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How Fifth-Grade Inclusion Teachers within a Suburban School District, Use Assessments to Guide the Literacy Needs of Their Students

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How Fifth-Grade Inclusion Teachers within a Suburban School District, Use Assessments to Guide the Literacy Needs of Their Students

by

Christine Erne

June 2012

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education: Childhood Literacy
How Fifth-Grade Inclusion Teachers within a Suburban School District, Use Assessments to Guide the Literacy Needs of Their Students

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Abstract

Much research has been conducted on inclusion classrooms as well as on assessments. However, little research exists on how teachers within inclusion classrooms use assessments to provide literacy instruction. I conducted a six-week study in two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms within a suburban school district, in order to determine how teachers use assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students. I interviewed two general education teachers and two special education teachers, and observed them during their ELA blocks. I explored formal and informal assessments the teachers used throughout the study.

The participating teachers used more informal assessments than formal assessments, which were observed during guided reading lessons. The participating teachers met students’ literacy needs through guided reading lessons, which were initially formed using students’ instructional reading levels from formal assessments. Informal assessments were used during guided reading lessons to guide individual students’ literacy needs. Further research should be conducted in order to generalize the study, since it took place in two classrooms with only four teachers.
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Chapter One

The following setting is a realistic background of two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms located in a suburban school district, in upstate New York:

Ms. Smith and Ms. Harper are co-teachers in a fifth-grade inclusion classroom. Ms. Smith is a special education teacher and Ms. Harper is a general education teacher. Ms. Raymond and Ms. Jones are also co-teachers in a fifth-grade inclusion classroom, within the same suburban school district as the other inclusion classroom. In this classroom, Ms. Raymond is a special education teacher, and Ms. Jones is a general education teacher. For the most part, the general education teachers and special education teachers share responsibilities in providing literacy instruction and assessments to all students, including students with disabilities. In both classrooms, informal assessments are used more frequently than formal assessments, especially during guided reading lessons.

Problem Statement

It is said that since the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the number of students with learning disabilities (LD) taught in general education classrooms has drastically increased (Kim, Klein, Vaughn, & Woodruff, 2006). Literacy instruction is extremely important for students with special needs, especially in the present educational world of high-stakes testing, school accountability, and inclusion (Wilson, 2006). Students with disabilities are to be serviced in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which means that to the appropriate maximum extent, children with disabilities are educated with children
who are not disabled (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular education classroom occurs only when the severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Hasazi, et al.). Inclusion can be defined as involving the full-time placement of students with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities in an age-appropriate regular education class, with necessary support services (i.e. special education teachers) for the children with disabilities, as well as for the general education teacher (Courson & Hay, 1997). A challenge within inclusion classrooms is that teachers must find ways to meet the diverse needs of their students (Gould & Vaughn, 2000). Teachers may want to find instructional practices as well as assessments they can use with the whole class that will benefit students with disabilities. However, teachers are more likely to implement adaptations “on the fly” during instruction, instead of differentiating lessons ahead of time (Gould & Vaughn).

**Significance of the Problem**

In 2006, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reported that over five and a half million school-aged students had disabilities that were significant enough to receive special education services (Wilson, 2006). About 96% of these students went to regular school buildings, and over half of these students were included in general education classes for at least most of the day. Most students with special needs who are included in general education classrooms have severe learning difficulties and skill deficiencies, especially in literacy. In order to meet the needs of
all students in an inclusion classroom, co-teaching (between a general education teacher and a special education teacher) is necessary (Wilson). In most inclusion classrooms, general education teachers are viewed as the masters of content, and special education teachers are considered masters of access (Sileo, 2011). Therefore, general education teachers usually teach the lessons while special education teachers normally assist with the lessons, and provide more support to students with disabilities. The classroom responsibilities of co-teachers should be shared equally, including instructional planning and delivery, discipline, grading, and collaborating with parents (Sileo).

In order for co-teachers in an inclusion classroom to meet the needs of their students, the teachers must assess the students. It is understood that teachers must know students’ strengths as well as their difficulties with learning (Black & William, 1998). Assessments are activities commenced by teachers and their students that provide evidence to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities within the classroom. Assessments that provide enough feedback for teacher modifications are referred to as formative assessments, because the information gained from them are used to meet specific needs of students (Black & William).

While there is much research done on inclusion classrooms and on assessments, there is little research on how teachers within inclusion classrooms use their assessments to provide literacy instruction. This study is important because it provides information regarding how co-teachers use their assessments to guide the literacy needs of all their students.
Purpose of the Study

Teachers can learn about how much and how well their students learn through classroom assessments. Classroom assessments are created, administered, and analyzed by teachers themselves, so it is more likely that they will apply results obtained from the assessments to their own teaching (Angelo & Cross, 1993). The purpose of my study was to understand how teachers used assessments to meet the literacy (reading, writing, and speaking) needs of their students.

Teachers should use information gathered from classroom assessments to refocus their teaching in order to meet the needs of their students. Classroom assessments should be used to provide teachers and students with student progress throughout the year, and they should provide specific information about students (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Teachers need to frequently collect data from their students, which include assessments in order to tailor their instruction to students’ educational needs (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2010). The question I focused on is how are fifth-grade teachers in a suburban school district, within an inclusion classroom, using assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students?

Study Approach

Special education and general education teachers work within inclusion classrooms to try to meet the diverse literacy needs of all their students. One way of providing instruction to students within an inclusive environment is co-teaching. Co-teaching can be defined as the cooperation of general education and special education teachers in the same classroom environment who share planning, application, and
student evaluation responsibilities (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010). All teachers within an inclusion classroom should decide who will plan and teach the lessons, who prepares for the daily lessons, decide on a co-teaching structure that all students will benefit from, how assignments will be graded, and what assessment processes will determine students' acquisition of knowledge and ability to demonstrate skills (Sileo, 2011).

I conducted a study within two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, in a suburban school district. Each fifth-grade inclusion classroom consisted of a general education teacher and a special education teacher, and both of them took part in planning lessons and providing assessments. I focused on what types of assessments the co-teachers used, and how they were used in order to guide students' literacy needs since there is a wide-range of abilities in each classroom. I interviewed two general education teachers and two special education teachers, separately. After I interviewed the teachers, I observed each classroom once a week for six weeks during their ELA blocks, in order to gain a better perspective on how assessments were used. I took anecdotal notes on how the teachers provided literacy instruction during their ELA blocks.

I coded my collected data from the interviews, observations, and informal and formal assessments I noticed, in order to discover any discrepancies. In chapter 4, I recorded my analyzed data from the three instruments I used to collect the data. I specifically focused on any relationships between assessments the teachers used and how instruction was given based on assessment results.
Rationale

I am passionate about inclusion classrooms because I substitute teach within these settings most often. I usually substitute teach for special education teachers, and I enjoy working with students within the inclusion environment. I understand that students within inclusion classrooms have different ranges of abilities, so it may be difficult to meet the needs of each student. Therefore, I conducted this study in order to determine how the special education and general education teachers work together to meet specific literacy needs of their students.

Summary

Assessments should be used to drive literacy instruction within inclusion classrooms. General education and special education teachers should work together to decide on what assessments to use, and how to inform their instruction based on assessment results. I conducted this study to understand how fifth-grade inclusion teachers use assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students. I interviewed two fifth-grade general education teachers and two fifth-grade special education teachers. I observed two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, and in each classroom one general education teacher co-taught with a special education teacher. In order to triangulate my data, I examined literacy assessments used by the participating teachers in both classrooms.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Much research exists on inclusion classrooms and assessments; however, there is far less research currently regarding how teachers within inclusion classrooms use assessments to provide literacy instruction. My thesis project is grounded on theories by Lev Vygotsky. He believed that most cognitive development came from experts (i.e. teachers) providing information to non-experts (i.e. students), and then gradually decreasing support as a student’s competence increased (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s idea of the zone of proximal development states that teachers need to determine what their students can do independently, and what they are able to do with adult guidance, in order to provide appropriate instruction (Vygotsky). My study focuses on how inclusion teachers use assessments to understand their students’ strengths and weaknesses in literacy, and how they provide instruction based on assessment results. The most important topics related to my thesis are importance of inclusion, research regarding assessments, impacts of assessment-driven instruction, and connections between reading and writing.

Importance of Inclusion

The education provided to students with learning disabilities (LD) has changed within the last two decades (Baker & Zigmond, 1996). Kephart (1970) reported students with severe learning disabilities needed to be in special education classrooms only. He believed students with disabilities should be instructed within a segregated classroom, unless they could be instructed full-time in a general education classroom. However, in 1990 the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act (IDEA) stated that public schools must provide special education services to allow eligible students to receive appropriate instruction from a special education teacher and to participate, in the maximum extent possible, in the general education classroom with nondisabled peers (Baker & Zigmond).

Baker and Zigmond (1996) conducted a research project involving five elementary school buildings that had just implemented a full inclusion service for students with LD. In two of the buildings, it was found that only the students who didn’t need intensive services were integrated full time, but in three of the buildings, full inclusion was the only special education service available. Therefore, all students with disabilities were integrated into general education classrooms. Based on interviews and observations, it was found that in the full inclusion classrooms, a special education teacher and a paraprofessional provided support services for the students with disabilities. In one of the classrooms, the special education teacher and the paraprofessional worked with small groups of students or individual students to modify assignments and to assist students who needed extra reading practice. In some of the classrooms, the special education teachers pulled the students with disabilities aside and taught students the same lessons as the general education teacher. However, the parallel lesson allowed more active student participation and more feedback to student responses. It was found that in many of the full inclusion classrooms, general education teachers would read tests aloud to the entire class, instead of having the special educators read tests aloud to students with LD. The full inclusion model was beneficial to the whole class, not just for the students with special needs. The full
inclusion model helped to change special education, because teachers began to adapt their assignments, activities, and tests, in order to accommodate the needs of all their students. If full inclusion into the general education classrooms was not an option within any of the five elementary buildings, then some of the students with disabilities would still be receiving pullout services, where students would be pulled out of class to work in a small group or individually with a special education teacher (Baker & Zigmond).

A three-year study was conducted on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) policy, which started in 1989 (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). The researchers interviewed legislators, state education board members, chief state school officers, state department of education administrators and staff, professors in higher education institutions, leadership personnel from professional associations, and members and staff of parent training and support organizations. The interviewees were from six states, and 350 interviews were conducted. Although teachers were not interviewed, all interviewees were considered knowledgeable of LRE policy implementation. Three of the six states were selected because of their relatively high use of separate schools, separate classes, and residential facilities. The other three states were selected because they used separate schools, separate classes, and residential facilities sparingly. After the interviews were completed, it was found that a majority of the interviewees appropriately interpreted LRE to mean the delivery of appropriate special education services in neighborhood schools, so students with disabilities could attend schools with their peers without disabilities (Hasazi, et al.).
Through a study focusing on including students with Autism into general education classrooms, Assouline, Ausilloux, Baghdadli, Darrou, Ledeser, Lenoir, Michelon, Pry, Verrechia, & Yianni-Coudurier (2008) collected and analyzed data for 77 children with Autism, which included information about each of their interventional programs. The researchers concluded that the number of hours of inclusion in the general education classrooms depended on the children’s behavioral and adaptive characteristics. Assouline, et al. concluded that 65 of the children benefited from inclusion in a regular school. The children who had less severe autistic symptoms were more likely to be included in the general education classroom, which was considered their LRE (Assouline, et al.).

I think students with Autism benefit from inclusion because inclusion environments provide support for young children, so they are able to grow and learn beside their peers (Kline, O’Connor, Vakil, & Welton, 2009). In order for an environment to be considered supportive, children need to feel accepted and cared for. In order for inclusion to be effective, special education and general education practices have to be merged so that accommodations and modifications are developed (Kline, O’Connor, Vakil, & Welton). Teachers have to differentiate their instruction and assessment to meet the needs of their students. Differentiation is the recognition, articulation, and commitment to plan for students' differing needs (Moon, 2005). Collaboration consists of shared classroom duties, such as planning, instruction, responsibility of students, assessment of student learning, problem solving, and classroom management. It’s important to consider inclusion as a method of delivering
services, which include developmentally appropriate practices, rather than as a placement for students with disabilities (Kline, O'Connor, Vakil, & Welton).

The three studies cited in this section reflect the importance of inclusion. The LRE is an important concept for inclusion teachers to understand, so students' needs are being met in the proper environment. Students with disabilities should be included into general education classrooms if that is their LRE (Assouline, et al., 2008).

**Research Regarding Assessments**

Assessments should develop a partnership for learning among students and their parents and teachers (Moon, 2005). However, some instructional decisions can only be made by the teacher. Three phases of the assessment process guided by teachers are (a) planning instruction (pre-assessment phase), (b) guiding instruction (formative assessment phase), and (c) evaluating instruction (summative assessment phase) (Moon). Assessments are all of the activities undertaken by teachers and their students that provide information to be used as feedback in order to modify teaching and learning activities (Black & William, 1998). Assessments become formative assessments when the evidence is used to adapt teaching to meet specific student needs. Black and William did extensive research on formative assessments that involved reading and analyzing nine years' worth of issues from more than 160 academic journals, many books, and earlier reviews of research. They had a total of about 580 articles or chapters to study. Black and William's research concluded that teaching and learning must be interactive, and teachers need to know about the progress their students make, along with their difficulties. Teachers adapt instruction
to meet students' needs, if they keep track of students' learning. Teachers find out what students' strengths and weaknesses are through observations, classroom discussions, and reading students' written work. Formative assessments can be of assistance to students, because these are assessments that help teachers decide what problems should be focused on with each student and teachers can give students necessary tools to fix areas of weakness (Black & William).

Black and William (1998) were cited in a specific study that was conducted using running records. A running record, considered a formative assessment, provides teachers with information that can be used to improve students' reading (Ross, 2004). A teacher administers these assessments by sitting next to a student who reads a leveled passage, and the teacher codes each word in order to find the percentage of words correctly read, the self-correction rate, and the categories of the student's miscues (meaning, visual, or structure). At the end of the reading, the student must complete comprehension questions. Ross (2004) conducted a controlled experiment in which a sample of 39 schools from one school district in Ontario, Canada, implemented the use of running records as a strategy for aligning literacy instruction with students' needs. Some of the schools within the district were randomly selected to begin the use of running records as a strategy to improve literacy instruction. Furthermore, 34 schools were randomly selected to use action research as a strategy to improve literacy instruction. In this study, action research means each school involved decided on a question to research and conducted a study within the school. The scores from the schools that used running records were compared to schools that
implemented action research. The sample consisted of 39 schools using running records and 34 schools implementing action research. There were 2,800 student participants in grades K-8; 3% were classified as English-as-a-second-language (ELL) students, and 20% received special education services. The study took place between May 2001 and May 2002 (Ross).

Ross (2004) examined school scores for Grade 3 reading, writing, and mathematics assessments students took in May 2001 (prior achievement, the independent variable) and the same assessments students took in 2002 (present achievement, the dependent variable). The above scores were only taken from schools that used running records as the treatment strategy. The purpose for collecting the scores was to see how much students grew in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, from May 2001 until May 2002. Schools that implemented the action research treatment consisted of principals and teachers working collectively to identify a professional topic related to literacy to work on, prepared improvement activities, implemented the action plans, and reflected on and reported results. Each of the action research schools decided on a different project. One school asked how they could use response journals to improve the communication strand of literacy. Therefore, teachers began the use of response journals along with the three R’s strategy (retell, relate, reflect). Every fifth student was drawn from each K-3 class as part of the school’s data collection. The researchers found that generally, teachers used rubrics to assess students’ writing. Teachers included in the study had access to
teacher in-service sessions and they had the same budget for purchasing early literacy resources (Ross).

Ross (2004) concluded schools that used the running records strategy achievement had a greater positive effect on achievement in reading and writing than did the schools that participated in the action research condition. The 39 schools that participated in the running records strategy achievement and the 34 schools that participated in the action research treatment were below the regional average in reading and writing in 2001. However, in May 2002, the 39 schools that used running records exceeded the regional average in reading and writing. The 34 schools that used action research fell even further behind the local average in reading and writing in May 2002 (Ross).

Ross (2004) was in favor of using running records, which I see teachers use to assess how well students are reading and comprehending. As mentioned earlier in this section, leveled books are used in many classrooms to assess the level (A-Z) students read, in order to place them in guided reading groups (Ross).

A standardized assessment that is similar to a running record is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (Williams, 1999). A student reads aloud to a teacher, while the teacher listens and marks down correct or incorrect words, and the student completes comprehension questions after the reading. Therefore, the teacher decides the student’s level of accuracy and comprehension score. A study was conducted in 1999 on the reliability of the DRA. A sample of 306 students K-3 participated in the study, as well as 87 teachers from 10 different states. Each teacher
who participated administered the DRA to three or more children in their own classroom. The classroom teachers audio taped each students’ conference and sent them to a second and a third person to rate. The second and third raters consisted of 16 originating teachers and 40 new teachers. The raters were randomly assigned audio taped conferences originating outside their school district (Williams).

Each teacher reported participating students’ rates of accuracy, comprehension, reading stage, and the teacher’s evaluation of each student’s phrasing and reading rate (Williams, 1999). The rate of accuracy is determined by teachers counting the number of uncorrected miscues and words given by teachers during the oral reading section of the DRA. Teachers evaluate the level of comprehension based on student retellings using descriptors on the DRA Continuum, which is provided with the assessment (Williams).

Inter-rater agreement analyses revealed good to fair reliability between raters (Williams, 1999). The inter-rater agreement between the first two raters was .80 across students and text levels. However, inter-rater reliability among the three raters was .74 across students and text levels. Researchers noted that a major purpose of the DRA is to help guide instruction. About 98% of the teachers and raters agreed or strongly agreed that information gained about readers during the DRA conference helps teachers identify what students need to practice or learn next (Williams).

An assessment that is similar to the DRA is the Developmental Reading Assessment-Second Edition (DRA2), which was published in 2006 (Beaver & Carter, 2006). The DRA2 is a teacher-administered assessment used to find a student’s
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independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. The DRA2 is a seven-minute test and the purpose of the DRA2 is for teachers to assess reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension, identify students’ reading strengths and weaknesses, determine students’ reading levels, inform reading instruction, monitor progress in reading, and aid in planning reading interventions. In order to assess reading engagement, students fill out a reading engagement survey that is included with the DRA2 assessment materials. Reading engagement can be defined as how often a student reads, the student’s knowledge of books, and reading goals students have. The DRA2 is administered in the same way as the DRA because a teacher administers the assessment by using two or three benchmark assessment books, which are included with DRA2 materials. Students in the middle grades are asked to predict the outcome of a book based on illustrations, and they read the entire text aloud to a teacher as the teacher marks miscues on a teacher observation guide. The teacher observation guide includes directions and scripts for the administration of the DRA2. For students in the middle grades, the Oral Reading Fluency score is found by combining scores of the predictions students made before they read the book and on expression, phrasing, rate, and accuracy of students’ reading. In the middle grades, students retell the story they read, orally respond to comprehension questions, and write a summary after they finished reading the book aloud to the teacher. Teachers score the comprehension portion of the DRA2 by deciding which was the best description of a student’s performance on each comprehension indicator and sums all scores to calculate a comprehension score which ranges from 1 to 4, or
frustration level to advanced level. Teachers should use the scores from the DRA2 to provide appropriate reading instruction (Beaver & Carter).

Teachers are expected to provide excellent instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Li, Newman, Reece, Smith, Valencia, & Wixson, 2010). Educators are also expected to assess student performance in each of the areas listed above and use the assessment results to inform instruction and evaluate student achievement. In order to assess students in these areas, researchers (Li, et al.) suggest that students read aloud for one minute as their teacher records errors, which would produce a score reported as words correct per minute (wcpm). The results of this approach to measure oral reading have been used for many purposes, which include screening to identify students academically at risk, placement in remedial and special education programs, monitoring student progress, improving instructional programs, as well as predicting performance on high-stakes assessments (Li, et al.).

Li, et al. (2010) conducted a study regarding oral reading in two Pacific Northwest school districts involving 279 students in grades 2, 4, and 6, about one third of the students were classified as English-language learners (ELLs). The term ELL is defined as speaking a language other than English, along with coming from a home where the primary language is spoken. The study consisted of norm-referenced and researcher-developed measures. Students read aloud while a researcher marked any errors, and students were required to complete comprehension questions that followed. The reading passages and comprehension questions were developed and
field-tested by the research team to assess accuracy, rate, prosody, and passage comprehension, and to calculate wcpm. The researchers acknowledged the history and development of wcpm only as a general indicator of reading ability, but it raises questions about frequency as a measure of oral reading fluency, especially in current high-stakes contexts where instruction should mirror assessments. It is, therefore, recommended that assessments should consider multiple facets of oral reading, meaning the combined role of rate, accuracy, and prosody in contribution to comprehension (Li, et al.).

Reading is an essential part of literacy, but phonics, spelling, and vocabulary are other important areas in literacy. Kathy Ganske (2000) published a book titled *Word Journeys*, which is a researched-based book that contains assessment-guided phonics, spelling, and vocabulary instruction ideas. A spelling assessment that can be found in the book is called *Developmental Spelling Analysis* (DSA). The purposes of the DSA are for teachers to quickly and confidently identify students’ spelling stages, determine specific strengths and weaknesses in spelling features so instruction can be appropriate, and teachers can monitor spelling progress over time (Henderson, 1990). The DSA reveals what orthographic understandings or rules of spelling, students already have (Bear, Truex, & Barone, 1989; Schlagal, 1989; Templeton, 1983). The DSA includes a Screening Inventory, which should be given in the beginning of the school year because it determines a student’s stage of spelling development. The Screening Inventory consists of 20 words that become progressively harder. A teacher reads the words in sets of five aloud, and students must correctly spell at least two of
the five words in each set. Students record the words on a reproducible student
Screening Inventory sheet, which is included in the *Word Journeys* book. Once a
student is unable to spell at least two words in each set of five, the teacher can quietly
tell a student to stop where they are. However, in large classes, teachers may not
notice how each student spelled every word. Therefore, when teachers grade the
Screening Inventory, they must stop scoring where the student was unable to spell at
least two words within the set of five. Teachers score the Screening Inventory by
giving one point for each word a student spelled correctly. Teachers use the Screening
Inventory Prediction Chart to determine students’ stages of spelling development,
which includes letter naming, within word, syllable juncture, and derivational
constancy. Once a teacher has determined students’ spelling development stages, they
use Feature Inventories, which are provided in the *Word Journeys* book. The Feature
Inventories are used to determine specific strengths and weaknesses in students’
knowledge of specific orthographic features. The Feature Inventories are
administered in the same way as the Screening Inventory. However, each Feature
Inventory has its own answer card so teachers can decide what parts of words
students misspell (i.e. prefixes, suffixes, etc.). Teachers use the results of the Feature
Inventories to decide what word study groups students belong in and provide students
with word study sorts found in the *Word Journeys* book (Ganske).

The studies and research mentioned in this section (Moon, Black & William,
Ross, Williams, Beaver & Carter, Li, et al., and Ganske) focused on formative
assessments, specifically with reading and spelling. Teachers had students read aloud,
while the teachers determined the strengths and weaknesses their students had in reading. Teachers use running records and follow-up comprehension questions to find information on different areas of reading (i.e. self-correction rate, fluency, etc.) in order to decide where reading instruction can begin for specific students. Teachers can use the DSA to determine students’ stage of spelling, which can inform word study instruction. I think these assessments are important tools that can inform instruction by helping educators understand students’ strengths and weaknesses in reading and spelling.

**Impacts of Assessment-driven Instruction**

Assessments are used to provide information about intended learning goals for each student and assists teachers in beginning the instructional sequence (Moon, 2005). Teachers need to have pre-identified instructional goals and objectives for each of their students, and those should be guided by assessments (Moon). A qualitative case study was conducted in 1995 that examined the relationship between assessment and instruction (Commeyras, Gilrane, Pearson, Roe, Rodriguez, Shelton, Stallman, & Weinzierel, 1995). The researchers focused on a variety of assessments, including standardized tests and informal diagnostic procedures, such as observations given by teachers. The study was completed in Illinois, within four school districts, two schools for each district, and two teachers for each school. Data was collected through use of observations and interviews. Each classroom was observed on three occasions, and field notes were taken during each visit. The observations provided the researchers with specific accounts of classroom events and assessment and how
teachers generated their lessons. The interviewees consisted of parents, teachers, principals, and the district central office staff. Each of the interviewees was interviewed once, except the teachers. The researchers asked only open-ended questions and recorded the answers for each of the participants. The teachers were interviewed before and after each of the three observations, which lasted for half the school day. The questions the researchers asked the teachers were related to what they would anticipate observing and what had actually taken place during the observations. These interviews were also for the researchers’ own knowledge behind the actions that were observed (Commeyras, et al.).

The researchers read and reread all the collected data in order to identify any existing patterns (Commeyras, et al., 1995). The ultimate research goal was to examine patterns across the four school districts. The researchers wanted to ensure that the cross-site analysis was grounded in a comprehensive investigation of the data from each school district. Subsequently, the researchers decided to explore each district as a separate case study, and after examining the separate analysis they were able to determine what assessments were given, who they were given by, where they were given, and how the results were used. It was found that all four districts had to administer standardized tests, the Illinois State Reading Test, used informal observations, and examined work done by students on a daily basis in order to assess their progress. It was found that in two of the four districts test data was highly valued, and teachers were required to use end-of-unit and end-of-level basal tests to track student progress. In these two districts where the assessments seemed to guide
instruction, the administrators actually had instructional power because they told their teachers what to test for. The relationships among assessment, instruction, and the decisions that go along with the instruction, are much more complex than originally thought by the researchers who conducted this study. The researchers concluded that many tests were used in order to guide instruction, and noticed through interviews and observations that instructional decisions based on assessments are more difficult than previously thought (Commeyras, et al.).

After I read this research article, it seems to me there is more pressure on teachers in two of the four districts that were studied. They were required to administer certain assessments required by the district, and then they had to plan their instruction based on the assessments. However, in the other two districts, teachers were able to develop their own instruction plans, and in those districts, students had higher test scores. I think this is because teachers were more focused on meeting the needs of each of their students, rather than “teaching to the test.” I think assessment and instruction are highly related; however, teachers should be able to decide when and how they will assess and instruct their students.

A different study was conducted during the 2005-2006 school year in which 464 first-grade students in 47 classrooms in 10 schools participated (Connor, Crowe, Fishman, Glasney, Morrison, Piasta, Schatschneider, & Underwood, 2009). The researchers used test scores and observations as their methods of collecting data. The observations were videotaped, and field notes were taken. One goal of the study was to find any differences in instructional patterns between intervention and comparison
classrooms. The schools were located in one school district in Florida, which consisted of highly diverse students in ethnicity and were located in neighborhoods that varied in socioeconomic status (SES). Students were randomly selected as target children for classroom observations, and in each classroom, students were rank ordered by their fall Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ) letter-word identification $W$ score and were then divided into three groups of equal size. Therefore, each classroom consisted of a group of students who had weak, average, and strong reading skills according to the classrooms norms. After the random selection of participants, the researchers decided to randomly select four students from each group, because they anticipated poor attendance among the students. Thirty-three children of the 464 were observed once, 87 were observed twice, and 344 were observed in the fall, winter, and spring. Forty-seven teachers and classrooms were observed at least once (Connor, et al.).

The assessments that were given to students were the WJ to assess language and literacy skills, and the Letter-Word Identification Test to assess reading skills (Connor, et al., 2009). Children were assessed on their reading comprehension, so they took the Passage Comprehension Test, where children were asked to read a sentence or brief passage and supply the missing word. The researchers also used the Picture Vocabulary Test, which asked the children to name pictures of increasingly familiar objects. The scores from all four assessments were used to compute recommended amounts of each literacy instruction type for the children in both the intervention and comparison classrooms. The types of literacy instruction observed in
this study include reading texts aloud, word identification, writing, and phonological awareness. The teachers completed a survey in the fall of 2005, which was designed to obtain information on their teaching experience and education. Furthermore, teachers were assessed on their knowledge of the English language and literacy by using the *Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Language and Print*. The teachers were assessed in the fall and spring and were videotaped three times throughout the year during their literacy block, once during the fall, once during the winter, and once during the spring. Field notes were written through the observation period, which were recordings of specific information that might not be interpretable from the videotape by itself. The video observations were coded by using a software package called Noldus Observer Pro version 5.0. The system was designed to capture the amount of time in minutes and seconds that participating students spent in the classroom activities. The videos were only coded by trained research assistants, and some of them participated in the classroom video observations (Connor, et al.).

Connor, et al. (2009) found that overall, students made good gains in reading and vocabulary skills throughout the school year. The researchers concluded that 70 to 80 minutes per observation in both the intervention and comparison classrooms were spent on language and literacy instruction and on average, 10 minutes were spent on classroom organization (i.e. explaining the daily activities to the students, reminding students of classroom routines, etc.). Generally, most of the time spent in literacy instruction was spent reading texts aloud, in pairs, or individually (about 17 minutes). The second most frequently observed type of literacy instruction was word
identification encoding, which was about 11 minutes. Writing was only observed for about 10 minutes. On average, 2-4 minutes were spent on phonological awareness and grapheme-phoneme correspondence activities. It was found that children who were in the same classroom sometimes received different amounts and types of instruction. In this study, the hypothesis was supported, which was that students received the right amounts of individualized instruction that predicted students’ reading outcomes, because student test scores increased. Students who needed extra instruction in an area (i.e. decoding words) received it, and were therefore able to perform at a higher level when assessed in this area (Connor, et al.).

Connor, et al. (2009) focused mainly on instruction, but students were re-tested 3 times during the school year. I believe that the individualized instruction or group instruction helped the students that needed it, because their test scores improved each time, on average. This study is a good example of how assessment drives instruction. The complexity of assessment and instruction were found in the Commeyras, et al. (1995) and Connor, et al. (2009) studies. According to the above studies, it is difficult to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses, and educators need to decide what type of instruction they should provide after completed assessments. I believe that if teachers don’t properly instruct their students based on previous assessments, then students won’t make good progress. In the Connor, et al. study, the researchers found that students made progress because the teachers who participated in the study instructed students in literacy areas they had the most difficulties in, and then assessed students in those areas. The researchers in the Connor, et al. study saw
progress because the teachers in the study focused on providing instruction and assessments that met the needs of the students.

**Connections in Reading and Writing**

There is a connection between reading and writing because cognitive operations or in-the-head strategies are used in both reading and writing (Anderson & Briggs, 2011). Teachers should teach reading and writing together, in order for children to have opportunities to construct strategic, in-the-head operations. Strategic operations that are successful for reading and writing are: searching, monitoring, and self-correcting. Searching is when a reader actively finds information within printed text, monitoring is checking one-self during the reading or writing process, and self-correcting is fixing errors independently. Children search, monitor, and self-correct while they read, in order to make meaning of texts. If students struggle with reading, they should be provided with more opportunities to write or they could struggle even more with literacy. Teachers should listen to students read and watch students as they write. While students read and write, teachers should document what students do as they read (i.e. correct errors, read slowly, read fast, etc.) and teachers should document what students do as they write (how they write and the content they write). The documents provide teachers with evidence of students’ higher order cognitive processing. The connections between how a student reads and writes become apparent by observing their strategic activity (Anderson & Briggs).

Reading and writing are related since knowing the meanings of words can help with writing (Shanahan, 1997). Therefore, it is possible to teach reading through
writing, or writing through reading. Reading and writing are not identical, but can be
thought of as two separate, but overlapping, ways of thinking about the world. When
readers write about texts, they can deepen their understanding of the text since writing
provides alternative perspectives on the text. Students will not necessarily improve in
reading just by adding writing to the curriculum. Therefore, reading and writing need
to be integrated in appropriate ways because beginning readers are considered
beginning writers (Shanahan).

Researchers conducted a study on connections in reading and writing in 2006
(Parodi, 2007). The sample of participants consisted of 439 students from 10 eighth-
grade courses of subsidized schools in Valparaiso, Chile. The schools were partly
private and partly state funded, and students were considered to be low, middle class.
The main purpose of the study was to assess connections between reading
comprehension and writing tasks. Therefore, the researchers designed four tests,
which included two comprehension tests and two written tasks. The comprehension
tests required participants to read argumentative texts and answer nine open-ended
questions, which forced the participants to make specific text-based inferences. The
written tasks required participants to write an argumentative text based on explicit
instructions that described the purpose of writing, the objective of the task, the subject
matter topic, and the implied audience. The reading and writing tests, mentioned
above, focused on topics that were previously discussed by each participant’s teacher.
The researchers organized the test sessions with extensive intervals between the four
tests, in order to avoid any interference between the collection of reading and writing
samples. The tests were administered by Spanish language teachers on different days of different weeks, and the tests were considered part of the participants' daily school activities (Parodi).

In the previously mentioned study (2007), the researchers asked four experts to judge items on the assessments. After the data was analyzed, the judges found organization structure of argumentative texts is a major struggle for students, in reading and writing. After the researchers examined the assessments, they suggested strategies most widely used by students led them to the comprehension of the written text as a list of ideas, without any organization. Additionally, the researchers decided the participants concentrated more on punctuation and other superficial procedures, and paid less attention to the organization and revision of written ideas. After the data was analyzed, the researchers believed students within eighth-grade do not keep information in their short-term memory active, so as they write, they forget recently generated ideas and jump from one idea to the next. The researchers believed non-expert writers have not automatized superficial procedures, and therefore must spend more time concentrating on those aspects, and less attention is given to the content of the writing. The researchers decided that poor readers and writers focus their attention on very particular ideas, while good readers and writers construct intelligible interpretations of information coming into their memory and can organize the information as well. The researchers who conducted the study concluded that processes involved in reading and writing share common knowledge-based strategies, which was decided based on the analyzed data (Parodi).
Summary

Teachers should use assessments to plan their lessons, as well as to determine what the specific strengths and needs are of each of their students. The inclusion classroom is a place where students with disabilities are able to learn beside their peers, but with modified instruction and assessments to fit their needs. The special education and general education teachers must collaborate to provide the most appropriate instruction and assessments for their students. Co-teachers may use different methods of co-teaching, but they both have to be involved in the instruction and assessment processes since they are related. Reading and writing are connected, and teachers should provide students with enough opportunities to practice writing, especially students who struggle with reading.
Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

My study was designed to explore how fifth-grade co-teachers within inclusion classrooms use assessments to meet the literacy needs of all their students. I interviewed four teachers who work within inclusion classrooms. Two of the teachers were general education teachers, and the other two were special education teachers. I studied assessments the teachers used with their students and observed the participating teachers in their ELA blocks in order to observe what kind of instruction was provided. I wanted to know if the teachers worked together to provide literacy instruction and if they used assessments to guide literacy instruction.

Participants

The study I conducted involved four teachers and two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms. Therefore, two of the teachers were general education teachers and two of the teachers were special education teachers. I did not collect data from children.

Context of Study

The study took place within a suburban school district in western New York State. The study took place within two different inclusion classrooms, where students with a variety of abilities were placed together. Each classroom consisted of a general education teacher and a special education teacher. I did not interact with the students, only the teachers within this study. I ensure the confidentiality of the teachers by using “Gen. Ed. 1 and Gen. Ed. 2” to refer to the general education teachers. I used “Spec. Ed. 1” and “Spec. Ed. 2” to refer to the special education teachers.
My Positionality as the Researcher

I am a middle-class Caucasian, and I have substitute taught for three years in the district where I conducted my research. I graduated from St. John Fisher College with a teaching certification in childhood education and special education. I have been working on my master’s degree in childhood literacy at The College at Brockport for two years. I believe literacy education is extremely important, because I know literacy is an area of education students will use their whole lives.

Assessments are used to provide students with proper literacy instruction. Since inclusion classrooms consist of such varied abilities, teachers need to consider many instructional approaches and resources based on their instructional goals and objectives (Moon, 2005). I believe teachers need to focus on what to teach, how best to teach it, and how to assess students’ proficiency with what was previously taught, while still considering students’ varying ability levels, interests, and learning profiles (Moon, 2005).

Data Collection

I used three different data collection techniques in order to explore my research question. I interviewed teachers, observed them and took anecdotal notes during their ELA blocks, and I studied teachers’ formal and informal assessments.
Interviews.

The interview (Appendix A) was given to all four teachers before I observed them. The interview was 10 questions and was kept the same for all teachers. The interview included questions about what kinds of assessments the inclusion teachers use with their students, how they use the assessments to inform their instruction, and how they decide whether or not a student has met a literacy instructional goal based on the assessments.

Observations.

I observed two inclusion classrooms, six times each. I observed each classroom once a week for six weeks, within the middle of the school year. I only observed the teachers during their ELA blocks, which was mainly during guided reading. I examined assessments the teachers gave students, and I considered any informal assessments teachers used during instruction. The assessments were only original copies, without student work on them. I focused on whether the interviews matched my observations or not. I was interested in whether both teachers provided instruction, or if just one of them did (i.e. only the general education teacher). I wanted to see how the teachers planned instruction based on previous assessments.

Anecdotal Notes.

During the observations, I took anecdotal notes of everything I noticed which were recorded in a notebook. I wrote about how instruction was provided as well as where instruction took place. I took notes about anything related to the teacher interviews, especially informal assessments I observed.
Assessments.

I examined informal and formal assessments in order to determine if teachers used assessments to guide instruction. I was able to observe informal assessments teachers used during their ELA blocks, especially during guided reading lessons. Therefore, I took notes on informal assessments I observed, and I explored formal assessments the participating teachers used.

Data Analysis

I analyzed my data by finding any patterns between the two classrooms and the teachers. I coded the data from the interviews, observations, and assessments I observed in order to discover specific themes that existed within my raw data. I recorded and analyzed my data from the interviews, observations, and assessments in chapter 4.

Procedures

Week One.

In the first week of collecting my data, I interviewed four teachers (two general education and two special education) and I observed each classroom one time, during the participating teachers' ELA blocks. I took anecdotal notes on everything I saw and heard the teachers doing. I wrote about any assessments the teachers talked about or gave to the students.
Weeks Two-Six.

During weeks two through six, I continued to observe each classroom once a week. I recorded any informal or formal assessments I noticed throughout the observations. I continued to take anecdotal notes of everything I saw and heard during classroom observations.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

The research process consisted of prolonged engagement because the duration was six weeks. I observed both classrooms one time for each week during the research process. I interviewed four teachers, and I persistently observed them and took anecdotal notes during the observations. Furthermore, I examined assessments the teachers used, without student names on them. Therefore, I triangulated data I collected. I made notes of any discrepancies between what I heard during the interviews and what I saw during the observations, as well as assessments I examined. The analyzed data is explained in chapter four. Through my research, I was seeking to learn whether teachers use assessments to guide literacy instruction. Also, I was seeking to learn whether special education and general education teachers work together to design and implement lessons as well as assessments, since instruction and assessments go hand-in-hand.
Limitations of the Study

I am not able to generalize this study, because I only researched two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, and only four teachers (two general education and two special education). Further research would have to be conducted in order to generalize my results to other fifth-grade inclusion classrooms. The classrooms used specific informal and formal assessments and implemented certain co-teaching techniques. Therefore, I am not able to generalize the use of specific assessments and specific co-teaching techniques to other fifth-grade inclusion classrooms.

In my interviews, at least one teacher from each classroom said they use informal running records throughout the year. However, I did not witness their use, so informal running records cannot be considered for my study. Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 said they use “main ideas, details, and summarizing” rubrics to assess students on concepts taught in guided reading. However, I did not observe the use of the rubrics, so they will not be considered for my study. Another limitation is Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 said they use post-it-notes to informally assess students, but I did not observe either teacher use post-it-notes during my study. Therefore, I cannot confirm or deny the use of post-it-notes in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom.

Summary

In order to understand how fifth-grade co-teachers within inclusion classrooms use assessments to meet the literacy needs of all their students, I had to begin my study with interviews of two general education teachers and two special education teachers. After I interviewed the participating teachers, I observed the two
inclusion classrooms and I took anecdotal notes during my observations. Throughout the six-week study I conducted, I examined literacy assessments the participating teachers used. Most of my research took place within a classroom, because I observed teachers during ELA instruction with students. I wanted to specifically understand how teachers used assessments to guide the literacy needs of students. I analyzed the data to see if there were any patterns between the classrooms and the teachers. My data analysis cannot be generalized to all fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, because I only interviewed four teachers and observed just two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of my study was to understand how fifth-grade inclusion teachers used assessments to meet the literacy needs of their students. I explored the ways in which teachers used or did not use assessments to guide literacy instruction. I conducted the study by observing two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, each with a general education and a special education teacher. I recorded anecdotal notes during each observation, and I interviewed the four teachers before I began the observations in order to determine any discrepancies in the data. In order to triangulate my data, I explored formal and informal assessments the participating teachers used with their students.

Prior to observing the teachers during their ELA blocks, I conducted interviews, which consisted of 10 questions (Appendix A). Then, I observed the teachers in their classrooms once a week for six weeks and took anecdotal notes on what I saw and heard. Since the study I conducted was with teachers who work within inclusive classroom environments, “Gen. Ed. 1” and “Spec. Ed. 1” refers to one classroom consisting of a general education and special education teacher and “Gen. Ed. 2” and “Spec. Ed. 2” refers to another classroom consisting of a general education and special education teacher.
After my raw data was collected, I coded my anecdotal notes, information from the interviews, and any assessments I observed throughout my study in order to discover reoccurring themes, which existed within my data. I discovered five themes, which provide answers to my research question, “how are fifth-grade teachers in a suburban school district, within an inclusion classroom, using assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students?” The themes I discovered were guided reading, guided reading journals, informal assessments, formal assessments, and instruction and assessments for students with disabilities.

**Guided Reading**

Through my observations, I discovered the main component of ELA was guided reading because the participating teachers spent one hour of a one-and-a-half-hour block on guided reading lessons, each day. The participating teachers provided some writing instruction during guided reading, and they were supposed to provide writing instruction during a half hour of their ELA block, which I observed in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom. However, I did not observe Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 provide a writing lesson to their students. Therefore, most of my observations took place during guided reading lessons, which were small-group lessons, based on students’ reading ability levels. When I asked the participating teachers how literacy services are provided (Appendix A, question 4), they had the same answer: guided reading. After I analyzed my data, I found the participating teachers used the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA) in order to assess students’ reading levels. When I asked the participating teachers how guided reading groups were
formed (Appendix A, question 6), all of them said DRA scores were used to initially form guided reading groups in September. However, students changed guided reading groups throughout the year because they were either struggling within their group or mastered concepts within their group. Throughout my six-week study, two guided reading groups changed in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom because the teachers felt students either struggled in their present group or needed to be challenged, based on information the teachers gathered through interactions and informal assessments of students. Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed 1 decided on instructional goals for guided reading lessons based on informal and formal assessments. In one of the guided reading groups I observed, the instructional goal was summarizing. According to Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s judgment based on informal assessments and discussions with the students, they decided some students mastered how to summarize and needed to work on different instructional goals. Therefore, Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 switched some students to guided reading groups so they were able to work on new instructional goals. However, in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom, guided reading groups did not change because these teachers felt comfortable with the groups during the time I conducted my study.

Through Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s answers to interview question 2 (Appendix A), I discovered that a team of teachers who work with Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 worked together to analyze DRA scores for guided reading. The teachers were required to collect students’ DRA scores, put the data on a chart, and scores were compared between classrooms. The purpose for collecting and analyzing DRA
scores was for the teachers to understand how many students were struggling with reading. The participating teachers used the results of the DRA scores to set realistic instructional goals for their students and worked together to decide how students could meet those goals during guided reading.

The participating teachers taught their own guided reading groups, so they were able to have two groups meet at a time. Guided reading lasted for an hour a day in both classrooms, and in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom each teacher had three 20-minute guided reading groups a day. However, some students met with Spec. Ed. 1 and Gen. Ed. 1 because they struggled in reading, and therefore needed more reading practice. In Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom, each teacher had two guided reading groups a day. Students in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom had a full half-hour of reading services provided, which means these students spent more time in guided reading groups than students in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom. Gen. Ed. 2 did not have re-teaching lessons with any students, so students who struggled with reading did not receive any extra reading instruction.

Before the school year started, Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 agreed guided reading lessons would last for 20 minutes each, in order for more students to read during the day. Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 agreed guided reading groups would be small (5 students or less) in order to provide intense reading instruction to a few students at once, which was discussed before the school year started. However, Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 decided some students needed more than just 20 minutes to read, and those students read with Gen. Ed. 1 following guided reading lessons with
Spec. Ed. 1, Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 used DRAs and informal assessments to decide which students needed extra time to read. However, assessments were not used as part of Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s initial decision about the duration of guided reading lessons. Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 agreed each guided reading lesson would last a half-hour and they agreed to have groups of 5-8 students in order for all students to meet in guided reading groups every other day, which was decided before the school year began. Assessments were not used as part of Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s initial decision-making process.

Through the interviews and observations, I found the participating teachers decided on instructional goals based on students’ DRA scores, informal assessments, and discussions during guided reading. When I asked the participating teachers if they use assessment data to drive instruction (Appendix A, question 2), all of them said they use DRA scores to decide on instructional goals for students in September. The participating teachers said they use informal assessments to decide on instructional goals throughout the rest of the year. Guided reading lessons were used for the participating teachers to instruct students on a reading goal. I recorded the participating teachers’ lesson goals from guided reading lessons in tables 1 and 2, since each of them had a goal for their students every day.
Table 1: Observations- Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Gen. Ed. 1 Instructional Goals</th>
<th>Spec. Ed. 1 Instructional Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Understand character traits</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Re-teaching lesson</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Character Descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Re-teaching lesson</td>
<td>Guided Reading Write down clues from story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Re-teaching lesson</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Administer Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA)</td>
<td>Administer Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Whole Group: Persuasive Writing</td>
<td>Whole Group: Persuasive Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Observations- Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Gen. Ed. 2 Instructional Goals</th>
<th>Spec. Ed. 2 Instructional Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Use text evidence</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Use text evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Use text evidence</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Causes and effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Guided Reading: NYS ELA practice</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Find details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Author's purpose</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Main ideas and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Whole Group: Students work independently</td>
<td>Whole Group: Students work independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Summarizing</td>
<td>Guided Reading: Put events in chronological order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I found guided reading was used for the participating teachers to provide literacy services to students, because the teachers required students to read and write during guided reading lessons. However, I found the participating teachers focused more on reading, and therefore used more informal assessments targeted towards students' reading needs. Since the participating teachers focused more on reading than writing, instructional goals were focused more on reading concepts rather than writing concepts. However, I observed Gen. Ed. 2 explain to students how to write a well-written summary in week 6. I discovered the participating teachers used the DRA to initially form guided reading groups, but as I will explain later in the chapter, through interactions and informal assessments, guided reading groups changed during the year and throughout my six-week study in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1's classroom.

**Guided Reading Journals**

In the interview I conducted, Spec. Ed. 1 mentioned the use of guided reading journals (Appendix A, question 1). Through my observations, I found Spec. Ed. 1 kept a journal for each student in Spec. Ed. 1's guided reading groups, which contained students' strengths and weaknesses in reading, along with reading goals for students. As students read aloud, Spec. Ed. 1 recorded words students had trouble decoding, answers to comprehension questions, as well as any noticed reading strengths or struggles. The journals showed growth in reading throughout the year since all instructional goals as well as progress towards the goals were documented for each student. For example, one students' goal was to read with expression. Spec.
Ed. 1 recorded his goal, and as the student read aloud, Spec. Ed. 1 made notes of times he read with expression, and when he didn’t read with expression. Spec. Ed. 1 was able to decide what reading goals were useful to students, by the use of informal assessments. The journals were used for conferences with students so they understood what reading goals they should have strived for, and they were used during parent-teacher conferences so parents understood what goals their child had in reading and writing. Therefore, Spec. Ed. 1 helped to guide the literacy needs of students by documenting strengths and weaknesses in reading from informal assessments, and used the information to guide instruction.

Informal Assessments

For the purpose of this study, informal assessments are assessments which are not mandated by the district. After I analyzed my data from the interviews, observations, and by closely examining assessments, I found informal assessments were used by the teachers to guide students’ literacy needs. In the interviews, the four participating teachers said they use informal assessments (Appendix A, question 8). Table 3 consists of informal assessments used in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom and in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom, which were mentioned in the interviews and observed during my six-week study. I found some of the informal assessments were used in both classrooms, and some informal assessments were not used in both classrooms. I found informal assessments were used more frequently than formal assessments, because most of the lessons I observed were during guided reading, and all teachers used many informal assessments during guided reading. I
only noticed four formal assessments during my study, but I noticed many informal assessments. Table 4 consists of the teachers’ actions for each informal assessment used within the two inclusion classrooms.

Table 3: Informal Assessments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watch/listen to students read</td>
<td>Watch/listen to students read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes in student’s journals while students read</td>
<td>Comprehension checks based on texts from guided reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read students’ post-it-notes from guided reading</td>
<td>Verbal and written responses in guided reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal and written responses in guided reading</td>
<td>Listen to students’ discussions during guided reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to students’ discussions during guided reading</td>
<td>Word study sorts (independently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word study sorts (in groups)</td>
<td>Word study sorts (in groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charts students filled out or any writing during guided reading</td>
<td>Charts students filled out or any writing during guided reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Purpose of Informal Assessments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Assessments</th>
<th>Teachers’ Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watch/listen to students read</td>
<td>Determine if students comprehend the reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes in student’s journals while students read</td>
<td>Determine students’ strengths and weaknesses in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read students’ post-it-notes from guided reading</td>
<td>Understand students’ thinking as they read texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal and written responses in guided reading</td>
<td>Determine if students comprehend the reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to students’ discussions during guided reading</td>
<td>Understand what students think about texts they read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word study sorts (in groups)</td>
<td>Practice for the DSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charts students filled out or any writing during guided reading</td>
<td>Determine knowledge of reading and writing concepts from guided reading lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension checks based on texts from guided reading</td>
<td>Determine if students understand what they read</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informal assessments were used for the participating teachers to determine students' strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing, and to decide if students needed to switch guided reading groups. In both classrooms, most of the informal assessments took place during guided reading because the groups were small and easy to manage. Word study sorts are listed in Tables 3 and 4, but the sorts were not used during guided reading because they were used as practice for the Diagnostic Spelling Analysis (DSA), a formal assessment used to place students in word study groups. The word study sorts will be discussed in more detail in the Formal Assessments section.

I found when students read aloud, the participating teachers listened and asked comprehension questions based on the reading, which was informally assessing whether students understood what they read. Spec. Ed. 1 relied on post-it-notes in order to informally assess students' thinking as they read texts. If students didn't understand a text, Spec. Ed. 1 required students to re-read parts of the text and fill out new post-it-notes. For example, during week two, Spec. Ed. 1 had students read independently in order to find character descriptions and write the descriptions on a post-it-note. At the end of the lesson, Spec. Ed. 1 looked at each student's post-it-note. One student was only able to find one character description, while the other students found multiple descriptions of the character. Subsequently, Spec. Ed. 1 had the student re-read a few parts of the text, and helped the student find 3 more descriptions. Therefore, post-it-notes were used as informal assessments to guide instruction.
Spec. Ed. 2 said comprehension checks were used after students read a text (Appendix A, question 1). In the first observation, I observed Spec. Ed. 2 administer a comprehension check based on a book students previously read. Spec. Ed. 2 graded the comprehension checks but the grades were not recorded in the grade-book because they were used as informal assessments to decide if students understood what they read. I found Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 required students to fill out packets which went along with every text students read, which were mentioned in their interview (Appendix A, question 1) and I observed students using the packets during every guided reading lesson. Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 marked the guided reading packets with check-marks, check-pluses, or check-minuses, in order to informally assess students on their knowledge of reading and writing concepts from guided reading lessons. If a student received a check-mark, it meant they met the expectations of the assignment. If a student received a check-plus, it meant they went above and beyond the expectations of the assignment. If a student received a check-minus, it meant the student did not meet the expectations of the assignment. For example, in week 6, Spec. Ed. 2 required students to write events from the story they read in chronological order. If students accurately wrote the events in chronological order, they received a check-mark. If students accurately wrote the events in chronological order and used complete sentences, they received a check-plus, because the expectations were to only write the events accurately in chronological order. However, the students received a check-minus if they didn’t accurately write the events, which means they were unable to meet the expectations of the assignment.
After I analyzed my data from the interviews and observations, I found most of the informal assessments took place during guided reading. The informal assessments I observed were used for the participating teachers to guide instruction. After my data was analyzed, I discovered that when participating teachers noticed students struggle with reading or writing activities, the teachers prompted students for more information, or had students re-read parts of the text.

**Formal Assessments**

For the purpose of this study, formal assessments are assessments that are mandated by the district. After I analyzed my data from my interviews, observations, and examining assessments, I discovered formal assessments were used to guide the literacy needs of students. In my interviews, (Appendix A, question 5) the participating teachers said they used more standardized assessments than teacher-created assessments. I found the previous statement to be true, since I did not observe any teacher-created assessments during my six-week study but I did observe the use of standardized assessments. Most of the formal assessments used in the classrooms were standardized assessments, which included the DRA, DRA2, and the DSA. All participating teachers mentioned the use of the DRA, DRA2, and DSA in the interview (Appendix A, question 1), and I observed the use of the DSA in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom. Table 5 consists of the purpose of each formal assessment the participating teachers used.
In both classrooms, the participating teachers used formal assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students. The DRA guided literacy instruction because it is a benchmark assessment the participating teachers were required to administer in the fall, winter, and spring and provided the teachers with independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. In the study I conducted, the participating teachers initially formed guided reading groups based on students’ instructional reading levels from the DRA. However, I noticed the participating teachers used informal assessments to decide if students needed to switch guided reading groups.

As I have mentioned, all students are administered the DRA three times each school year, in order to monitor the reading progress of all students. However, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 were required to administer the DRA2 to students with disabilities, because the district mandates special education teachers keep track of their students’ progress in reading. All participating teachers mentioned the DRA2 is the only assessment that is different for students with disabilities (Appendix A, question 9). It is only a seven-minute test and Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 believed
the DRA2 did not give much information on how well students could comprehend a
text, which I discovered when I asked question 7 of the interview (Appendix A).
However, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 chose texts during guided reading that were
based on students’ instructional level scores from the DRA2, because they were
tested once every two weeks. Since the DRA2 was used to find students’
independent, instructional, and frustration levels for guided reading, Spec. Ed. 1 and
Spec. Ed. 2 focused on finding texts which were within their students’ instructional
levels because they wanted books that weren’t too easy or too challenging for their
students, in order for them to grow as readers. My research did not conclude reasons
why Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 used the DRA2 to find texts based on instructional
levels of students with disabilities, especially since they did not believe the DRA2
accurately assessed comprehension of a text. Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 did not use
other assessments to determine if the levels were correct. However, as I have
mentioned, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 used informal assessments during guided
reading in order to determine if students understood the texts they chose.

I found the participating teachers used the *Diagnostic Spelling Analysis* (DSA)
to guide students’ word study groups in order for students to practice sorting and
spelling words, which is part of the literacy program within the school district.
Although I did not observe the administration of the DSA in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed.
2’s classroom, I did observe students perform word study sorts and I observed
students administer spelling tests to each other based on word study words, while
Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 led guided reading lessons.
In the interviews, none of the teachers mentioned the independent reading book report as an assessment (Appendix A, question 1). However, during week 5 in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s classroom, I observed students working on their independent reading book projects, because Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 allowed students to work independently for a half hour of their ELA block. The independent reading book project is a monthly school-wide assessment in which teachers require students to find a book of their choice or based around a genre of the teacher’s choice (i.e. nonfiction), and students must write a report about what they read, which is graded as an assessment. The independent reading book project does not guide instruction because students read a book and write a report on their own. The reports may help teachers decide if the students understood the text, since the reports are graded by using rubrics. However, the teachers within the school are not required to provide instruction based on the results of the book reports.

Formal assessments used in the two classrooms were used to guide literacy instruction in order to meet all students’ needs. The DRA was used to initially form guided reading groups, which was the biggest portion of the ELA block for the participating teachers. The DRA2 was an assessment used for students with disabilities in order to monitor their progress in reading and Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 found texts based on their instructional reading levels. The DSA was used in order to create word study groups based on spelling abilities. Students used word sorts to practice their spelling and had spelling tests on the words they sorted. The independent reading book project was based on a genre in which the teachers chose to
focus on each month. The reports were assessed once a month, but were not used to guide specific literacy instruction. The participating teachers provided some writing instruction during guided reading, and were supposed to provide writing instruction during a half hour of their ELA block, which I observed in Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1’s classroom. However, I did not observe Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 provide a writing lesson to their students.

**Instruction and Assessments for Students with Disabilities**

In the interviews, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 mentioned the DRA2 is an assessment that is only administered to students with disabilities, and the DRA2 is an assessment mandated by the district (Appendix A, question 1). The DRA2 is similar to the DRA because it is a benchmark assessment used to monitor progress except it is only administered to students with disabilities. The participating teachers used the DRA2 to quickly assess a student’s independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. Since the DRA2 was administered once every two weeks, students with disabilities were assessed more frequently than their peers within the inclusion classroom. Therefore, the participating teachers used the scores from the DRA2 to provide individual instruction for students with disabilities during guided reading. I found Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 used texts within their students’ instructional levels, in order to meet their literacy needs according to scores from the DRA2.

In both classrooms, I found Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2’s guided reading groups consisted mainly of students with disabilities, along with a few students who struggled in reading. Some students who were in Spec. Ed. 1’s guided reading groups
needed more practice reading, and therefore, had re-teaching lessons with Gen. Ed. 1 following guided reading lessons with Spec. Ed. 1. Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 set specific guided reading goals for their students by using scores from the DRA as well as informal assessments during guided reading lessons. Therefore, Gen. Ed. 1 helped students with disabilities make progress towards meeting their reading goals since Gen. Ed. 1 provided extra reading instruction.

Summary

In both classrooms I studied, most of the literacy instruction was given in guided reading groups, which consisted of more reading instruction than writing instruction. The DRA was used for the participating teachers to determine instructional goals for students, as well as to decide on student placement in guided reading groups. However, informal assessments were used during guided reading lessons because the DRA did not provide enough information on students' reading abilities. The informal assessments were used for the participating teachers to determine strengths and needs in literacy and they were used to decide if students needed to switch guided reading groups. Spec. Ed. 2 recorded students' reading strengths and weaknesses in guided reading journals, which were used to keep track of progress throughout the school year and the journals were used for parent-teacher conferences. The DRA2 was only administered to students with disabilities, and the special education teachers found texts that closely aligned with their students' instructional reading levels from the DRA2. The participating teachers used the DSA to form word study groups, so students were able to practice sorting and spelling
words. The independent reading book project was the only assessment that did not
guide instruction because the participating teachers did not provide instruction based
on results of the projects. Therefore, most assessments were used to guide the literacy
instruction for all students.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

I conducted my research in two fifth-grade inclusion classrooms in order to explore how teachers use assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students. In this chapter, I explain my conclusions and implications based on my findings from the data I collected from the interviews, observations, and assessments. I am able to conclude that students benefited from guided reading lessons, formal assessments did not provide the participating teachers with enough information, informal assessments were used to decide on individual students’ strengths and weaknesses in literacy, and students would benefit from writing more during guided reading. Implications for my teaching include I would use informal assessments more frequently than formal assessments, I would provide students with many opportunities to write during guided reading, and I would use other assessments besides the DRA2 to determine if instructional levels are accurate for students with disabilities. I recommend further research should be conducted in order to generalize my results to other fifth-grade inclusion classrooms, further research should be conducted in order to determine benefits from guided reading groups in other classrooms, and further research should be conducted on how often other fifth-grade inclusion teachers use informal and formal assessments.
Conclusions

1. Students benefited from guided reading lessons.

After I analyzed data from my study, I found guided reading lessons in the inclusion classrooms were used to provide literacy services to students according to their needs. Students benefitted from small-group instruction because specific instructional goals were determined for each individual and each group of students to master, through informal assessments and the DRA. As mentioned in chapter 2, the idea of the zone of proximal development states that in order to provide instruction tailored to students' needs, teachers must determine what students are able to do independently and what they are capable of with directions from adults (Vygotsky, 1978). The participating teachers in my study decided on instructional goals that aligned with students’ proximal development and the participating teachers used texts within students’ instructional levels, which were texts students could not read independently but were not too challenging for the students to read with a teacher. Students were initially placed in guided reading groups according to their instructional level from the DRA, and the participating teachers used informal assessments to decide if students needed to switch guided reading groups throughout the school year. Students who were grouped together read at about the same reading levels and could interact with the same texts together. Therefore, guided reading lessons were tailored to students’ specific literacy needs within their zones of proximal development.
2. Formal assessments did not provide teachers with enough information about individual students’ literacy strengths and weaknesses.

Although formal assessments were used to guide literacy instruction, they didn’t provide the participating inclusion teachers with enough information on each student’s literacy needs. Earlier researchers found the DRA was an accurate measure of students’ reading levels (Williams, 1999). However, in the study I conducted, the participating teachers did not only rely on the DRA to determine reading levels because they had to switch students to different guided reading groups within the first few weeks of school. The participating teachers used informal assessments during guided reading to determine if students needed to switch guided reading groups. The DRA2 was a seven-minute test, and it was used to determine instructional reading levels for students with disabilities, once every two weeks. However, since it is a short assessment, teachers did not want to only use the test to decide students’ comprehension levels. Therefore, teachers used informal assessments during guided reading to determine if students were able to comprehend texts. The DSA was used to place students into word study groups so they could sort words within their developmental spelling stage (Ganske, 2000). However, the participating teachers required students to take spelling tests on words they sorted, which assessed words students knew and words they struggled with. The independent reading book project assessed some writing abilities through rubrics, but it was only given once a month and did not guide individual student instruction. Writing instruction was not provided based on assessment results from the independent reading book projects. Therefore,
formal assessments did not provide the participating teachers with enough information to guide individual students' literacy needs.

3. Teachers used informal assessments to determine students' individual strengths and weaknesses in literacy.

The participating teachers from the inclusion classrooms in my study used informal assessments to determine each student's strengths and weaknesses in literacy. Black & William (1998) conducted research on formative assessments, which are assessments teachers use to understand students' strengths and weaknesses, and provide instruction based on their needs. In the study I conducted, informal assessments were formative assessments since they informed instruction for individual students' literacy needs. In the study I conducted, I found the DRA was used to initially form guided reading groups. However, informal assessments were used for the participating teachers to decide if students needed to switch guided reading groups. In Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1's classroom, two guided reading groups changed because Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1 decided some students mastered instructional goals and needed to master new goals during guided reading, through the use of informal assessments. The DRA2 was administered to students with disabilities in order to discover instructional reading levels and find texts for guided reading lessons. However, the participating teachers in my study used informal assessments to determine if students were able to comprehend the texts chosen for guided reading lessons. Therefore, informal assessments were used in conjunction
with the formal assessments to determine individual students’ strengths and weaknesses in literacy.

4. Students would benefit from writing more during guided reading.

During the six-week study I conducted, I found more reading instruction was used than writing instruction in the two inclusion classrooms. Guided reading lessons were used for intense reading instruction, which were based on reading goals. However, writing is an essential part of literacy, and it is connected to reading instruction. Students should write about what they read in order to deepen their understanding of the text, since writing provides alternative perspectives on the text (Shanahan, 1997). In the study I conducted, I found Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 required students to write more than Gen. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 1, since students in Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2’s guided reading groups were required to write in guided reading packets that went along with texts they read. I noticed Gen. Ed. 2 and Spec. Ed. 2 often discussed with students potential answers to write in their guided reading packets, and then students wrote the answers. Therefore, instead of mainly focusing on reading instruction, the participating teachers should spend more time on writing instruction so students can form their own answers to comprehension questions.
Implications for My Teaching

1. I would use informal assessments more frequently than formal assessments.

In the study I conducted within two inclusion classrooms, I found informal assessments were used more frequently than formal assessments. There were only four formal assessments that I noticed during my study, which were all mandated by the district. I found that informal assessments were used mainly during guided reading, since that was the main component of the participating teachers’ ELA blocks. I would use informal assessments more frequently than formal assessments, and I would use informal assessments for the same purposes as the participating teachers in my study. For example, I would listen to students read and have discussions with them based on texts they read, in order to determine students’ strengths and weaknesses in literacy, and to decide on instructional goals for guided reading lessons. In order to keep track of data to inform my decisions on guided reading goals, I would take notes on students as they read, which is what Spec. Ed. 1 did in the study I conducted. In the study I conducted, informal assessments seemed to have guided individual instruction more than formal assessments, so I would use more informal assessments than formal assessments. If I was required to use the DRA, I would only use it to initially place students in guided reading groups, but I would use informal assessments to decide if students fit their guided reading group placement or if they needed to switch to a group with harder or easier texts and different instructional reading goals.
2. I would provide students with many opportunities to write during guided reading.

In the study I conducted within two inclusion classrooms, I found the participating teachers provided students with more reading instruction than writing instruction. I would have students write more during guided reading lessons, and not only require students to answer comprehension questions, but also write summaries about what they read. Readers should write about texts they read in order to deepen their understanding of the text (Shanahan, 1997). I would read students' writing to determine any strengths or weaknesses in writing, because this provides evidence of students' cognitive writing processes (Anderson & Briggs, 2011). Therefore, I could decide on instructional goals for writing, not just for reading.

3. I would use other assessments besides the DRA2 to determine if instructional levels are accurate for students with disabilities.

In the study I conducted within two inclusion classrooms, the participating teachers used the DRA and DRA2 to determine students with disabilities' reading levels. Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 used texts in guided reading lessons that aligned with students' instructional reading levels, from the DRA2 assessment. However, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 did not believe the DRA2 was completely accurate because the assessment is too short, but they did not use other assessments to determine its accuracy. I am not able to conclude reasons why Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 didn't use other assessments to confirm its accuracy. However, Spec. Ed. 1 and Spec. Ed. 2 used informal assessments during guided reading to decide if students
were placed in the correct guided reading groups. Therefore, if I were required to use the DRA2 for the same purposes as the teachers in my study, I would not rely on scores from the DRA2 to decide on instructional texts for guided reading lessons. I would use informal assessments to guide specific literacy instruction with students during guided reading.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. **Further research should be conducted in order to generalize my results to other fifth-grade inclusion classrooms.**

   In order to generalize my results, further research should be conducted on how other fifth-grade inclusion teachers use assessments to guide the literacy needs of their students. The instruction and assessments the teachers provided in my study could be different in other classrooms, especially in different districts since the district I conducted my study in required teachers to administer certain formal assessments.

2. **Further research should be conducted in order to determine benefits from guided reading groups in other classrooms.**

   In the two inclusion classrooms I studied, I found guided reading lessons were used to provide students with literacy services. Students benefited from small-group instruction since instructional goals were set for each guided reading group. However, other fifth-grade inclusion teachers could have different ways of providing literacy instruction in guided reading groups. The teachers in the study I conducted provided more reading instruction rather than writing instruction. Further research should be
conducted to determine if other fifth-grade inclusion teachers provide more reading
direction than writing instruction, or more writing instruction than reading
instruction. Therefore, guided reading groups in other fifth-grade inclusion
classrooms could have different benefits than I found in my study.

3. Further research should be conducted on how often other fifth-grade
inclusion teachers use informal and formal assessments.

I found the participating fifth-grade inclusion teachers in the study I
conducted used more informal assessments than formal assessments. I observed
informal assessments during each guided reading lesson. However, formal
assessments were not used as frequently. The DRA was given three times a year, the
DRA2 was given once every two weeks to students with disabilities, the independent
reading book project was a monthly assessment, and my study did not conclude how
often the DSA was given. Further research on assessments should be conducted in
order to generalize how often informal and formal assessments are used in fifth-grade
inclusion classrooms.

Final Thoughts

In the study I conducted, I found there is a strong relationship between
assessments and instruction. The participating teachers used more informal
assessments than formal assessments, in order to determine specific literacy goals for
students. Guided reading lessons were the most important part of the literacy
program, and instruction was differentiated to meet the literacy needs of each student.
Students with disabilities were included in the general education classroom, because
it was considered their LRE. The participating teachers in my study shared the responsibility of providing instruction and administering assessments, in order to meet the literacy needs of all students.
References


Commeyras, M., Gilrane, C., Pearson, D.P., Roe, M., Rodriguez, A., Shelton, J.,


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: ______________________
Date of Interview and Time: ______________________

Purpose Statement:
The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a better understanding of how experienced inclusion teachers use their assessments to meet the literacy needs of all their students. Any insights and perspectives that you are willing to share will allow me to more effectively consider my personal use of assessments, especially in an inclusive classroom. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice to not respond. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. I anticipate that our interview will last 15 to 20 minutes.

Questions:

1. What kinds of literacy assessments are you using?

2. Do you use assessment data to drive your literacy instruction? If so, how?

3. How do you know if students are struggling with reading and/or writing?

4. Since there are varying abilities of students within your classroom, how are literacy services provided?

5. Do you use more teacher-created literacy assessments or more standardized assessments? Why do you think that is?

6. Do you have guided reading groups? If so, how are they formed?

7. Do the assessments that you use provide you with enough information to understand all of the abilities and struggles that each child has, or are there other ways of receiving information about your students?

8. Do you ever informally assess your students to see if they understand what is being taught? If so, how do you do this?

9. Do you assess students with special needs in different ways than the general education students? If so, how is this done?

10. Do you and your teaching partner take turns teaching? If so, how do you plan the lessons, and do you look at assessment results together?
Closing:

I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me use the reading program in a more effective way. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity confidential.

In the event that I need clarification after transcribing this interview, may I request follow-up discussion?