A Basal Program Does Not Stand Alone: The Roles Professional Choice, Principled Practice, and Finessing Play in Elementary Teachers’ Negotiation of a Basal Program

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A Basal Program Does Not Stand Alone: The Roles Professional Choice, Principled Practice, and Finessing Play in Elementary Teachers' Negotiation of a Basal Program

by

Ashley Roberts

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A Basal Program Does Not Stand Alone: The Roles Professional Choice, Principled Practice, and Finessing Play on Elementary Teachers’ Negotiation of a Basal Program

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# Table of Contents

## Chapter One: Introduction .........................................................1
  Statement of the Problem ...................................................1
  Significance of the Problem ................................................3
  Purpose of the Study .........................................................5
  Study Approach ...............................................................6
  Rationale ...........................................................................7
  Summary ...........................................................................8

## Chapter Two: Literature Review ..................................................10
  History of Basal Readers .......................................................11
    Early Basal Readers .........................................................11
    Twenty-First Century Basal Readers .....................................14
  Effective Reading Instruction ................................................19
    Explicit Reading Instruction .................................................20
    Phonemic Awareness .........................................................22
    Phonics ...........................................................................24
    Vocabulary .......................................................................25
    Fluency ...........................................................................26
  Comprehension .....................................................................27
  Balanced Literacy Approach ..................................................30
    Read Alouds .....................................................................31
    Shared Reading ..................................................................32
    Guided Reading ..................................................................33
    Independent Reading .........................................................34
  Negotiating Basal Program ....................................................35
  Summary ...........................................................................38

## Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures ........................................40
  Participants ..........................................................................40
  Context of the Study ...........................................................42
    Treasures Reading Program ..................................................42
  My Positionality as the Researcher ...........................................44
  Data Collection .....................................................................45
    Interviews ...........................................................................45
    Research Journal ...............................................................46
  Data Analysis .......................................................................46
    Interviews ...........................................................................46
    Research Journal ...............................................................48
  Procedures ...........................................................................49
  Criteria for Trustworthiness ....................................................49
  Limitations of the Study ..........................................................50
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations ..................................128
  Conclusions......................................................................................128
  Teachers Use Professional Judgment to Make Instructional
  Decisions ...................................................................................129
    Time .......................................................................................130
    Developmental Level ............................................................131
  Teachers Use Principled Practice to Negotiate the Program 136
  Teachers Finesse the Program to Individual the Program......138

Implications for Students’ Learning .............................................139
  Students Receive Developmentally Appropriate Instruction 139
  Students are Exposed to Effective Reading Instruction......141
  Students Experience a Spiraling Reading Curriculum ......142

Implications for My Teaching ......................................................143
  Better Knowledge of the Program Contents and
  Organization .............................................................................143
  Broader View of the Spiraling and Expectations in Other
  Grade Levels ...........................................................................145
  Knowledge of My Future Role as a Literacy Specialist .....147

Recommendations for Future Research ......................................148
  Balance Sample Size and Representation of Grade Levels...149
  Broaden Research to Additional School Districts ..........149
  Explore Topic into a Quantitative Research Design ......150

Final Thoughts ............................................................................151

References ..................................................................................154

Appendixes ..................................................................................159
  Appendix A: Interview Consent Form .................................159
  Appendix B: Interview Questions ...........................................161
  Appendix C: Interview Protocol ..............................................162
List of Tables

Table 4.1: First Grade Teachers' Contextual Information.........................55
Table 4.2: Teacher A's Weekly Instructional Sequence.............................62
Table 4.3: Second Grade Teachers' Contextual Information.......................79
Table 4.4: Weekly Curriculum Sequence- Teacher F and Teacher G..............84
Table 4.5: Third and Fourth Grade Teachers' Contextual Information..........101
List of Figures

Figure 4.1: Front and Back of Oral Vocabulary Cards........................................57
Figure 4.2: Independent Workstations..............................................................64
Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

It is Wednesday afternoon, and my seventeen energetic second graders are in music class. I have 40 minutes to begin planning reading instruction for the upcoming week. To make the most of my planning time, I open up my teacher’s manual for our basal program *Treasures* (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 2009) and begin looking over the next week’s scope. The program recommends that, on a daily basis, teachers use one-third of instructional time for whole group instruction and two-thirds of instructional time for small group instruction. My daily reading block lasts approximately one hour and forty-five minutes. Therefore, I spend 30 to 40 minutes doing whole group instruction from the basal program; I use the remaining 70 minutes to teach small, differentiated groups while the other students engage in computer and literacy activities.

For me, the great thing about *Treasures* is that the teacher’s manual includes multiple outlines for planning: unit outlines, weekly outlines, and daily outlines. Each week, the materials in the basal program contain directions and activities for me, as the teacher, to use during whole group instruction in oral vocabulary, listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, reading fluency, grammar, and writing; it also includes recommendations for each of these areas on a daily basis. In addition, the program’s materials map out how I am suppose to conduct small-group reading instruction for each day of the week.
To an untrained eye, this program's contents may appear to be a complete package. There seems to be endless resources: leveled texts, teaching guides, workbooks, and scripted prompts for lessons. As a third year teacher, Treasures is the second basal program I have used as a part of my reading instruction. Even though I have used a basal program before, planning a week of reading instruction from the program outline remains to be a daunting and complex task.

As I scan the pages designated for day one instruction, I examine the various mini-lessons and estimate how long each lesson would take based on my students' needs and abilities. Working purely on estimation, I speculate that it would take at minimum of two hours and forty-five minutes to teach the content. This does not include the time it would take my students to complete the five workbook pages accompanying the phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension lessons; it does not include the time my students and I would need for small-group reading instruction. In all, the content for one day would require more than three hours of uninterrupted classroom instruction. In a classroom of students with specials needs, three hours of uninterrupted time is not even possible.

On a typical day, my second grade students receive five hours and fifteen minutes of instruction in the classroom (excluding lunch and time for music, physical education, and art). Clearly, three hours of basal instruction is not possible within this context. I have 30 to 40 minutes, with all of my students, to provide whole group reading instruction based on the basal curriculum. I wonder, then, how a teacher can
possibly fulfill the scope of the basal program and deliver effective reading instruction for all students? Is it even realistic?

Significance of the Problem

Basal programs have held a longstanding presence in elementary classrooms (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). A basal program is a comprehensive, scientifically-based program that encompasses different components considered essential in reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Tompkins, 2010). These commercially produced programs are produced for kindergarten through grade five.

Today in the twenty-first century, basal programs continue to play a prominent role in how American children acquire reading skills and reach competency in reading; a prominence greatly attributed to the passage of No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (Ediger, 2010). Administrators and curriculum specialists are continuously evaluating and implementing commercial reading programs in efforts to meet federal requirements, such as adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is a way of measuring progress of students and, in turn, school districts under Title I of No Child Left Behind (Paige, 2002). AYP is how the federal and state governments measure if teachers are successfully educating students (Paige, 2002). Schools must show progress towards proficiency goals in order to meet AYP standards determined by individual states; if a school district does not meet AYP standards, the school will face varying sanctions determined by individual states (Paige, 2002). As the
government increases its demands on accountability, the use of basal series has become more widespread, as these commercial programs fulfill the increased need for rational and uniform instruction (Duncan-Owens, 2009). The district I work in has a history of consistently meeting AYP requirements. Despite this, the school continually adopts basal programs as a part of our reading curriculum.

It is critical that reading programs not only incorporate characteristics of effective reading instruction, but also harmonize with the students and teachers involved (Ediger, 2010). If a program does not entail effective instructional practices and fit with the population using it, the school district will not see the results and proficiency it is looking for (Ediger, 2010). A school district often chooses a basal program after engaging a committee in charge of evaluating and analyzing a range of commercial programs and selecting the program that best fits the literacy goals of the school district. For many school districts, standardized basal programs seem to be the most rational plan available (Ediger, 2010; Shannon, 1983).

Basal programs hold the capability of providing the backbone of uniformity in elementary reading instruction, which many stakeholders deem as essential (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). As administrators are facing the twenty-first century demands of accountability and progress monitoring, basal programs create an avenue for assuring that teachers are delivering the same curriculum within the same relative time frame (Ediger, 2010; Kersten & Pardo, 2007). Basal programs also seem to be the most rational plan available because they provide strong guidance for new, inexperienced teachers (Kersten & Pardo, 2007).
As I indicated earlier, basal programs provide teachers with a sequence map for instruction, for each day of the week, dictating the sequence and pacing to be followed (Pilonieta, 2010). Large publishing companies employ doctorate professors from large universities to design and structure basal programs. A program’s authors hold various literacy credentials: authors of reading instruction textbooks, educational researchers, members of prestigious reading organizations, as well as professors of education (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009). The authors determine the sequence and pacing for the program; however, they are not the only individuals who contribute to the sequence and pacing of a basal program. Program consultants, and reviewers, too take part in designing a balanced program (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009). Despite the credentials and expertise of the qualified professionals designing basal programs, teachers who use basal programs struggle to cover the large quantity of material within a week’s time (Pilonieta, 2010).

**Purpose of the Study**

When I sit down to plan a week of reading instruction, I first look at the reading strategy that is the focus of the week. This reflects my approach and philosophy of reading instruction; most of my instructional time is devoted to modeled lessons, guided practice, and integrated strategy instruction. I firmly believe in the process of metacognition and the role it plays in helping students become proficient readers. Metacognition is the process of thinking a person uses, to think about his or her own thought process.
I also incorporate pre-reading activities and discussions into my instruction to help students build their oral vocabulary and stimulate their background knowledge. While these choices are not always prescribed in the basal program, I make it a point to build them into my instruction. Much of my basal instruction focuses on the reading skills and strategies, and the background and vocabulary instruction. I do not place a heavy emphasis on the phonics, spelling, and workbook activities.

As I conducted this study, I developed better insight on how experienced teachers use the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) program. I believe that I can use the program more effectively now that I have a better, or broader, perspective of how experienced teachers do so. This study also allowed me to build my own understanding of the components of the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) basal program, and ultimately, learned how I can best use these components with my students.

The experience of researching an essential question relevant to my teaching practices and difficulties improved my ability to collect and analyze qualitative data from colleagues, an important professional skill necessary for success and survival in the education world. The central question of my study was: How do elementary teachers negotiate the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) basal program?

**Study Approach**

The participants of the study were nine elementary teachers, currently teaching grades one through four and using the Treasures (2009) reading program.
The participants were colleagues of mine. Through the process of interviewing the teachers, I collected meaningful, qualitative data using grounded theory design (Creswell, 2008). Working from a grounded theory perspective allowed me to generate a theory in response to my research question, based on the data I gathered from the teachers; any theories I developed after data collection and analysis, were generated from the perspectives of the teachers involved (Creswell, 2008).

Through the interview process, I focused on how and why the participants use the basal program in the ways they do. I transcribed the interviews, as well as my field notes, into text documents. After I transcribed the interviews and field notes, I organized similar text segments into categories. The data collection process lasted five weeks.

**Rationale**

The main goal of this study was to gain perspective, clarity, and understanding of how nine experienced teachers negotiate the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) basal program. A qualitative study enabled me to explore the problem and gain a deeper understanding through interviewing the teachers. I used the interview process to ask broad questions about how the teachers used the basal program. I used open-ended questions in a one-on-one interview setting; the teacher was in control of the response she provided. A one-on-one interview setting seemed most appropriate to my research question, as some teachers could be reluctant to share their perspectives in the presence of other colleagues (Creswell, 2008).
I used descriptive and reflective field notes throughout the process of interviewing, as well as my research journal, to triangulate evolving perspectives and findings. The process of interviewing provided me an opportunity to extract as much information from the teachers as possible, in order to best understand how the teachers negotiated the basal curriculum.

Summary

Negotiating the scope and sequence of a basal program continues to be a complex task for me. The content pacing and daily sequence of the basal program requires more instructional time than I have. In a school district where a basal program is required to be taught in its entirety, with no room for flexible decision-making, teachers become technicians and managers of the curriculum (Cloud-Silva, 1987).

In my school district, we are encouraged to use the basal program as a guide to deliver effective reading instruction. I am not required to implement every component of the basal program; however, as a third year teacher, I find it challenging to determine the essential components in the program. Each week, I spend a great deal of time negotiating the basal program to fit my teaching style, students' needs and abilities, students' learning styles and interests, and the overall literacy goals of our class. Even though I spend a lot of time familiarizing myself with the content of the program and much time planning reading instruction, I feel as though I could still use the basal program more effectively.
In doing this study, I gained more knowledge and a better understanding of how experienced teachers use the basal curriculum and what components they placed the most emphasis on, and what overarching themes guided their processes.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Basal programs have been accepted as scientifically sound methods of effective reading instruction for the past 150 years (Cloud-Silva, 1987; Duncan-Owens, 2009; Tompkins, 2010). The definition of effective reading instruction has shifted dramatically since that time, mostly since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. As a result, the content of basal readers has also changed to fit the definition of effective reading instruction (Martinez & McGee, 2000). As a high percentage of teachers, estimated to be 80 to 95 percent, still use basal programs for reading instruction, it is critical that these programs adapt to meet the recommendations of effective instruction (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Martinez & McGee, 2000).

In this chapter, I describe the development of basal readers from the early nineteenth century until now. The historical development of basal readers showcases how prevalent they have been in reading instruction. I also describe what effective reading instruction looks like from differing perspectives. This is relevant to the role of basal readers, since basal readers offer lesson guides for effective reading instruction. The final section of this chapter describes how teachers in the twenty-first century have adapted to the demands of basal reading programs.

As mentioned in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding and insight of how elementary teachers negotiate the components of a basal reading program to deliver effective reading instruction.
History of Basal Readers

Early Basal Readers

Basal readers have a longstanding presence in American education; they have been used to teach reading since the seventeenth century (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Before 1890, the content in the earlier basal readers reflected the societal goals of the people (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Martinez and McGee (2000) describe some of these periods: during the 1600s, early readers contained literature based heavily in religious themes, from 1776 to 1840, early readers were filled with literature conveying moral behaviors and goals.

It was during the period from 1890 to 1910 that the content of basal readers began to dramatically change (Martinez & McGee, 2000). It was during this period that teachers began to advocate the inclusion of higher-quality literature in basal readers (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Teachers began to incorporate long verse poetry and classic literature pieces. Martinez and McGee (2000) explain that basal readers were ultimately used to support and teach the process of reading; they were not intended to support the larger education goals of the country. Needless to say, the literature used in basal readers were not filled with religious babble and works about moral behaviors, as they were from the 1600s to the 1900s (Martinez & McGee, 2000). The purpose of the basal reader remained centered on teaching the process of reading for the first half of the twentieth century (Martinez & McGee, 2000).
As Martinez and McGee (2000) recognize, even in the 1950s, basal readers were the primary instructional method for delivering effective reading instruction and nothing more. The quality of the literature was often poor; the stories typically depicted the white, middle-class, suburban life (Martinez & McGee, 2000).

This pattern continued in the 1960s and 1970s as well; skills based instruction was the center of the teaching methodologies. Basal readers provided this forum. Children received instruction in word identification, comprehension, study skills, and oral reading with a heavy reliance on the phonics instruction (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Literature certainly lost its role and importance during this period (Martinez & McGee, 2000).

According to Pearson (2002), in the 1960s, children were taught high-frequency words using strictly controlled literature and heavy phonics instruction. Pearson explains that the dominant teaching approach during this decade was the 'look-say' approach. This approach consisted of students learning high-frequency sight words and then practicing them repeatedly in basal stories. Using the platform of sight words and repeated readings of basal literature, teachers would then build in phonics instruction. Pearson details the characteristics of reading instruction in the 1960s: phonics were an integral part of the cueing systems, phonics instruction should continue beyond early primary grades, and reading readiness programs were integral in children's further development. Again, the majority of reading instruction was delivered through the 'look-say' approach, with controlled basal literature.
Basal programs in the 1960s began to incorporate more skills lessons in the teachers’ manuals (Pearson, 2002). Skills lessons did not occupy many pages in the teachers’ manual prior to the 1960s (Pearson, 2002). However, basal programs began to include more teachers’ guide pages for lessons, especially in skills development. It was during the 1960s that teachers’ manuals developed into scripted teaching guides (Pearson, 2002).

Up through the 1960s, the quality of literature was not the center of basal reading programs. According to Pearson (2002), “the look-say basals had experienced virtually uninterrupted progress from 1930 to 1965” (Pearson, 2002, p. 9). However, in the 1970s, educational research began to investigate basal readers and their role in reading instruction. For example, Dolores Durkin (1978) emphasized the role of supplemental literature when using basal readers for reading instruction. Durkin criticized American education for its over-reliance on basal reading programs. Cloud-Silva (1987) and Shannon (1983) supported and expanded upon Durkin’s criticisms in the 1980s, as basal readers dominated reading instruction nationwide.

During the 1980s, multiple researchers began criticizing the content and use of basal readers. Shannon (1983) strongly criticized that the use of basal readers were becoming too prevalent in reading instruction. School districts, administrators, and teachers were heavily relying on basal readers as the only method of teaching students to read.

Shannon (1983) investigated whether or not teachers felt alienated from their reading instruction as a result. Shannon described alienation as a concept in which
teachers "control only the level of precision with which they apply commercial materials (Shannon, 1983, p.71). Despite Shannon’s hypotheses that teachers would certainly feel alienated, because of the overuse of basal readers, he found, through surveys and interviews, that teachers did not feel alienated from their role in reading instruction, despite heavy use of basal readers. However, Shannon’s study took place in the midst of a decade where reading instruction directly correlated with basal readers (Shannon, 1983).

Cloud-Silva (1987) looked at teachers’ attitudes concerning basal readers as well. Again, at this time in American education, basal readers were implemented in approximately 90 percent of elementary classrooms (Cloud-Silva, 1987). Even before the 1980s, basal readers had been the primary method of teaching reading for more than a quarter of a century. Cloud-Silva’s study centralized around the idea that teachers were playing the role of technicians and managers, rather than active teachers; not to say that the teachers were not doing jobs, but that the reading curriculum was scripted and planned for them through use of the basal. (Cloud-Silva, 1987; Shannon, 1983). Similar to Shannon’s study (1983), Cloud-Silva found that teachers exhibited neutral feelings towards their use of basal readers and even expressed moderate approval of the programs.

Twenty-First Century Basal Readers

According to Cloud-Silva (1987) and Shannon (1983), teachers in the 1980s did not portray negative feelings towards basal readers; they did not feel alienated
from their reading instruction. At the time, basal readers were accepted as the best method for reading instruction (Cloud-Silva, 1987; Shannon, 1983). However, as the twentieth century came and past researchers began to strongly criticize the components of the basal programs (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Duncan-Owenś, 2009; Ediger, 2010; Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

One of the biggest arenas of criticism with basal readers, especially since the turn of the 21st century, was the lack of quality comprehension lessons (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Pilonieta, 2010). In 1981, Dolores Durkin completed a research study in which she investigated the role of comprehension instruction in five of the most widely used basal readers. Durkin’s found that the contents of the basal readers devoted little attention to teaching methodologies, like explicit and direct comprehension instruction; however, the content in basal readers strongly focused on assessment and written pieces. Just in recent years, Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) and Pilonieta (2010) conducted similar investigations concerning the instructional methodologies, or teaching practices, for comprehension lessons in basal manuals.

Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) and Pilonieta (2010) conducted similar studies that focused on reading comprehension recommendations in basal programs. Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy focused on five popular basal programs used in grades three through five. Similarly, Pilonieta investigated the inclusion of comprehension instruction recommendations in five basal programs in kindergarten through grade six. The researchers of both studies coded the lessons in the reading programs based on the skills and strategy instruction, the level of direction given to the teacher, and
degree of strategy application. Both studies found that basal programs incorporate too many skills within one grade level. Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy determined that, on average, basal reading programs incorporate a range of 18 to 29 reading skills and strategies.

Some of the skills included in the programs mentioned in the study are: author's purpose, cause and effect, character, classify and categorize, compare and contrast, drawing conclusions, descriptive text structures, comparing genres, using illustrations, making inferences, making judgments, identifying main ideas and details, identifying plot, making predictions, identifying problems and solutions, sequencing events, identifying setting, and summarizing. The commercial programs also include instruction guides for comprehension strategies: analyzing, questioning, monitoring and clarifying, reading ahead, adjusting reading rate, rereading, story structure, summarizing, text structure, and visualizing (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009).

The National Reading Panel (2000) recommends that students receive instruction in seven core skills and strategies per grade level plus instruction in using multiple strategies: predicting, questioning, thinking aloud, analyzing story structure, summarizing, representing text through visual modalities, and analyzing text structure (Dewitz, Leahy, & Jones, 2009). Clearly, the number of skills and strategies included in the teaching prompts during comprehension lessons is well above the research-based recommendations.
Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) and Pilonieta (2010) had similar conclusions in regards to the quality of instructional models. The researchers of both studies concluded that the basal reading programs included in the study did not include enough opportunities for a teacher to implement modeled instruction, provide explicit instruction, or guided practice. Explicit instruction is an important component of effective reading instruction (Learning Point Associates, 2004; Metsala, 1997; Rupley, 2009). Pilonieta’s conclusions emphasized that basal programs have improved in the area of instructional recommendations for comprehension, but there is still much room for restructuring and improvement.

Besides the investigations surrounding comprehension instruction in basal programs, administrators also face problems when trying to match the program with the student and teacher population (Ediger, 2010). One of the main dilemmas encompassing the selection process for basal programs is that “one size does not fit all” when it comes to implementing a reading program (Ediger, 2010, p. 138). According to Duncan-Owens (2009) and Ediger (2010) it is critical that committees and administrators consider the needs of the students and teachers, alongside with the strengths and weaknesses of considered reading programs. While it is impossible for a single program to meet the needs of each student, it is important that administrators attempt to match needs and programs as best as they can (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Ediger, 2010).

The climate of education in the United States is rapidly shifting towards standardized, high-stakes testing. Considering this, basal programs have continued to
hold a prominence in schools (Ediger, 2010). According to Duncan-Owens (2009) and Ediger (2010), there are positive and negative aspects to consider when requiring teachers to use a basal program. Basal programs can provide new teachers or inexperienced teachers with a supportive context for delivering effective reading instruction. Each basal lesson is scripted and demands less preparation for teachers as they complete lesson plans. The basal manuals are also good resources for suggested learning activities and extra support possibilities (Ediger, 2010). If teachers use the basal handbooks as a guide, they can exercise professional judgment and training to deliver creative reading instruction. For administrators, one of the most frequently emphasized benefits of a basal program, according to Ediger (2010), is that it allows for uniformity and consistency from classroom to classroom. All second graders, despite who their teacher was, would have exposure to the same literature and same instructional sequence (Ediger, 2010). While this fits in with the No Child Left Behind notion that one size fits all when it comes to curriculum and education, it is appealing to administrators responsible for yielding adequate test results and maintaining progress in standardized test scores (Ediger, 2010).

Duncan-Owens (2009) and Ediger (2010) report similar negative effects concerning basal programs. Since the 1980s, researchers have inquired whether or not basal programs alienate and marginalize teachers (Cloud-Silva, 1987; Shannon, 1983). Duncan-Owens (2009) and Ediger (2010) suggest similar concerns when considering the negative effects of basal programs. According to Ediger, the delivery of basal lessons is often formal and artificial. Because of this, authentic teaching is
often missing when basal programs are implemented; teachers become marginalized and alienated from the reading instruction they deliver (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Ediger, 2010).

However, Duncan-Owens (2009) reported that teachers often make alterations and adaptations to the basal programs and how they use the programs in their classrooms: combining basal program with other instructional approaches, combining basal program with personal methodologies, combining basal program with district curriculum and personal methodologies.

Depending on the school district, this idea could potentially be a serious problem. Some school districts are mandated to use a basal program as a result of No Child Left Behind; however, some school districts choose to use a basal program as a guide and support tool for teachers. The teacher manuals act as a guide for instructional practices and methodologies and provide instructional support in components of reading instruction.

**Effective Reading Instruction**

Effective reading instruction looks different depending on the perspectives and philosophies in place. The two main perspectives of effective reading instruction that I introduce include the critical role of explicit instruction in the five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) and the balanced literacy approach. While basal reading programs traditionally dictated lessons in the five essential areas of reading instruction, more
up-to-date programs have started incorporating components of the balanced literacy model.

**Explicit Reading Instruction**

The role and impact of explicit instruction on reading instruction has dominated educational research (Learning Point Associates, 2004; Metsala, 1997; Rupley, 2009). Explicit instruction is the process of teachers clearly stating what is being taught and modeling how to use the new learning and information (The Partnership for Reading, 2009). In doing so, students' attention is directed on an experienced individual using the new learning. Metsala (1997) and Rupley (2009) emphasize the importance of explicit instruction as a part of effective reading instruction. Explicit instruction is essential in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension instruction; these components are the important in effective reading instruction (Rupley, 2009). Explicit instruction in each component is described in the concurrent subsections.

Explicit instruction, according to Rupley (2009), is critical in reading instruction, as it better prepares students for guided practice and application. Guided practice is the process when students begin to use new learning with the support of a qualified teacher (Rupley, 2009). For example, when students begin using a new reading strategy, such as predicting, in a guided reading setting, they are attempting to use the new strategy with the support of the teacher. The teacher can scaffold their experience by providing more or less support as needed. Students are not yet ready to
use the newly acquired learning independently, but they are able to use the new learning with the help of a teacher. For teachers to successfully accelerate readers, they need to provide an abundance of opportunities for guided practice (Rupley, 2009). Guided practice is another essential component of effective reading instruction (Allington, 2002; Learning Point Associates, 2004; Metsala, 1997; NICHD, 2000; Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

Research has supported that explicit instruction, paired with the five essential components of reading, (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) provides effective instruction (Allington, 2002; Learning Point Associates, 2004; NICHD, 2000; Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Learning Point Associates (2004), an organization funded by the U.S. Department of Education, supported that explicit reading instruction is best paired with systematic instruction. Systematic instruction refers to a logically sequenced plan of teaching progressively more challenging skills (The Partnership for Reading, 2009). This involves purposeful tasks, logical assessments, clearly defined objectives, and multiple guided practice opportunities (The Partnership for Reading, 2009). According to the perspectives of federally funded education organizations, such as The Partnership for Reading (2009) and Learning Point Associates (2004), systematic and explicit instruction within each component of reading are critical for delivering effective reading instruction (Bear, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004; Metsala, 1997).
Phonemic Awareness

Yopp and Yopp (2000) define phonemic awareness as “the awareness that the speech stream consists of a sequence of sounds—specifically phonemes, the smallest unit of sound that makes a difference in communication” (Yopp & Yopp, 2000, p.). Phonemic awareness is considered one of the essential components of effective reading instruction; it is considered a prerequisite for developing reading proficiency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonemic awareness plays a critical role in kindergarten and first grade (Learning Point Associates, 2004). This essential piece of reading instruction is a critical ingredient for early reading proficiency and accelerated progress (Shanahan, 2010). Systematic instruction in phonemic awareness is critical; teach simplistic concepts and gradually build up to more complex patterns with explicit instruction and reinforcement (Learning Point Associates, 2004).

The goal of phonemic awareness instruction is for children to understand that all words consist of separate sound units (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osburn, 2010; Shanahan, 2010). Armbruster, Lehr, and Osburn (2010) and Shanahan (2010) concur that as children develop phonemic awareness in kindergarten and first grade, they acquire the abilities to segment, divide, blend, and recognize sound units. Phonemic awareness is an essential component of effective reading instruction, as it predicts how well children will acquire other reading skills; early phonemic awareness has proven to increase future reading proficiency and success (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osburn, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004; Shanahan, 2010). Armbruster, Lehr, and Osburn (2010) and Shanahan (2010) emphasize that despite being an emergent...
literacy focus, phonemic awareness allows students to recognize and decode unfamiliar words within print, comprehend texts better, and acquire spelling skills easier.

Effective phonemic awareness instruction begins in kindergarten and is a continuous focus at least through second grade (Shanahan, 2010). According to Shanahan, lessons in phonemic awareness are most effective when delivered to small groups of children and simultaneously with alphabetic instruction. Instruction in phonemic awareness must incorporate child-friendly activities, such as nursery rhymes, songs, chants, word games, riddles, and storytelling (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Yopp and Yopp (2000) argue that the activities used for phonemic awareness instruction should be engaging, interactive, fun, playful, and promote social language development.

Yopp and Yopp (2000) support that instruction should be systematic, or progress in a developmental sequence: focus on rhyme, focus on syllables, focus on onsets and rimes, and then focus on phonemes. Different ways to manipulate sounds during phonemic awareness instruction include matching, isolation, substitution, blending, segmentation, and deletion (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). While child-friendly activities, systematic instruction, and sound manipulation are each integral in effective phonemic awareness instruction, Yopp and Yopp state that the quality of the instruction and the responsiveness from the individuals require more consideration than the actual amount of time devoted to such activities.
Phonics

Phonics, like phonemic awareness, is a critical component of reading instruction in kindergarten through second grade; it is an essential component of early reading success (Learning Point Associates, 2004; Tompkins, 2010). The National Reading Panel (2000) found that phonics instruction provided clear benefits and advantages in learning to read. Phonics instruction, unlike phonemic awareness, establishes the rules of relationships between letters and sounds; phonics deals more specifically with spelling and sound patterns of oral language (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osburn, 2010). Even though phonics instruction is critical in kindergarten through second grade, it can also be helpful for struggling readers in upper elementary grades (Tompkins, 2010). Phonics instruction, like other essential components of reading instruction, should be explicit and systematic (Learning Point Associates, 2004; Shanahan, 2010).

Explicit and systematic phonics instruction has been found to improve all aspects of students’ reading and spelling capabilities (National Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) also stated that effective phonics instruction should clearly and directly explain relationships between letters and sounds, ultimately producing students with stronger word recognition, comprehension, and spelling skills (NICHD, 2000; Shanahan, 2004). Explicit phonics instruction is best paired with authentic learning opportunities; reading, writing, and teacher-directed tasks are authentic learning tasks that involve transferring phonics knowledge into application (Tompkins, 2010).
Vocabulary

Explicit instruction in vocabulary is an essential element of effective reading instruction (Armbruster, Lehr, Osburn, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004; Bear, 2010). Vocabulary instruction envelopes how we communicate with others: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Bear, 2009). Vocabulary instruction must be direct, strategically sequenced, and within developmental ranges of students (Tompkins, 2010). According to Tompkins (2010), it is critical to build effective vocabulary instruction into pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities. Learning Point Associates (2004) stated that "vocabulary acquisition is crucial to academic development. Not only do students need a rich body of word knowledge to succeed in basic skill areas, they also need a specialized vocabulary to learn content area material" (p. 22).

Armbruster, Lehr, and Osburn (2010) suggest that vocabulary instruction incorporates clear definitions of new words and teaches students to be problem-solvers when learning unknown words in context. To achieve this, teachers should incorporate word learning strategies, extensive read alouds, repeated readings, rich contexts for vocabulary enrichment, and active engagement with vocabulary words (Bear, 2010). According to Bear, word learning strategies include explicit instruction in using root words, suffixes, prefixes, and derivatives.

It is also important that students receive instruction in using contextual information to infer word meaning. In order to provide students with ample experience in using contextual information for vocabulary development, teachers need
to expose students to rich texts and resources across multiple genres and text structures. This allows students to practice context clues with multiple, meaningful texts in an experience-rich classroom (Bear, 2010; Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002). These instructional strategies are research-based and support effective reading instruction (Armbruster, Lehr, Osburn, 2010; Bear, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004).

**Fluency**

Fluency plays an important role in reading success (Hasbrouck, 2010). According to Hasbrouck (2010), educators view and define fluency differently depending on their perspectives and pedagogical philosophy. Hasbrouck defines fluency as the ability to effortlessly solve words with acceptable-accuracy while maintaining an appropriate rate and expression. Fountas and Pinnell (2007) define fluency as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and flexibility in solving words. This also includes reading with strong momentum while displaying phrasing, pausing, intonation, and stress. The National Reading Panel (2000) includes some of these same aspects of fluency in its definition: “fluent readers are able to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 11).

Following the National Reading Panel report in 2000, an early screening instrument was designed based on the findings of the federally funded National Reading Panel. This instrument, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills), was designed to provide an accurate measure of early literacy skills based on
the five components of reading instruction reported by the National Reading Panel: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2011).

According to the University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning (2011), the DIBELS instrument uses oral reading fluency to determine if a student is progressing at grade-level standards. Fluency, in the terms set forth by DIBELS and the University of Oregon, is defined by automatic word-recognition and word-solving; fluent reading would appear to exert no mental or cognitive effort (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2011).

Despite the varying definitions and perspectives of fluency, there are commonalities in effective instructional practices to incorporate in the classroom. The University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning (2011), theoretically based around Reading First and the National Reading Panel’s fluency definitions, urges the use of developmentally appropriate tasks, repeated readings, and ample time in the classroom to practice fluent reading. The University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning also supports to use of corrective feedback when observing students’ fluency practices.

Comprehension

Comprehension is the ultimate purpose of reading (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Paris (2010) defines comprehension as, “making sense of words, connecting ideas between text and prior knowledge, constructing and negotiating meaning in
discussions with others” (Paris, 2010, p.1). It relies heavily on the other essential components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency (Armbruster, Lehr, Osburn, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004). Without the application of the other essential components of effective reading instruction, comprehension will not transpire.

According to Paris (2010) and Tompkins (2010) the largest quantity of comprehension occurs when a reader connects what is already known (background knowledge or schema) to what is being read; Paris refers to this as conceptual knowledge. Learning Point Associates (2004) define comprehension as, “constructing meaning that is reasonable and accurate by connecting what has been read to what the reader already knows and thinking about all of this information until it is understood” (p. 30). Comprehension is often a difficult component of reading instruction as it requires a student to undergo a great deal of thinking, as well as conceptual thinking and connecting to prior knowledge (Dole, 2010).

The complexity of thinking involved when comprehending texts is not the only challenge with comprehension instruction. Readers also use varying degrees of language skills when comprehending: oral, expressive, and receptive (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Oral language development is essential for reading comprehension; students who understand more words in an oral capacity, comprehend written text better (Paris, 2010).

In addition to the influence oral language has on comprehension, the lack of fluent decoding, knowledge of text features and genres, and flexible use of
comprehension strategies can create roadblocks in effective reading instruction (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osburn, 2010; Dole, 2010; Paris, 2010; Tompkins, 2010). Explicit explanations and modeling lessons of comprehension strategies is crucial for effective reading instruction; teachers must model strategies for activating background knowledge, generating questions, predictions, summarizing, inferring, and monitoring (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osburn, 2010; Dole, 2010; Learning Point Associates, 2004; Paris, 2010).

As readers are exposed to explicit instruction in activating background knowledge, summarizing, inferring, and questioning, they can begin to share opportunities for guided practice through cooperative learning and small-group instruction (Tompkins, 2010).

Comprehension instruction must begin with the process of activating background knowledge (Dole, 2010). Students benefit greatly from talking about main ideas and experiences prior to reading; it allows them to activate their experiences, feelings, and knowledge before tackling challenging written language (Dole, 2010; Paris, 2010).

Effective strategy instruction also incorporates reading aloud to students to familiarize students with the language of texts and books. This allows students to understand the differences between book language and oral language; students can then make connections across the two and derive meaning from written language (Dole, 2010). All readers need explicit instruction in strategies to use before, during, and after reading; however, it is critical that teachers also incorporate text structures
and features in their comprehension instruction (Paris, 2010). When students can
decipher between different genres and text structures, they stand a better chance at
positively interacting with the text (Paris, 2010).

Balanced Literacy Approach

Balanced literacy is an instructional methodology that provides effective
reading and writing instruction through the thoughtful, reflective decision making of
the teacher (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009; Spiegal, 1998). The framework for
balanced literacy is structured to incorporate reading and writing simultaneously; it
cultivates an array of language arts components, such as speaking, listening, reading,
writing, and viewing (Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, 2010;
Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009).

As noted in Fountas and Pinnell (2001), the balanced literacy framework is a
flexible framework that includes the following curriculum components: interactive
read aloud, modeled and shared reading/writing, word study, guided reading,
independent reading, literature study, and the writing workshop. Each component of
the balanced literacy framework provides varying levels of scaffolding and explicit
modeling, a critical component of effective reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell,
2001; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009).
Read Alouds

The purpose of read alouds, in the balanced literacy model, is to provide a whole-class with a model of exemplary reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009). While doing this, teachers may also explicitly teach reading strategies, story elements, and vocabulary concepts while providing students the experiences of more challenging books (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009). Read alouds require listening skills and listening comprehension as well (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009).

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2009), during a read aloud the teacher reads a text aloud to the students. The teacher prompts thinking before, during, and after the reading of the text. This process deepens children’s understanding of the text and it further develops their ability to use oral language to communicate (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Read alouds have obvious instructional benefits; however, children receive other benefits from this essential component of effective reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Children experience explicit teaching, high-quality modeling, various genres and types of texts, and what it feels like to be engaged in a community of learners and readers (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009).

Fountas and Pinnell (2001 & 2009) urge the importance of text selection for read alouds. It is important that teachers select texts that are developmentally appropriate for the audience of learners and incorporate story elements that are understandable and relatable. Furthermore, once a read aloud begins, an effective instructional strategy is to have students turn and talk to each other. This livens up the
read aloud experience and creates an interactive atmosphere. The following components of texts should be considered for each grade level when planning and implementing read alouds in the classroom: genre, text structure, content, themes, language and literary features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, words, illustrations, and book and print features (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

**Shared Reading**

The purpose of shared reading, in the balanced literacy model, is to read with children in unison (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Fountas & Pinell, 2009; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), shared reading provides the necessary support children need as they begin to explore and use new skills and strategies with text; they begin to behave like readers. During shared reading, the teacher can provide ample support and begin allowing children the opportunities to experience text and language (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Shared reading develops comprehension skills, phonemic awareness, story elements, concepts about print, fluent reading, and self-monitoring (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009).

Like read alouds, shared reading allows readers to experience explicit teaching, socially constructed meaning, and a learning community (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). However, shared reading goes beyond these common goals and allows the readers to participate in the reading with ample support (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Shared reading is often referred to as performed reading. Shared and
performed readings involve: processing print continuously, working in groups, practicing expression and intonation, and choral reading opportunities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). When selecting texts for shared, or performed, readings teachers should consider the same characteristics of texts as mentioned in the read aloud section.

**Guided Reading**

Guided reading is another critical component of effective reading instruction in the balanced literacy model (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Through guided reading, teachers can allow greater student application of reading strategies and behaviors in small group settings (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Guided reading requires less support from the teacher than shared reading and more action from the readers (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). During guided reading, the teacher does minimal modeling, but shifts to the supporting and prompting role (Saskatoon Public School, 2009).

There are various models of small group reading instruction; however, guided reading, as a part of a balanced literacy model, consists of specific characteristics (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001; 2007; 2009), in guided reading, teachers group students who are similar enough to receive the same instruction. Grouping in guided reading is flexible and allows students to move in and out of guided reading groups.
A component of guided reading that is unique to the balanced literacy model is the role of a book introduction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). A book introduction incorporates some of the following actions: activating schema, inviting students to think aloud, having students locate new vocabulary in the text, helping students make connections, and drawing attention to the illustrations and the information presented.

Following a book introduction, effective guided reading includes modeling, prompting, and reinforcing of strategic behaviors (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). Strategic behaviors may include comprehension strategies, think alouds, fluency, word solving, and using cueing systems (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; 2007; 2009). Effective guided reading instruction incorporates instruction and support in using processing strategies, such as solving words, monitoring, summarizing, maintaining fluency, prediction, connecting, inferring, and analyzing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

**Independent Reading**

Independent reading is an essential part of effective reading instruction (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Independent reading is the only component of the balanced literacy model that uses student-selected texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The purpose of independent reading is to allow students ample practice and experience, with texts at their appropriate reading level, in order to apply newly acquired reading strategies. Fountas and Pinnell describe the role independent reading in a powerful definition, “independent reading enables students to clock up mileage
as readers, expand their reading powers, and fulfill the essential goal of daily reading” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007, p. 115).

Even though the students read on their own or with a partner, the teacher’s role is to monitor text selection and confer with students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). With ample independent reading time during the balanced literacy framework, readers build their confidence, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension strategies (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009).

The role of the teacher is very different during independent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). In the common forms of student reading, sustained silent reading (SSR) and drop-everything-and-read (DEAR), the teacher’s role is to monitor student behavior and read as well, as a model for the students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). However, in independent reading (balanced literacy model), the teacher’s role is to provide students with book talks, provide mini-lessons, confer with students, observe students’ reading behaviors, and reinforce group sharing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). It is clear that the role of the teacher has shifted dramatically from SSR and DEAR, to the balanced literacy model of independent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

Negotiating Basal Programs

Basal programs have drastically changed in the past decade (Martinez & McGee, 2000). As explained earlier in the chapter, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the literature of basal readers portrayed the ideals of the society: religion and moral behavior (Martinez & McGee, 2000). For the majority of the twentieth century, basal
programs incorporated instructional, skills-based methodologies for teachers to adhere to when using the grade-level basal readers (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Now, in the twenty-first century, teachers must craft innovative methods for teaching diverse students with grade-level basal programs (Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

Teachers using basal programs in the twenty-first century must strive to skillfully deliver effective reading instruction using the program curriculum, as well as their own expertise on effective reading instruction. In 2007, Kersten and Pardo completed an ethnographic study of how two teachers, one second grade teacher and one third grade teacher, negotiated a basal program to deliver literacy instruction to a diverse student population. There was a gap in the years of experience; one participant had thirteen years of experience and the other had four years of experience. The two teachers “cautiously maneuvered their way through literacy planning and practice to meet the needs of their linguistically, culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse students” (Kersten & Pardo, 2007, p. 146).

The study was initiated to address the inconsistencies between what policies mandate and what teachers actually do in their classrooms (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). The two teachers both implemented their school districts’ basal program, but adapted the program to fit their best practices and ideas of effective reading instruction. Kersten and Pardo frequently used the terms finesse and hybridize to explain how teachers used basal programs in their classrooms. Through interviews and observations, the researchers investigated how the teachers negotiated the basal program.
Kersten and Pardo (2007) explain that finessing curriculum meant the “precise and complicated system of manipulating and maneuvering among various aspects of teaching context” (p.147). Finessing took place when teachers made active decisions on the parts of the curriculum to attend to and ignore. The goal of this practice was to make active decisions in order to deliver effective instruction. While it is not addressed in Kersten and Pardo’s study, the idea of effective instruction and components varied among teachers. The one participant, with four years of experience, focused on integrating reading and writing through a workshop model. While this was not a part of her basal curriculum, she placed an emphasis on the workshop model based on her ability to manipulate and maneuver the curriculum.

Hybridizing is another term that Kersten and Pardo (2007) used in their ethnographic study on how teachers negotiate basal programs. Hybridizing is a bit different from finessing because finessing entails attending to and neglecting certain components of a program. On the other hand, hybridizing involves a teacher using his/her previous best practices in conjunction with the required curriculum. The result is a new and original teaching style that combines personal pedagogy and basal curriculum.

Kersten and Pardo (2007) found that the participants each had a different negotiation process when working with the basal curriculum. The second grade teacher incorporated basal curriculum for one reading bock during the week and used personal pedagogy for the remainder of the week. Her personal pedagogy was heavily centered on integrating reading and writing through literacy centers and guided
reading. The third grade teacher incorporate equal pieces of five components she felt influenced her teaching: district requirements, Reading First requirements, her own methodologies and practices, test preparation, and basal reading program (Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

Summary

For multiple centuries, teachers have used basal readers to deliver reading instruction. As educators and researchers have better defined what effect reading instruction looks like, basal programs have been reconfigured to fit the criteria of effective reading instruction (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009). Basal programs now recommend teaching methodologies in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The instructional recommendations incorporate grade level literature for whole class instruction. With the turn of the twenty-first century, basal programs have started to incorporate aspects of the balanced literacy model into their instructional guides.

Basal programs’ teaching methodologies have continuously faced criticisms for the lack of research-based recommendations and methodologies, and for their role in marginalizing teachers’ professional judgment. Despite this, they have continued to play an important role in the education of American students. Teachers must now “use what they know about effective pedagogy, students, and learning and mesh these with new policy to create innovative and successful literacy practice” (Kersten & Pardo, 2007, p. 153). However, the manner in which teachers go about meshing
professional expertise, education, personal pedagogy, and basal curriculum has not been studied in great detail. I feel that my study's findings have contributed to the knowledge base regarding the process of reading curriculum negotiation.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The process of negotiating complex curriculum can be very challenging. I feel that the basal program my school district uses, *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009), is probably most useful after a teacher has had multiple years to negotiate and craft the scope and sequence of his or her particular grade level. *Treasures* contains a diverse range of support resources, literacy activities, and leveled texts. As a new teacher in my district, I have found the process of negotiating the complex curriculum of this basal program very challenging; often resulting in many frustrating hours of lesson planning.

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this qualitative study was to help me gain a more defined understanding of how more experienced teachers negotiate the basal curriculum, more specifically, *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009). As other teachers in my school most likely experience similar time constraints as I do, I hoped that this study would yield insights and perspectives on their processes through the exploration of the research question: How do elementary teachers negotiate the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) basal program?

Participants

I interviewed nine elementary teachers, ranging from grades one through four, who were currently using the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program. All of the participating teachers were females with a master’s degree. The age range of the participants was twenty-five to fifty-five years old; the average age
was thirty-nine years old. The years of experience ranged from four years to thirty-four years; the average number of years of experience was fourteen years. Four of the participating teachers were currently teaching in first grade, three teachers were from second grade, one teacher was from third grade, and one teacher was from fourth grade. All of the participating teachers had taught other grade levels in the past.

Among the nine participating teachers, a wide range of educational backgrounds were present: liberal arts, elementary education, English, special education, science, English writing arts, and psychology. The specialties covered in graduate education included: special needs, literacy, gifted education, special education, and reading. All of the participants were certified kindergarten through grade six; however, many of the participants had additional certifications: literacy, English, special education, reading, social studies and English Language Arts.

I used purposeful and convenience sampling when I selected my participants (Creswell, 2008). I selected the participating teachers intentionally to gain in-depth insight about the process of curriculum negotiation. In doing so, I was able to develop theories grounded in data provided by participants with various perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2008). Each teacher completed an informed consent statement (see Appendix A). I assigned each teacher a secure and anonymous number, which I used when labeling and documenting the data.
Context of the Study

This study took place in a small, rural school district in western New York. The population of the community is lower middle-class; the median income for a household in the school district is approximately $37,000. The community is invested, involved, and supportive of the students’ education.

District-wide enrollment, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, hovers around 950 pupils. The demographics of the student population consist of the following: 89 percent white, 6 percent Latino/Hispanic, 3 percent African American, and 2 percent Native American. The school district has consistently achieved good standing for adequate yearly progress.

The elementary school, in which I collected the data, consists of nineteen teachers, ranging in years of experience and credentials; two of the teachers are new to the district, and the other seventeen teachers have been tenured and completed their master’s degree. Eighteen of the teachers are female and one is male.

Treasures Reading Program

The data I collected during this study was based on the 2009 Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill) Reading/Language Arts program. According to the Macmillan McGraw-Hill website, the Treasures (2009) products are designed to help all learners by balancing quality instruction with high-quality literature (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009). With the goal of engaging multiple learning experiences across the program, the program authors attempt to yield literate citizens into our diverse and
ever-changing communities. To do so, Treasures is packaged with an abundance of materials that aim to motivate young learners. Despite the abundance of materials and teacher resources, Macmillan McGraw-Hill (2009) believes that the program structure provides manageable and easy-to-use materials.

*Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) is a comprehensive, research-based program structured around the essential components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The program also details instruction in oral language, grammar, writing, and spelling. As a package, *Treasures* includes various assessment resources: screening, diagnostic, placement, weekly, fluency, unit and benchmark, English Language Learner, and running records. In addition to the extensive assessment resources, *Treasures* also includes student anthologies, weekly leveled readers, big books, decodable readers, read aloud teacher anthology, literacy workstations, listening selections, retelling and oral vocabulary cards, alphabet cards, sound boxes, leveled workbooks, grammar workbooks, and spelling workbooks.

Each week, *Treasures* establishes defined objectives in phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. Macmillan McGraw-Hill (2009) aligns each unit with national and state standards, allowing teachers to easily align the program standards with district and state standards. The curriculum for each grade level is organized into six units, each unit spanning approximately five weeks. Each week, the program incorporates a piece of literature, specific to the theme and genre studied. In one unit, students are exposed to five or six core pieces of literature.
My Positionality as the Researcher

It is important for me, as a researcher, to consider my own positionality within the context of my study. As cited in Milner (2007), “Researchers’ multiple and varied positions, roles, and identities are intricately and inextricably embedded in the process and outcomes of education research” (p. 389). A researcher’s positionality consists of, but is not limited to: race, culture, gender, class, education, and experience (Milner, 2007).

I am a middle-class Caucasian female; I was raised my whole life in a middle-class family. I completed my undergraduate studies at Elmira College. I have my Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Social Studies. Currently, I am pursuing my master’s degree in Literacy at The College at Brockport in New York State. I hold New York State initial certifications in childhood education, grades one through six, and social studies, grades seven through nine; after my graduate education I will be certified in literacy, birth to grade six.

My first teaching position was in fourth grade in a different school district. I was required to use the Scott Foresman (2002) basal program. I currently teach second grade; it is my first year teaching at the school district in which I am completing this study. As I mentioned in my first chapter, I currently use the Treasures (2009) program. My teaching approach, when using a basal program, is to focus on the components I feel are most beneficial for my students. Personally, I feel that strategy instruction is the most important component of the basal program. I incorporate strategy instruction into all my lessons, whether it is reading, math, social
studies, or science. Strategy instruction gives students the tools necessary for
constructing meaning from text.

Vocabulary and skill instruction are also important parts of my classroom
reading instruction. While I use components of the basal program frequently, I
organize my weekly reading instruction into pre-reading, reading, and post-reading
instruction. I was deeply invested in this research study, as I hoped to gain a better
perspective of how the study's participants negotiated the Treasures reading
curriculum on a daily basis.

Data Collection

The nature of this qualitative study was to explore and understand the process
of negotiating reading curriculum. I collected data from interviews, field notes, and
my research journal. Each data source helped form a complete picture of how the
teachers used the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program.

Interviews

The primary method of data collection was interviewing. The interviews were
one-on-one and semi-structured; I used pre-determined questions to guide the
teachers (see Appendix B). Each main interview question was open-ended to enable
the teacher to offer her perspective. The teacher was able to control the types of
responses she gave during the interview. During the interview, I audiotaped, if the
teacher consented, the conversation for future transcribing and analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

In addition to transcribing the interviews, I also used an interview protocol to gather organized field notes during the one-on-one interviews. My interview protocol (see Appendix C) included instructions for the interview process, open-ended questions, note space for each participant’s responses, and space for follow-up questions (Creswell, 2008).

Research Journal

As I completed the interviews, I used a research journal and memos to document my thoughts as the researcher. My research journal and personal memos were also a part of data collection. My research journal and memos allowed me to record and organize emerging similarities among participants.

Data Analysis

I transcribed and coded each data source at the completion of the data collection process, a process that allowed me to surround myself with the data. I manually sorted, categorized, and coded all of the data information.

Interviews

Before beginning the analysis process, I transcribed each interview, as well as my protocols from the interviews. I used the audiotapes from the interviews to create
text documents with highly-accurate recording (Creswell, 2008). After the process of converting the interviews into text documents, I completed a preliminary exploratory analysis of the transcribed data across each grade level (Creswell, 2008). This involved reading and rereading the interviews and field notes. I continued to use memos to record my preliminary understanding of the data and my thoughts about how I would organize the text documents.

I also decided if I needed to collect more information; I anticipated that since there were no new perspectives emerging, I had enough data. This preliminary process was time consuming, as it required multiple readings of the documents. The goal of the process was to gain a general picture of the data in its entirety (Creswell, 2008).

After I gained a preliminary picture of the data, I began to code the data within each grade level. Coding data simply means to label information by describing the text segment or cluster of text segments (Creswell, 2008). This process involved grouping the transcriptions, or portions of transcriptions, into segments and groups. To assign codes to the interview and observation text segments, I asked myself the underlying meaning of the participants' words or actions. I used manual analysis to sort and categorize the data. This involved rereading the interviews and field notes, dividing the response into groups, and color-coding specific parts of the text. I looked for repetition and patterns across the interviews and field notes. Even though this method of analysis was time consuming, it allowed me to keep a personal connection
with the data I collected. I continued this process for each grade level and continued to make notes and observations with personal memos.

Once I coded a single data set, I made a list of each code, or label, I used throughout the document. Then I looked at all of the codes I used, grades one through four, and I compiled a list of words for the entire document and searched for overlap, redundancy, and reoccurring themes. When applicable, I grouped similar codes together. I completed this process for each interview, set of field notes, journal entry, and research memo. I continuously grouped text segments across all data sources. After I coded each grade level, I searched for similar codes that formed major themes and perspectives from all teachers, despite the grade level.

A theme is found when a substantial quantity of similar codes can be clustered together in a broad category (Creswell, 2008). I did not know, before beginning data collection, how many themes, or categories I would have at the conclusion of data analysis. The themes I used relate to the processes elementary teachers use when negotiating the basal program. I present these themes in chapter five.

Research Journal

I transcribed my research journal notes after I completed the process of analyzing the interview and protocol data. I used the data from my research journal to triangulate the findings from the coding process.
Procedures

The process of data collection took five weeks to complete. The following sequence is an outline of my data collection procedures:

1. **Weeks One and Two**: I gathered and organized all of the contextual information that my participants provided during the initial consent stage. This information allowed me to gain a better picture of my participants and their backgrounds. I also informally met with teachers to clarify any questions they had about the interview questions, which I provided with the consent documents. This allowed the participants to know exactly what information I was inquiring about.

2. **Weeks Three, Four, and Five**: I scheduled and conducted the nine interviews. As I conducted each interview, I continuously worked on transcribing the audiorecordings. This process took a great deal of time. In between interviews, I continued to revisit the prior interview transcriptions. During this process, I used my research journal to record similarities and reflective thoughts. I organized my thoughts and the similarities from interviews by grade level.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

It was critical that I accurately reported the findings and my interpretations of this study. The themes I discovered were grounded in the data from the teachers I
interviewed. Due to the duration of the study, prolonged engagement increased the validity of my research design and in turn my findings. My use of persistent interviewing throughout the data collection phase ensured the credibility of my findings. I used triangulation across multiple data sources to increase the accuracy of my findings: interview transcriptions, interview protocols, research journal, and research memos. Triangulation also involves using data from multiple individuals (Creswell, 2008). The data was from multiple participants, so the findings are more valid and credible.

At the conclusion of coding the data sources and interpreting the results, I used the process of member checking to corroborate my findings and check the accuracy of my interpretations (Creswell, 2008). Member checking consists of cross-checking the research interpretations and findings with a participant(s) from the study. Two participants validated the accuracy of my interpretations and descriptions in a follow-up interview setting. Also, the participants validated that the themes I generated were realistic to their work and the topic. I also transcribed the member checking interviews to support the validity of my study.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research studies, there were limitations with my research design, data collection process, my analysis, interpretation and representation of the data. While interviewing is a solid method of gathering qualitative data, it also has disadvantages and limitations. The process of interviewing can create an effect of
"filtered" information. As the researcher and interviewer, I elicited specific information. Therefore, I had a certain amount of control over the nature of teachers' responses, despite being open-ended interviews. I attempted to use broad questioning to elicit the greatest quantity of teachers' perspectives. However, I still focused the interview on the process of negotiating the basal program.

Furthermore, interview data holds the potential to portray deceptive data (Creswell, 2008). Depending on the interview setting and relationship with the interviewer, the interviewee may detail information he/she feels is fitting to the interviewer's wants or desires. In other words, the interviewee may simply yield data to appease the researcher. Prior to beginning the interview process, I explicitly stated to each participant that my intentions were not to criticize or reveal her teaching methods. Rather, I was looking to gain an in-depth perspective and understanding on the complex process of how she negotiates the *Treasure* reading program.

Qualitative studies are never free from the researcher's interpretation. In my study, I used personal interpretation and experience to collect and analyze the data sources. However, I used grounded theory design to develop theories from the participants' perspectives. To ensure that my findings were valid and credible, I used triangulation and member checking, as mentioned above, to minimize the effect of my own interpretations (Creswell, 2008).

The number of teachers from each grade level was another limitation of my study: four first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and one fourth grade teacher. When reading the following chapter, keep in mind that
the findings for first and second grade were based on the perspectives of larger groups of teachers. Third and fourth grade only had one teacher each, therefore, the findings I present for third and fourth grade are purely based on one teacher’s perspective.

The original design for data collection was intended to include teacher observations. This would have allowed me to see teachers in action while using the reading program. Due to the timing of the study, mid-May to June, most teachers had completed the reading curriculum and program. Therefore, teachers were no longer using the program in the classroom. The data collected was strictly gathered from interviews; the opportunity for classroom observations, with the reading program in action, was not conducive to the time of year in which the study was conducted.

Summary

Negotiating any form of curriculum can be challenging. The Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program, which was central to my study, offers many resources and instructional plans for teachers. However, I perceive that there is simply not enough instructional time within one day to teach the entire curriculum set forth by the program. Even after three years of teaching, I still find myself wondering how anyone can possibly teach all of the components in the reading program.

As I interviewed experienced teachers within my school district, I gained better insight on their processes of negotiating the reading curriculum. Through the eyes and perspectives of these teachers, I understand how I can most effectively
utilize the *Treasures* reading program to provide effective reading instruction in my classroom.
Chapter Four: Findings

As I mentioned in chapter one, the purpose of this qualitative study was to help me develop a better insight and understanding of how experienced, elementary teachers use the *Treasures* (McMillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program. The central question of my study was: How do elementary teachers negotiate the *Treasures* (2009) reading program?

I collected data collected through one-on-one interviews with teachers, field notes, and a research journal. The interview questions were predetermined; I used the inquiries I had about our district’s basal program to structure open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The driving elements I focused on during the interviews were: essential components of the basal program, sequencing the curriculum, using program resources, using small group reading instruction, and using additional supplements.

As I completed each interview, I looked back at the previous data collected and tried to figure out where the new information fit in or did not fit in. I used my field notes and the interview transcripts to find and document patterns within grade levels and across grade levels. My use of a research journal played an important role in documenting the evolving shifts in patterns and data. I analyzed all of the transcribed interview data using text segments and manual (Creswell, 2008). The entire data collection process lasted five weeks.

In this chapter, I present the themes and connections I made during and after the interview process. Each section outlines my interpretations of the data collected
from my colleagues. I have chosen to first present the data according to grade level. Then, I present the themes and connections I discovered across grade levels.

Teacher Interviews

First Grade

I interviewed four teachers, who were currently teaching in first grade. I refer to the teachers as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D in the remaining sections of this chapter. Three of the teachers, Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C used the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program in first grade the previous year. One teacher was new to the grade level, but had used the same reading program in kindergarten. Table 4.1 shows the contextual information for the four, first grade teachers.

Table 4.1: First Grade Teachers' Contextual Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elementary Special Education Reading Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Elementary English Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elementary Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Elementary Literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have organized my findings according to the main discussion topics of the interviews: negotiating essential components of the program, sequencing the curriculum, utilizing program resources, incorporating small group lesson plans, and selecting additional supplements.

**Negotiating Essential Components**

I found that the four, first grade teachers were ultimately selecting the same components from the program as the most essential. All four teachers stated they felt the phonics and spelling components were two of the most essential components for first grade instruction. Teacher C explained that the most essential component was, "probably the phonics component just because they're still sort of sounding out reading, sounding out the words" (June 9, 2011). I interpreted this explanation to mean that first graders heavily rely on decoding; therefore, the phonics component of the program provides the most essential instruction. The phonics and spelling plans in the basal manual coincide to match the weekly pattern focus. For example, a phonics objective may say, 'Blend words with short /u/u and long /u/u_e'. The weekly spelling objective would then be, 'Sort and spell words with short /u/u and long /u/u_e'. The phonics and spelling objectives are always aligned in the reading program.

Another program component that all four teachers stated as essential to their first grade instruction was the oral vocabulary lessons and the high-frequency vocabulary words. All four teachers expressed that the oral vocabulary lesson played...
an important role in their literacy instruction. These lessons, from the manual, incorporate cards with pictures on the front for the students and interactive text and prompts on the backside for the teacher. Figure 4.1 portrays one set of the oral vocabulary cards.

Figure 4.1: Front and Back of Oral Vocabulary Cards

Teacher A and Teacher C made clear statements about the importance of these oral vocabulary lessons. Teacher A explained “the oral vocabulary is to expose the kids to words that they wouldn’t normally be exposed to through their own reading level but they should be familiar with” (June 1, 2011) and Teacher C explained “the oral vocabulary exposes [students] to bigger words” (June 9, 2011).

In the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) teacher’s manual, the oral vocabulary lessons are scripted to be taught whole group and incorporate a weekly story that ties into the theme or main selection of the week. The teacher delivers the oral vocabulary lesson through an interactive read aloud.

All four teachers also stated that the high-frequency vocabulary words were essential to their classroom instruction. Again, Teacher C expressed that first grade
readers are still sound-out readers, meaning they are still decoding many words. As the reading series incorporates new high-frequency vocabulary words with each weekly story, students are able to acquire more words into their automatic word banks. The first grade teachers’ goal is to have all students master the entire high-frequency vocabulary word bank, approximately 190 words, presented over the scope of the series.

While these four teachers agreed on the majority of the essential components, there were a few differences across the four interviews. Teacher A and Teacher C mentioned comprehension as an essential component from the reading series. Of these two teachers, Teacher C stated “comprehension would be just for the second half of the year because we need them to be comprehending at a pretty good level before going into second grade” (June 9, 2011). Teacher A included the “comprehension strategies” (June 1, 2011) in her list of essential components from the program’s manual. In my opinion, the reason for this being that by the end of first grade, many readers are able to decode and read fluently above grade level; then the focus shifts to comprehension strategies.

The other difference I found after reviewing the interview data and field notes, is that only Teacher D incorporated the grammar component of the program into her daily literacy instruction.

Teacher D stated:

I think they [the components] all are most important for me because the workstations help me while I’m doing my reading groups. The
phonics, the grammar, it's all important to them [the students] because they [components] come together as a whole. Each component is important (June 13, 2011).

While Teacher D did not expand on how she incorporated the grammar component into her daily instruction from the program, it was evident that she placed value in the grammar component when she stated that all of the components “come together as a whole” (June 13, 2011).

In addition, Teacher D felt that the writing component of the program was essential to first grade, as the writing workstations form a link between the reading and writing process: “Basically the workstations are writing [tasks] that are linked to the reading selection of the week. It’s all about the writing ... with the topics and themes from the reading materials.” (June 13, 2011). All four teachers incorporated a writing journal that included the writing prompts from the weekly curriculum.

Teacher B explained:

They always have a journal writing, so we’ve made our own journals with those writings in it...they are the prompts from the story examples and based on the story...we’ve changed the writers’ checklist a little bit because we’ve always felt that they complete the assignment better. We have them check off if they used details [from the story], capitals and punctuation. We sat down as a grade level and structured it, and Sarah helped align graphic organizers to support the students (June 7, 2011).
Sequencing Basal Curriculum

One of the main concerns I could detect from all four first grade teachers was the time restraints they faced. When I asked about how they sequenced the curriculum, in accordance with the reading program, all four teachers explained that they do not have enough time to get in the amount of whole group instruction as designated in the program. Teacher B stated “usually the large [whole] group lessons I follow almost to a “T”, but the small group I do not.” (June 7, 2011).

Teacher D responded:

I wish that I could, but I don’t feel like I have enough time during the day to follow exactly everything. So, I do pick and choose the things I think are important for the children…but I try to follow it as closely as I can. I do teach the components dictated for each day, but in my own way (June 13, 2011).

I interpreted their responses to mean that they teach the material for each day but by using their own organization, language, and structure.

Based on the information Teacher A and Teacher C shared, I felt that their process of negotiating the curriculum sequence was based on the term finesse, which I discussed in chapter two (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). In other words, both teachers manipulated the curriculum to meet their students’ needs and the time available.
Teacher C explained:

I follow it for the first three days. And then days four and five I do my own thing, depending on what they’re getting and not getting. So I’ll do review games or we’ll do sentence strip activities based on the weekly selection (June 9, 2011).

Her reasoning was “I just don’t like to jump too much into it [content] because it spirals each week.” (June 9, 2011). I interpreted this to mean that the reading program continuously incorporates skills and strategies from week to week, and therefore if students do not master the skills during one week’s instruction, then the skill will resurface down the line with more instructional opportunities and guided practice. Therefore, as she stated “...then days four and five I do my own thing, depending on what they’re getting and not getting.” (June 9, 2011).

Table 4.2 represents how Teacher A adapted a weekly routine to cover the essential components of the series.
Table 4.2: Teacher A’s Weekly Instructional Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Day 1 | • Complete writing/content area workstation  
               • Introduce the weekly theme  
               • Deliver oral vocabulary lesson  
               • Introduce spelling key |
| Day 2 | • Read and interact with “Getting Ready Story” – finding vocabulary words in context  
               • Introduce high-frequency vocabulary words  
               • Engage in vocabulary game  
               • Model comprehension strategy of the week |
| Day 3 | • Introduce and read the weekly story as a whole group |
| Day 4 | • Shared reading of core story  
               • Read the paired selection as a whole group  
               • Complete the comprehension strategy graphic organizer for the week |
| Day 5 | • Do spelling test and selection test  
               • Complete remaining workbook pages |

While Teacher A’s weekly sequencing does not exactly match the weekly sequence from the teacher’s manual, the essential components, designated by the teacher, are included and touched upon. Teacher A also indicated that the extent to which she can incorporate the lessons “is based on the time allotted that I have aide help and when students are getting pulled for AIS [Academic Intervention Services]” (June 1, 2011). After the interview, Teacher A mentioned that it has taken her three years to establish a solid sequence routine.

All four teachers worked together to create a Treasures journal. This journal incorporates a written prompt, from the program, that coincides with each main selection. All four teachers utilized the journal with their students. However, they implemented it in their classroom on different days, depending on their students. This
was not part of the commercial reading program, but the teachers created it to fit with the reading program. Though not stated in the interview, in my opinion, I think the teachers created a bound Treasures journal to align reading and writing, and to have students' writing samples in on artifact to see growth. All four teachers also incorporate their own writing instruction, which is not based on the reading program.

Utilizing Program Resources

Based on the interview data, I determined that the four teachers utilized a great deal of the program resources. Based on my experience with the reading program, the reading program offers an incredible array of resources for each grade level: spelling workbooks, practice workbooks, grammar workbooks, leveled readers, decodable readers, workstations, retelling cards, oral vocabulary cards, flip charts, and various computer resources.

Workstations: Teacher C and Teacher D relied on the program workstations for center activities. The workstations include writing prompts, word work, spelling activities, and content area connections that relate to the story and theme of the week. Figure 4.2 displays the general layout and function of the workstations.
Teacher C stated “I always use the workstations during their reading centers because I think they are a really nice component” (June 9, 2011). Teacher D explained “I feel that the literacy workstations are very helpful because while I am teaching [reading] groups, the children are reviewing things that we previously learned...the workstations I incorporate with something I do called the Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006)” (June 13, 2011).

Teacher D also explained:

I use all of them. I try to at least. What I do is I have one of them [workstations] out each day. I use one and then I flip it over and use the one [on the reverse side]. Then I use the next one and then the next one. There are five total. (June 13, 2011).
In regards to the Daily Five, Teacher D stated “I try to incorporate science or social studies during the writing workstation. Right now we’re doing a science unit—we have our butterflies—so we’ll do writing about it.” (June 13, 2011). This is just one example of how the teachers used the program’s resources differently.

Teacher A and Teacher B incorporated the workstations into their literacy block, but not consistently and not every day.

Teacher B stated:

Sometimes I’ll use their ideas in my own way, but I do take ideas from there [workstations]. But we’re not doing them [workstations] every week. We’re not doing the writing and social science prompts. I just use them sometimes, if I need ideas. I tried starting out using them, but some of their abilities were just too different (June 7, 2011).

I made up folder games and folder activities. We do a lot of dictionary skills. After we’ve hit a certain point from the spelling list I do alphabetical order. So it’s mostly my own material that we use. I have a folder game on cause and effect. If it’s dictionary skills or guide words, I have a folder on that too (June 7, 2011).

Teacher A used the workstations sparsely: “Mondays, with the reading series, I do the writing workstations, whether it be a science one, a social studies or the writing one. I do one of those on Monday.” (June 1, 2011). Based on my interview with Teacher A, I inferred that the workstations did not play a critical role in her daily
reading instruction, but were used once a week to link in content area learning and writing.

In all, the four teachers incorporated the workstations in some form. They all used the resources available; however, each teacher *finessed* the resources to fit their students' needs and their own teaching style (Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

**Workbooks:** A major resource the program provides is the various workbooks: spelling, practice skills, and grammar. With the spelling workbook, phonics skills are also included. The activities in the practice books focus on reading skills, strategies, graphic organizers, and vocabulary. The program also offers approaching level, on level, and beyond level workbooks. In our school district, all students receive an on level workbook.

Teacher A stated:

> I mean—I'd say we've done 85 percent [of the workbook]. A lot of the pages I don't think they've given the kids enough space. So a lot of times we'll do it together either on the AV Rover or on the teaching chart. I would say I use a lot of it. (June 1, 2011).

However, Teacher A stated that many of the workbook pages were completed independently, or with a buddy, while the teacher completed guided reading groups: “And most of it is independent work. Most of the practice book pages I expect them to do independently or with a partner” (June 1, 2011). She did explain that some pages from the workbook were completed as a whole group: graphic organizers,
technology links, and study skills. The other pages, which mostly focus on phonics and vocabulary, were mostly completed independently or with a partner.

Teacher A also explained, “Now let’s see, they do have the approaching workbook and I’m using that with one of the kids that moved into the district” (June 1, 2011). She would copy the corresponding pages that the other students were completing from the approaching grade level workbook. In my experience, the purpose of the approaching level workbook is to allow students to practice the skills and strategies, but at a level more paralleled to their needs. While she did make modifications for the student below grade level, she stated that she “does not usually use the beyond level workbook” (June 1, 2011).

Teacher B utilized the workbooks in much the same way. She stated that she used most of the workbook, except:

…the graphic organizers. I find that if they [students] try to copy, then it takes them forever. So, sometimes I’ll type it up and they just have to cut it up and glue it in. I tried starting it out the other way, with them copying it, and some of their abilities range so… if I have it all typed up and cut it up. Then they watch me do it. Then they cut it out and glue it. I found that’s an easier way to do the graphic organizers. Sometimes I just skip them [workbook pages] if it’s something I’m not happy about. And then the fluency page. Those would be the only two pages that I might not do (June 7, 2011).
Teacher B did not particularly like the graphic organizers in the workbooks, because they were too small for first graders’ writing and because the task of copying and completing a graphic organizer is very time consuming in first grade. Her solution was to complete the graphic organizers on a class size chart and then students would receive the written text on a typed page. Students would then cut and paste the text segments into the correct sections of the graphic organizers. In my opinion, Teacher B’s modification of what the program has to offer was instinctive and necessary. While the teacher still incorporated the resource and pages, she also made adaptations to scaffold the abilities of her first graders.

Teacher C and Teacher D both incorporated the workbooks into their daily instruction with students completing many of the pages independently. Teacher C explained:

I pick and choose. Like the practice book, I usually do a lot of the vocabulary ones [pages]. The vocabulary sheets are important. Some of them we do together like the cause and effect. Concepts that are little bit more difficult, that they might not get. Context clues, and concepts like that, we’ll do together. But a lot of the fill in the blanks and reading the questions and answering, I have them do on their own during center time (June 9, 2011).

Teacher D explained “I pick and choose. If it’s something that I don’t want to use, I’ll skip it. I don’t use every single one because sometimes I differentiate the activities using the other workbooks” (June 13, 2011). Compared to the other
teachers, Teacher D utilized the approaching level and beyond level workbooks the most, since she is the inclusion teacher.

Teacher D stated:

Everyone gets the “O” book for on level. But for beyond, I have about five students that are beyond, so I have to photocopy five copies of that. And then the approaching, I have another five [students] for that and then I have five [students] that are on level. Sometimes it is more beneficial for the students to get the approaching or beyond level practice, instead of the on level page (June 13, 2011).

These workbooks correspond to the on level workbooks, but with the appropriate adjustments in difficulty. In my experience, the differentiated workbooks work well for the vocabulary exercises because they incorporate the same vocabulary words, but in a less demanding or more challenging context. Also, the reading skills practice pages include a lower or higher level piece of text, depending on the workbook. In my opinion, the leveled workbooks allow teachers to scaffold and enrich students with easily accessible resources, which are also aligned with the weekly curriculum goals.

The workstations and workbooks were the two program resources that all four teachers utilized, but in different ways. While the teachers adapted the resources to fit their classrooms, teaching styles, and students, they still implemented the necessary curriculum as recommended by the program manual. The following resources were
also utilized by all four teachers, but with similar methods: decodable readers, leveled readers, retelling cards, oral vocabulary cards, and listening library selections.

**Incorporating Small-Group Lessons**

Each first grade teacher incorporated small-group lessons in slightly different ways. All four teachers used the leveled readers and decodable readers, as the text for all or part of their small-group lessons. Leveled readers are available in approaching, on level, and beyond; they also align with the theme and topic of the weekly main selection. Decodable readers are program texts unique to kindergarten and first grade. These texts use the spelling pattern focused on each week. Each unit of the program is aligned with one decodable reader. These texts are not provided in different levels, like the leveled readers.

When I inquired about small-group lessons, each teacher described a different approach to incorporating small-group instruction, based on what the program recommends. Teacher A expressed that she used, “A mixture. More of a guided reading layout” (June 1, 2011).

Teacher A described:

> With my two lowest groups, what I usually do is the working with words [lessons]... the making words ... we do the letter tiles. I expect my two higher groups to be doing this on their own, independently... sometimes we go through and look through the
decodable reader for the key and try to find all those words (June 1, 2011).

While Teacher A focused on word work with the lowest reading groups, she followed a different layout for her higher groups:

That group two, which is my highest group, they’ve been for ten weeks now, out of the beyond level [readers]. But it’s hard to keep those kiddos interested and into it so you’ve got to bring some things into it.

Now my group three there, I was using the leveled readers right up until two weeks ago with them and it’s a group of three boys and they’ve been doing really well (June 1, 2011).

With her reading groups above grade level, she would often incorporate texts that were more challenging and still at the students’ interest. Teacher A only used the decodable readers with the approaching level students; these texts became independent reading for the on level and beyond level readers.

Teacher B focused on incorporating various texts within one week of small-group instruction: “I start out each guided reading group, each week, with the decodable readers. And then I use the leveled readers, and when I get done with those books then I bring in the other books” (June 7, 2011). Teacher B would use at least three different texts over the course of one week: decodable readers, leveled readers, and texts from the district’s leveled reading lab. Teacher B did not follow the small-group lessons, as recommended from the manual, instead: “it’s mostly reading
strategies at this point. And then once we get to that point with the higher groups then it’s using graphic organizers, how to do a retell—beginning, middle, and all those kinds of things” (June 7, 2011). She stated that she used her own structure to teach word solving strategies and other comprehension strategies, which were not necessarily aligned with the program.

Teacher C used the small-group lesson prompts and plans:

For the first two days—but for my higher groups I don’t use them.

Because for my higher group, I’ll read the story for the first day, the leveled reader story, just to get them exposed to the theme more. Then we’re doing harder things like chapter books and texts like that (June 9, 2011).

Teacher C incorporated the leveled readers for the first two days, to align with lesson objectives in the manual. After the first two days, she described, “I’ll then pull other stories from Reading A to Z or the district’s leveled reading lab like chapter books” (June 9, 2011). Teacher C expressed that sometimes she would use the entire week’s lesson designs, but then some weeks she would stick to a text that the students were reading from reading lab.

Teacher D was the only teacher that followed the lesson designs from the teaching manual.

She explained that:

I do all of my plans right out of the book. Depending on the level though, I use a variety of the different lessons in there. For example,
my group that’s approaching or on level, I’ll use phonics letter tiles to identify, blend, and read words. My highest group, I still go by this [manual]. I don’t need to use the letter tiles anymore because they have that mastered. But what I do need to do for them, is since the are reading at almost a third grade reading level, I have to go to the reading lab to get—more resources through that...I use the leveled readers every day (June 13, 2011).

Based on the information from Teacher D, I inferred that the small-group lesson plans in the manual are informative and essential to her daily reading instruction. Of the four first grade teachers, Teacher D was the only teacher who, in my opinion, relied heavily on the program lesson plans for small-reading groups.

**Supplementing the Program**

While the four teachers were fairly unison in how they selected important components, sequenced lessons, and incorporated resources, the extent that each teacher supplemented the program with technology and additional resources varied. There was a noticeable difference in how the teacher incorporated technology, mostly due to the availability of equipment.

**Technology:** Teacher A has an interactive system in her room called an AV Rover, a moveable cart with a laptop, projector, interactive calibrated laser device, and audiovisual equipment. With this set of equipment, the teacher can convert a regular
whiteboard into an interactive board, much like a SMARTboard. Therefore, Teacher A explained how she used the AV Rover, “All my grammar is done that way [on the AV Rover]. I also project the main selection and workbook pages” (June 1, 2011).

Teacher C had a similar set of equipment in her classroom, but slightly different. The Interwrite board also includes a laptop and audiovisual cart. However, the board is what makes the equipment interactive, whereas the AV Rover becomes interactive with a calibrated wand and pen. Regardless of the technicalities, both forms of technology are interactive. Teacher C has access to an Interwrite board.

Teacher C explained:

I do my transparencies, grammar, and sometimes I’ll do practice pages on there or just showing them a lot of stuff on there. Sometimes I’ll do extra phonics, with grammar and punctuation. I’ll put sentences up there and have them edit it. I also use BrainPop Junior, if it corresponds with our theme of the week or topic (June 9, 2011).

In addition to the program resources, she also pulled resources from BrainPop Junior and Safari Montage. Both of these resources are available through our school district and provide teachers with video clips and audiovisual resources for teaching various topics. Teacher C explained that she often used BrainPop to support her lessons on reading and writing skills. She also stated “I sometimes use Safari Montage to integrate some of the themes or topics that we cover” (June 9, 2011). I interpreted this to mean building background knowledge for the program story and theme of the week.
While both Teacher A and Teacher C had access to interactive technology and used it with the reading program, they used the resources differently to supplement the reading series.

**Other Supplements:** Teacher B and Teacher D explained that they do not incorporate a great deal of technology with the reading program, mostly due to the fact that they do not have the interactive equipment necessary to do so.

Teacher B explained:

I know some of them [first grade teachers] use the rover—the two use the rover. I don’t have that. Technology—I use the computer for spelling—they [students] have to write the spelling words three times. They have to use it in a sentence but they’re doing it all in Word and that’s where they’re getting typing skills (June 7, 2011).

Teacher D stated:

At the beginning of the school year we used to use Starfall, but now it’s a bit too young. It [Starfall] reads stories to them and they can make stories. They used it in kindergarten. But now we do not use it and I don’t really use any other technology (June 13, 2011).

In my opinion, Teacher B and Teacher D did not incorporate technology with the reading program, because they did not have access to certain forms of technology. However, all classrooms have access to student computers.

The teachers supplemented the reading program with other resources as well. Both Teacher A and Teacher C relied on Reading A to Z, a leveled library located on
the Internet, accessed by the district. Based on my experience and personal use with the program, Reading A to Z provides teachers with many leveled, literacy activities and resources. In addition, there are leveled texts aligned with the Treasures (2009) reading program. Besides Reading A to Z, each teacher supplemented the reading program in other ways.

Teacher A, as mentioned above, supplemented the reading program with Reading A to Z resources. In addition to this Internet resource, she also implemented Making Words.

Teacher A described this additional resource:

I do it with our spelling key more so than the keys we have. This comes with...where they cut out the letters. So, you would say to them: this is a mystery word. And you lead them through the lesson to manipulate the letters into new words (June 1, 2011).

This supplemental program utilizes various word manipulation activities to build phonics and spelling skills. Teacher A explained that she did not use this program with all of her students and mostly used it during guided reading groups to focus on spelling keys and phonics rules.

As cited above, Teacher B was not able to supplement the program through technology opportunities; however, she stated that she incorporated many of her own ideas and resources to supplement the workstations provided by the program. Her center activities, or folder activities as she referred to them, focused on dictionary and thesaurus games, skills games, and reading strategy activities. While these activities
were not provided through the reading program, Teacher B felt they were beneficial supplements to the overall success of the commercial reading program.

As quoted above, Teacher C utilized interactive technology frequently through different methods: projectable workbook pages, video clips, and interactive sites.

Teacher D, like Teacher B, did not supplement the reading program with technology. However, Teacher D supplemented the reading program with a balanced approach to organizing literacy activities during small group instruction: the Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Teacher D described the Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006) as:

The Daily Five is basically focused on five components and it's like this: listening—the children are listening to reading—I have books on tape that I made myself or I bought. So they're listening to it and they're doing a graphic organizer. We also work on writing—that's where I implement the workstation ideas. Read to yourself and read with a buddy. And that's what I have over there in my leveled reading, where I have all of my own books that I have leveled over the summer. I also have word work, where they are using the letter tiles and they're doing spelling or site words. Or they do rainbow writing or anything exciting. And that's the Daily Five. It's not just spelling—it's reading, it's writing—it's balanced. And they do that while I'm doing my reading with guided reading groups (June 13, 2011).
The Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006) is a way of organizing literacy instruction into five balanced components. This allowed the teacher to supplement the program with authentic texts and other forms of literature. It also allowed her to have students working at their independent levels while engaging in balanced literacy activities. The resources Teacher D used for the Daily Five’s (Boushey & Moser, 2006) components were acquired, leveled, and organized by the teacher for maximum effectiveness and success.

Each teacher supplemented the reading program in some manner, whether it was through incorporating technology, center activities, or other teacher resources found elsewhere.

Teacher C ended our interview with this statement:

I think it’s important to follow it [the program]—not exactly, because of the spiraling curriculum-- because it does hit on a ton of important things: comprehension, graphic organizers, the grammar, and everything else. I think that’s why we all follow it in first grade the way we do. It’s a nice curriculum, but it’s not all that we do. It’s not the only thing that I do for reading instruction (June 9, 2011).

Second Grade

Three second grade teachers participated in the interviewing process. Of these three teachers, only one had previously used the reading program in the classroom. One of the other teachers had used a different program in a parochial school, and the
other teacher had used a similar, but outdated basal program in a different district. While the first grade teachers had very similar perspectives on some topics from the interview, there were differing perspectives amongst the second grade teachers. I organized my findings for second grade into the same subtopics as first grade. I will refer to the teachers as Teacher E, Teacher F, and Teacher G. Table 4.3 represents the contextual information for the second grade teachers.

Table 4.3: Second Grade Teachers’ Contextual Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elementary English, 7-12 Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher G</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Psychology Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negotiating Essential Components

After interviewing the three participating second grade teachers, I immediately could see differences in teaching style based on the perspectives the teachers provided.

Based on Teacher E’s statement, “The one thing that I do like [about the program] is that at least the spelling goes along with it” (June 1, 2011), I inferred that spelling, phonics, and word work were the essential components she used from the program. Teacher E spent the first portion of the interview explaining how she incorporated spelling, word work, and phonics into her daily instruction.
Teacher E continued:

I actually do Words Their Way (cite) with my kids at the beginning of the year. And I didn’t actually know if I was going to get in trouble for doing my own testing on the kids at the beginning. I like to do that type of stuff and I try—and depending on what—where my students are in their spelling...they all getting different spelling words. I’ll come up with my own spelling activities, like spelling bees (June 1, 2011).

Based on Teacher E’s statements and discussion about the role of spelling in her classroom, I inferred that spelling was an essential component in Teacher E’s reading instruction. Teacher G also included spelling as an essential component in her reading instruction.

During our interview, Teacher G described some of the spelling activities she used with the program, “I have supplemented the spelling portion of the program with different skills I thought were important—alphabetical order, handwriting, and repeated writing of spelling words. Spelling is one of the parts [from the program] that I really pull from” (June 16, 2011). As one of the four second grade teachers in our school district, I was surprised that teachers were implementing the spelling component as one of the essential parts from the program.

Teacher F did not focus on the spelling component, as the other two second grade teachers did. Instead, she described her use of essential components based on comprehension:
I always look at the comprehension component first—the skill and the strategy—there's always one of each. I try to make sure that the comprehension goals remain the focus of my entire week's instruction—whole group and small group, listening and reading. With the comprehension component in mind, I also use the oral and written vocabulary component consistently. I don't emphasize the grammar and spelling components as much as I would like. I find myself short on time for whole group instruction from the program, so I try to focus on the parts I think are most important for the kids (June 8, 2011).

Based on the interview data, I could see that there was clearly an inconsistency within the second grade on what is most essential for effective reading instruction.

Teacher E did include comprehension as an essential component of her small-group reading lessons:

In my guided reading, I use trade books. We've really been focusing on, especially my two higher groups, on Post It note strategies and finding unfamiliar vocabulary words—making connections and writing our thoughts in journals. We also look for our spelling words during this time (June 1, 2011).

In my opinion, Teacher E selected comprehension as an essential part of her small-group reading lessons. However, not in alignment with the actual program...
recommendations and scripted outlines. How Teacher E implemented the comprehension component into her guided reading groups seemed to be based on her approach to effective reading instruction.

Teacher F, as mentioned above, placed the most emphasis on reading and listening comprehension, when describing the essential components for second grade reading instruction. As quoted above, Teacher F felt that reading and listening comprehension, from the program, were essential in providing effective reading instruction.

When I asked Teacher F the reasons supporting the essential components she detailed, she stated:

Second grade is unique. Some kids are still developing independent reading skills and fluency, and some kids are on to chapter books. The range of abilities is very scattered, at least in my classroom. I focus on comprehension and vocabulary the most because, the bottom line is, these kids are going into third grade. Texts become more challenging and the kids have to take state assessments [in third grade]. I choose the parts that I think will get them [students] ready for third grade (June 8, 2011).

In addition to the spelling, and phonics components, Teacher G also felt that grammar was another essential component of the program. She stated: “And of course the grammar. Once we get the grammar going, we’re able to look for those things in the stories—whether it’s contractions, compounds, or whatever” (June 16, 2011).
Based on my interpretation of Teacher G's responses about essential components, I inferred that word work plays an important role in her daily instruction; she focused on spelling, phonics, and grammar, which are consistent elements of word work.

Based on the interview data, I felt that there were drastic differences and perspectives on the essential components of the program implemented in second grade. In my opinion, these differences stem from the difference philosophies and approaches the teachers have towards reading instruction.

**Sequencing Basal Curriculum**

Among the grade two teachers, the manner in which each teacher sequenced the program curriculum had some similarities and some differences. Teacher F and Teacher G had both modified the program sequence to fit their instructional time and students. Table 4.4 represents the curriculum sequence adapted by Teacher F and Teacher G, as detailed during the interviews.
Table 4.4: Weekly Curriculum Sequence- Teacher F and Teacher G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Active Background</td>
<td>Introduce Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral vocabulary lesson</td>
<td>Discuss picture prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce story vocabulary</td>
<td>Vocabulary text selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce spelling/phonics pattern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vocabulary work</td>
<td>Listen to main selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read aloud with main selection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce comprehension strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocabulary work</td>
<td>Retell story with sequence cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retell story with sequence cards</td>
<td>Main selection graphic organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buddy read main selection</td>
<td>Fluency practice from workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main selection graphic organizer</td>
<td>Buddy read main selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Graphic organizer from workbook</td>
<td>Shared reading of paired selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leveled vocabulary and skills</td>
<td>Buddy read main selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practice from workbook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spelling test</td>
<td>Buddy read main selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main selection comprehension</td>
<td>Main selection comprehension test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided Writing- Response to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>literature with 6+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were similarities across the two teachers: both teachers focused on the vocabulary component on the first day of the instructional week. However, Teacher F also incorporated the oral vocabulary resources and lesson ideas. Regardless, both teachers focused on vocabulary of some sort on the first day. Like wise, both Teacher F and Teacher G read the vocabulary reading selection prior to the main selection on the first instructional day. The vocabulary lessons and vocabulary reading selection
are both included on the day one outline in the second grade program. However, many other lesson components are included for day one.

Teacher F explained why she only focused on the components charted above for day one:

Just in one day, it [the program] wants you to teach a lesson in each area: reading, writing, word work, vocabulary, listening, and so on. Well... that's nearly impossible... so I choose to start with the vocabulary and background lessons and build from there. Without knowing the vocabulary and topic of the week, I think the kids would really struggle the rest of the week (June 8, 2011).

Both Teacher F and Teacher G incorporated the main selection on day two. The main difference, after hearing both perspectives from Teacher F and Teacher G, was that Teacher F read the main selection aloud to her students on day two and Teacher G “I have them listen to the CD” (June 16, 2011). Regardless of how the main selection was conveyed to the students, both teachers had the class listening to the main selection before reading it.

I found it interesting that both Teacher F and Teacher G utilized the retelling picture prompts during the third instructional day. Even though it is not included on the day three lesson plans in the program, both teachers utilized the cards at this point in the week. Teacher G touched upon the use of this program resource, “We do the retelling cards right before we do the graphic organizer” (June 16, 2011). The graphic
organizers, as mentioned above, are included in the student workbook and aligned with the comprehension skill or strategy of the week.

On the fourth instructional day, Teacher F completed the vocabulary and skill workbook page from the student workbook in small, leveled groups.

Teacher F, an inclusion teacher with fifteen students, explained how and why she leveled the workbook pages:

I'm not a huge fan of the workbooks. When I first started using them I felt like they were too easy or too hard for the students. The on level seemed to only fit three or four students. So, I started copying the approaching and beyond level pages. They matched the same concept, skill, or focus of the on level, but fit the students' independent levels better.

I think workbook pages should be at an independent level. I would copy six of the approaching level and five of the beyond level. The kids who were on level would take the page out of their workbook. I had the levels copied on different colors to manage easier...sometimes I would have my aide write the students' names on the correct copy. Then when it was time to do our pages, the students would buddy up with someone with the same colored page. It is a lot to manage, but I think it worked better in my classroom (June 8, 2011).

Both Teacher F and Teacher G reviewed the story elements on the fifth instructional day and had students take the selection, or story, test.
Based on my experience teaching second grade, a selection test consists of multiple choice and short answer questions. Each test focuses on the story vocabulary words, story events, skills based questions, and inferential questions. While Teacher F and Teacher G had many similarities in how they sequence the basal curriculum, especially within the first three instructional days, Teacher E did not have many similarities.

Teacher E did not have a set sequence in place that was a guide for her weekly instruction. She was a bit vague in explaining how she sequenced all of the essential parts of the curriculum. Teacher E explained that each week she would try sequencing the curriculum a little bit differently, to find what worked best for her students.

Teacher E described her weekly sequence:

The first day we go over the spelling words, we break them down into patterns. Like I said, I usually add other words. A lot of times I’ll do the words in strips, have them sort it, and then I have them brainstorm other words they could add to their spelling lists. We usually go over the vocabulary. I actually will read the little section and they’ll find the words in context. We’ll do that but we’ll also brainstorm ways that we could use the word. I’ll take my transparencies out. And I’ll intro[duce] the spelling pattern.

Day two, I’ll have them listen to the story and then they buddy read. Day three, we’ll read it together as a group and then buddy read it again. We pretty much buddy read it everyday. The rest of the week
we do a lot of spelling games and writing. I try to come up with something on my own. I have used the retelling cards—but not very often (June 1, 2011).

Based on the limited information from this portion of the interview, I inferred that there are many differences on how the second grade teachers negotiated the program sequence. While Teacher F and Teacher G had similarities in how each sequenced the program curriculum, there were also differences amongst the two teachers, as described above.

**Utilizing Program Resources**

Based on my experience in the school district, the reading program offers different teacher and student resources depending on the grade level. In second grade, teachers have access to the following resources: leveled readers, workstations, oral vocabulary cards, retelling cards for each core story, various workbooks, and CDs for listening selections and fluency passages. The three second grade teachers used many of the same resources from the program, but there were also some resources that were not used by all three teachers.

**Workstations:** The workbooks were the only resources that all three teachers used similarly. Teacher E was the only teacher in grade two who frequently used the workstations during her small group instruction.

Teacher E described her use of the workstations as:
I do like the stations. I like having those. You know, having the ideas at the ready. And the kids like them. Sometimes I’ll say: ‘Okay. It says to write up a whole story…and I’ll say no, just a beginning, middle, and end. Then share with a person at the workstation. I’ll sometimes modify them [workstations] (June 1, 2011).

**Workbooks:** All three teachers used the spelling workbook in its entirety.

Teacher E stated:

I do use the spelling book. I mean, it’s only the first ten words. I like the idea of the workbook pages for the first tens words, but I have to come up with so many other things for that too, to get them practicing (June 1, 2011).

The spelling workbook provides four practice pages with various spelling exercises and activities, based on the ten spelling words from the program. Teacher E, as quoted above, mentioned that she created more spelling activities, since the workbook only addressed the ten pattern words from the program.

Teacher F used additional spelling activities during center time as well:

For my spelling center, I have the kids complete one page [workbook] a day. Then I have other activities for them to do—cutting and ordering alphabetically, word shapes, stair spelling, and Spelling City—which is an interactive site on the Internet for spelling games and practice (June 8, 2011).
Second grade also provides students with a practice workbook; it consists of vocabulary work pages, reading skills practice, study skills lessons, and fluency passages that align with the core story of the week. Based on my experience, there are approximately six to eight workbook pages for each week of instruction. All three teachers expressed that they do not use all of the workbook pages for each week, but rather pick and choose the most important pages for students to complete.

When asked about her use of the practice workbook, Teacher E stated:

I pick and choose—I will do the vocabulary, then phonics, and whatever goes along with our spelling pattern. I will, but not always, use the graphic organizer. Sometimes I don’t like the graphic organizer they give us, so I’ll come up with something else (June 1, 2011).

Teacher G stated the following when asked about the practice workbook:

I do use some of the practice book—probably a couple times a week. But I don’t use it all because I don’t think that it’s necessary to do that all the time. I do use the graphic organizer and the fluency practice…the vocabulary and the reading skills pages. I never use all of the pages (June 16, 2011).

The second grade practice book is also available to teachers at an approaching level and beyond level. Teacher F was the only teacher who expressed that she incorporated the leveled workbook editions into her reading instruction. As quoted above, Teacher F felt that using the leveled editions in her classroom made a
difference on the students' performance. The other two teachers used the on level edition.

**Other Resources:** While Teacher E used the workstations frequently, Teacher F and Teacher G both used the retelling cards every week during whole group instruction. Teacher E stated that she did not use the retelling cards often. The retelling cards offer picture prompts to support students retelling the core selection and the events. The cards also can be used to practice sequencing events. On the back side of the retelling cards, the teacher is given two sets of prompts for a modeled retelling of the story and for a guided retelling of the story. As displayed on Table 4.4, Teacher F and Teacher G both used the retelling cards in the middle of the instructional week.

In second grade, only two of the four teachers have leveled readers. The leveled readers come as a set with approaching, on level, and beyond level texts for each week of the basal program. Only one teacher that I interviewed, Teacher G, had regular access to the leveled readers. Teacher G stated:

I used them pretty much every single week. They go along with the stories really well. I was able to do a lot more with the leveling the questions. I would have them [students] looking back in the text for details and that sort of thing (June 16, 2011).

Teacher E and Teacher F did not have regular access to the leveled readers.
Another resource that comes with the second grade basal program is a set of oral vocabulary cards. Based on my experience with the program, these stories are used as interactive read alouds to expose children to vocabulary they would not see in their leveled texts, unless they were reading above grade level. An example of the oral vocabulary cards is presented in the first grade section.

Teacher F justified her use of the oral vocabulary cards:

On day one, I focus on vocabulary, from the story of the week and the oral vocabulary cards. I like to use the cards because they have many uses: read aloud, think aloud, story elements, language, and allow students to hear fluent reading. I have even used them to teach listening and note taking skills (June 8, 2011).

Since Teacher F was the only teacher who expressed that listening and oral vocabulary were essential components of her reading instruction, in my opinion, it was fitting that she was the only teacher who incorporated these resources into her instruction.

One teacher, Teacher F, used another resource that supplements the basal program: the online interactive published website. While this resource did not come in the bundled package for teachers, it is free on the McGraw-Hill website. I investigated the site after the interview. The interactive site has links that align with each unit and story. Once a student selects the specific story of the week, he or she can engage in various mini-lessons in vocabulary, phonics, spelling, background knowledge, and technology.
Teacher F explained:

While I do guided reading groups, I have students doing other literacy activities. I try to get them on the computers every day. I have them use Spelling city or the website with the program [*Treasures*]. It’s a good way to have the kids practice the vocabulary and spelling—it’s engaging and allows them to use the computer.

I had to show them the site using the AV Rover first and we navigated it together a few times. I have them do the oral vocabulary activities too—it builds their background up. They really like the technology lessons—there’s one lesson for each week of the unit. It’s pretty neat.

Even though the grade two teachers used many resources differently, there were many similarities on how they implemented the workbooks in their classrooms. The other resources were used, or not used, dependent on the teachers’ styles, preferences, and students’ needs.

**Incorporating Small-Group Lessons**

The manner in which each teacher incorporated small group lessons was different across the grade level. The only teacher who used the small group lessons from the teacher’s manual was Teacher G.

Teacher G stated:

What I do is use it [manual] as a guide. We’ll discuss the same skill, like main idea, or whatever the test skill is. I follow the same type of
activities as in the manual. But I don’t do it [scripted lessons] word for word out of there (June 16, 2011).

While Teacher G did not follow the lesson plans explicitly, or “word for word”, she would use the skills lessons as a guide for what she would do with her reading groups. Based on my interpretation of Teacher G’s experience with the program, I determined that Teacher G used her expertise to inform her small-group reading lessons, as well as the lesson plans from the basal manual to guide her instructional focus.

On the other hand, Teacher E and Teacher F did not refer to the small group lesson plans, from the manual, in any way. Teacher E and Teacher F, both educated in literacy backgrounds, used their own versions of small group reading lessons.

Teacher E stated:

For my guided reading, I use trade books. We’ve been really focusing on Post It strategies, finding vocabulary words they don’t know, making connections, and writing things like that in our journals—like if the story reminded them of something else. If they find spelling words, one day I might say okay in this chapter, do you see any spelling words. It’s not anything from the actual program. I may focus on the skill or strategy of the week with my groups, but I never use the scripted lessons or recommendations for the small-groups (June 1, 2011).
Teacher E integrated writing into her small group lessons; often these writing experiences focused on making connections with the text, as quoted above. While Teacher G relied on the leveled readers for small group texts, Teacher E pulled leveled texts from the district's leveled reading lab.

Teacher F described her small-group lessons as more guided reading based, meaning she followed the guidelines of Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading layout.

Teacher F described her small-group lessons:

I don't use the scripted small-group lessons from the manual for two reasons—I don't have a set of leveled readers and I feel like using books from the leveled library are more precise for the kids. Approaching level sometimes means level F through level I. In my opinion, that's a pretty big gap to be using the same text—which should be at their instructional level.

I use guided reading with leveled texts from the leveled library. I always prepare a book introduction—not a picture walk. I incorporate different strategies and goals depending on my kids. Writing is always a component of my guided reading lessons too (June 8, 2011).

In addition to using a guided reading layout, Teacher F shared a resources she used to plan guided reading lessons, The Continuum of Literacy Learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). Teacher F used this resource to select the skills and goals for each guided reading group. Like Teacher E, Teacher F also used the leveled texts from the district's leveled reading lab for guided reading lessons. Teacher F also pulled
reading comprehension passages from a website (www.superteacherworksheets.com) to begin preparing students for third grade state assessments.

Teacher F explained:

After we came back from Easter break, I started using reading comprehension passages from SuperTeacherWorksheets. I used the level one, two, and three passages, which were the same as first, second, and third grade reading levels. One day a week, usually on Fridays, I would work with the kids, or my aide would, on the passages and comprehension questions.

The kids actually liked doing these because I sold it as 'very important for third grade'. I would work with the level one and level two groups and my aide would work with the level three group. I still approached the texts like guided reading: book introduction, vocabulary, think alouds…it worked out great because the comprehension questions were like the ELA with graphic organizers and higher-level questions (June 8, 2011).

In my opinion, the degree in which the second grade teachers delivered small group reading instruction lacked uniformity. The school district’s expectations for how small-group reading instruction should be conducted has been loosely communicated: teachers are expected to work with small reading groups every day, and students reading below grade level should receive this instruction daily. The
building principal has pushed the guided reading approach, but it seems that teachers continue implement their own interpretations of this instructional component.

**Supplementing the Program**

All three second grade teachers used various supplements with the basal program; a range of technology and other literacy resources were used within the second grade classrooms.

**Technology:** Each teacher supplemented the program with Spelling City, an interactive website that allows students to engage in various spelling games and activities. Spelling City is engaging and provides students with meaningful practice opportunities. Spelling City is unique to second grade, as other grades do not use the site. Other than Spelling City, Teacher E and Teacher G did not incorporate any other form of technology with the reading program.

Teacher F stated that with the access of an AV Rover in her classroom, described in the first grade section, she supplemented the reading program with the interactive website created by the same publishing company.

Also, Teacher F stated:

I use BrainPop Junior all of the time. With reading, writing, science, social studies—everything. I use the animated video clips if they go along with our theme, topic, or vocabulary. Sometimes there are clips
with mini-lessons on reading, writing, and study skills—like main idea, contractions, punctuation, cause and effect.

Any time I can use it [AV Rover] to engage the kids and enhance their learning I do it. It can be used to build background and extend lessons. It also helps auditory and visual learners...inclusion and struggling learners (June 8, 2011).

Other Supplements: As a second grade teacher, I knew before the interviews, that the entire second grade used Explode the Code with their students. Based on my own understanding, this supplemental program is based on phonics instruction and mastery of basic word patterns. It comes in the form of a student workbook. All three teachers used this workbook and program, in its entirety, with their students.

Despite all three teachers supplementing the reading program with this workbook, Teacher G seemed to have the most confidence in it:

I don’t like having another workbook for the kids to do. But I really think the tasks improve the kids phonics and knowledge of the phonics rules—especially with the vowels. And, after the first lesson, I have the kids do the lessons independently or with a buddy, so it doesn’t take away from my instructional time with the kids. We’ve used it many years and really like it (June 16, 2011).

In addition to using Explode the Code to supplement the basal reading program, each teacher had her own way to supplement the program.
Teacher E stated that:

I actually do Words Their Way with my kids at the beginning of the year and then I incorporate those types of things in with their weekly spelling. I did my own testing on the kids at the beginning. They all get different spelling words, different bonus words (June 1, 2011).

Teacher E was able to supplement the program with Words Their Way because she had used the program in other placements. Teacher E was able to differentiate spelling and word study lists based on the spelling pattern from the reading program. Based on my perspective, Teacher E used her experience and values to supplement the basal reading program with a word study program that allowed her to better meet the needs of her students.

While Teacher E described how she supplemented the program with an additional word study program, Teacher F supplemented the program with various literacy centers.

Teacher F described her literacy centers:

I'm always looking for ideas for literacy centers—books, the Internet, other teachers—I try to always have a word work center and a writing center, where the kids can do purposeful and authentic activities. I don’t like when teachers make kids do pointless activities to keep them busy.

I always have the computers going with some sort of literacy task. Sometimes if I have a parent volunteer in, or if my aide is in, I have
them work with a small group on word games or shared reading (June 8, 2011).

Based on the data from the interviews, I felt that each teacher supplemented the program differently, depending on the core values and teaching philosophy of each teacher. It seemed like each teacher's past experiences also influenced how she supplemented the reading program. Teacher E had past experience in implementing Words Their Way, a word study program; Teacher F had a background in establishing and organizing balanced literacy centers; Teacher G had many years of past experience with other basal programs and was able to supplement the new program with strong components of the past programs. In my opinion, it was clear that the teachers were committed to incorporating their best literacy and teaching practices with the basal program.

Third and Fourth Grade

There were a larger number of first and second grade teachers than third and fourth grade teachers. Therefore, I have combined my findings from the interview with the third grade teacher with my findings from my interview with the fourth grade teacher; I had one participating teacher in both third and fourth grade. As mentioned in chapter three, since I only interviewed one participant at each of these grade levels, the findings cannot be generalized for the entire grade level. I will refer to these participants Teacher H and Teacher I. Table 4.5 represents the contextual information for Teacher H and Teacher I.
Table 4.5: Third and Fourth Grade Teachers’ Contextual Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Educational Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher H</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Childhood, B-6, Literacy English, 7-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher I</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Elementary Special Education, Gifted Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negotiating Essential Components

When I interviewed the third and fourth grade participants, both teachers stated that reading comprehension was the most essential component of the basal program.

When questioned about the essential components from the program, Teacher H, a third grade teacher, responded:

I think for our grade level, reading comprehension is the most important component, especially getting ready for the New York State ELA [English Language Arts] assessments. That’s a big portion of what is assessed. The reading comprehension is definitely the most important (June 20, 2011).

Teacher I, a fourth grade teacher responded: (please include this)

Based on the perspectives of Teacher H and Teacher I, I inferred that the importance of reading comprehension is most likely attributed to the role comprehension plays in the standardized testing for these two grade levels.
Teacher H, the grade three teacher, felt that the questioning stems provided with the main selections were essential to her reading instruction “any questions that are scripted before, or pre-reading or after-reading, I always do those” (June 20, 2011). She explained that the role of questioning, “can be very powerful in teaching students if used effectively” (June 20, 2011). In addition, the questions were designed to focus on the skill, strategy, and overall objective of the week’s scope. By using the questions scripted in the manual, Teacher H felt that “I know I am using good instruction because I do use the focus and guided questions” (June 20, 2011).

Teacher I felt that reading comprehension was the most essential component of the program, since “the questions are similar to what we have seen with the testing program” (June 16, 2011).

Teacher I felt that the skills and vocabulary mini-lessons were essential to the comprehension component:

We generally do the mini-lessons on how the character changes over time, the problem, using specific details to answer questions, the character traits, and supporting with details. That kind of stuff based on what we’ve seen on the [state] test (June 16, 2011).

Speaking only of the reading program, Teacher I only focused on reading comprehension as the essential component of the program.

She stated that in grade four:

Well, we don’t use the spelling at all. We have—I don’t know the name of the workbook we use. We did try the spelling when we first
got the program, but it was—because we didn’t do the story to the scripted lessons, it was very confusing to align the spelling. So, we just use a generic grade four spelling workbook. In fourth grade, we don’t focus on spelling as much. We don’t worry about spelling skills at this point. So, we do spelling separate from the reading program (June 16, 2011).

In my opinion, it is clear that spelling and phonics are not focused on nearly as much as they are in first and second grade, and even in third grade.

When asked about the writing component from the reading program, Teacher I also stated that:

> We don’t use the writing typically. We’ll usually tweak it for what we’re looking for. I’ll put bullets with it so it’s the way kids are used to seeing. We loosely use it [writing lessons]…we have definitely developed different ones over the years based on the New York State assessments (June 16, 2011).

Even though Teacher H stated that reading comprehension was the essential component of the basal program, she explained that, “I think all the other components are important as well because there’s the grammatical component, there is also the spelling component, and those go along too” (June 20, 2011). As Teacher I explained that the grammar spelling component was not prevalent in grade four classrooms, Teacher H stated that “We use pretty much the whole spelling component…some of the grammar we implement outside of the program with our supplement materials”
(June 20, 2011). Teacher I justified that students "are still building and fine tuning complex phonics skills" (June 20, 2011). It becomes important to build these components into daily reading instruction, which the basal program does incorporate.

**Sequencing Basal Curriculum**

As I interviewed Teacher H and Teacher I, I was very surprised with the difference in the information I collected from the primary grade levels and grades three and four, elementary grade levels. According to the information Teacher H and I provided me with, grade three and grade four deviated from the curriculum sequence dictated in the basal program on a frequent basis.

Teacher H, a grade three teacher, described that the grade three teachers often stick to the dictated sequence for the spelling component of the program. However, for the main selection story and the comprehension strategies and skills, Teacher H has also incorporated stories from an older reading program: "We [third grade teachers] also use the Spotlight [older series]. So almost all of our main selections either come out of the one series or the other. We pull a lot of supplement stuff but the main stories we always spend two weeks on, instead of one..." (June 20, 2011). She explained that many of the stories from the older basal program better align with the science and social studies curriculum. It seemed, based on the information from the interview, that Teacher H did not sequence the curriculum according to the basal program, but rather relied on the experience and knowledge of her team teachers to incorporate other literature from past programs.
In addition to deviating from the dictated curriculum sequence, Teacher H also extended the duration of the main selections past one week. The basal program dictates an instructional sequence for only one week per main selection. However, Teacher H explained that “the main selections we always spend two weeks on, instead of one. Some weeks require more time if the skill is really important or if the story is really long” (June 20, 2011).

Teacher I, the grade four teacher, expressed similar information in regards to how she sequenced the basal curriculum. Teacher I explicitly stated that much of the reading instruction she provided in grade four was “based it [instruction] on the New York State assessments” (June 16, 2011).

Like Teacher H, Teacher I has, over time, selected the most appropriate and meaningful main selections from the basal program and then extended the length of the instructional scope to two weeks.

Over the two week period, Teacher I sequenced the following activities to deliver the basal curriculum:

The first day I introduce the story and I introduce the vocabulary. The second and third day we usually split the story over the two days. And then the fourth day of that week, we typically do the skills with the story and act out the vocabulary words. And then typically on Friday, we do the grammar either related to the main selection, or a week that we skipped the selection. Then the next week we act out the vocabulary again. Listen to the story on CD, do more skills with it.
over the four days. And then on the fifth day of that last week we take the test on it. We use the weekly assessment that focuses on the skill and vocabulary.

We never tried to hit all the stories, we knew realistically in fourth grade, it would be impossible. So we build in our own written responses, short answer questions, process pieces, or independent writing pieces...all structured based on our experiences with the testing program (June 16, 2011).

While first and second grade sequenced the basal curriculum differently, third and fourth grade engaged in similar practices with sequencing the curriculum; teachers at both grade levels engaged with the main selections for a longer duration than scripted and both grade levels structured the curriculum and sequence to align with standardized testing expectations.

**Utilizing Program Resources**

The resources available to third and fourth grade teachers were much different than the resources provided to first and second grade teachers. Neither Teacher H nor Teacher I had access to workstations, retelling sequence cards, or oral vocabulary story cards. These are three program resources frequently used amongst the first and second grade teachers.
Leveled Readers: Like the first grade teachers, both Teacher H and Teacher I frequently used the leveled readers that accompany the basal program; Teacher H stated “I only use the leveled readers for guided reading groups” (June 20, 2011). Teacher I expressed, “And then during our small-group reading time is when we do the leveled readers. I use the leveled readers with my group and the special education teacher uses her own resources from the leveled library” (June 16, 2011). Again, these resources are available in levels of approaching, on, and beyond grade level. Teacher H and Teacher I both used the leveled readers, everyday, for their small group reading lessons.

Workbooks: In my opinion, the availability of various workbooks is one of the more prevalent aspects of this reading program. Because of this, I was extremely interested in how the teachers incorporated the workbooks into their daily reading instruction. Interestingly, a large number of the participants felt that the workbooks were too much for their students: too many pages for each core selection and redundant work.

Teacher H included the spelling workbook on a weekly basis; however, she did mentioned:

We do a mix. A lot of times it’s independent and then we’ll go over it together. Sometimes it will be [whole] group. It depends on how challenging it is. A lot of the activities are easy enough for them to do
on their own and they're really quick. Where other ones they struggle with and those are the ones that we'll do together.

Since we also use the old series, we do not use all the stories. So, we use the practice book for every story but we pick just two or three pages out of the whole set that they give (June 20, 2011).

Teacher H did not use the entire practice workbook because, as mentioned above, grade three often extended a main selection over two weeks of instruction and sometimes skipped stories and supplemented with stories from an older series.

Teacher I did not incorporate the program spelling workbook into her daily reading instruction, but instead shared, “Well, we don’t use the [program] spelling workbook at all. We use a generic grade four spelling book. In fourth grade, we don’t focus on spelling as much” (June 16, 2011). She explained that in grade four, all of the teachers have extended the instructional time frame for the main selections to two weeks. Ultimately, students are exposed to three main selections per unit as opposed to the five main selections dictated by the reading program.

Teacher H detailed that she incorporated the practice workbook, which focuses on the program vocabulary, phonics, reading skills, fluency, and study skills. All students in grade three are provided a practice workbook. Teacher H only used parts of the practice workbook that were most valuable to the daily and weekly objectives of her reading instruction. These parts of the workbook most always included, “the vocabulary pages and reading skill pages” (June 20, 2011).
Teacher I used the practice workbook with her fourth grade students. Like Teacher H, Teacher I only used certain pieces of the workbooks, especially since the students do not have their own copy of the workbook.

Teacher I detailed her use of the practice workbook:

We use the workbook, but we do not have student copies. But what we do is copy—often we use the on level and the approaching level, we’ll copy it back to back. And we’ll do—one side we might teacher from and the other one they’ll have to do as an independent assignment. So we use the workbooks and we use the beyond level too.

We use all the workbooks that—for teaching purposes for the whole class we use the on and approaching and then for some of our stronger kids we might pull a couple copies of the beyond level book. We use the grammar workbook too. We just photocopy what we need.

Because we don’t do the whole thing [program], we thought it was very wasteful [to order student copies]. We don’t necessarily do everything that’s in those books either. We usually do just the vocabulary and the skills pages, and sometimes the phonics pages (June 16, 2011).

As I mentioned above, third and fourth grade teachers were not given the same program resources as the primary grade levels. Therefore, conversations about the retelling sequence cards, oral vocabulary story cards, and workstations were not
central to the interview, as they were in the interview with first and second grade teachers.

**Incorporating Small-Group Lessons**

Both Teacher H and Teacher I incorporated the program’s leveled readers into their small-group reading lessons.

Teacher H stated the following about the leveled readers during small-group reading lessons:

> I do use those [leveled readers] in guided reading. I tend to include usually—at least the bottom two levels [approaching and on level]. Sometimes I get to the beyond level with my high readers. But always at least the bottom two. And sometimes if they’re not too difficult, we’ll flip flop so the kids get more exposure [to the theme] (June 20, 2011).

Teacher H stated that she would often review the small-group lessons provided in the program’s teacher manual to plan her weekly small-group instruction:

> I incorporate those [small-group lessons]. Sometimes I can’t get to all the stuff they include because there’s so much. But I do use what they give. Same thing with the questions and stuff. I will pull the ones [questions] that I think are most appropriate or that the kids can do. (June 20, 2011).
I interpreted what Teacher H said to mean that she could never cover all of the small-group lessons because of the large quantity of content built into each lesson. To compensate for the lack of time and extensive amount of content in the program's small-group lessons, Teacher H would use similar questions to guide her small-group lessons as those found in the teacher's manual. Interestingly, the use of the program's questioning stems was also a focus of Teacher H's response regarding the essential components of the program at the beginning of her interview. In my opinion, this reflects Teacher H's approach and philosophy in teaching reading.

Teacher I was in a different classroom setting than Teacher H, and not just in a different grade level; Teacher I was also the inclusion classroom. Teacher I would co-teach with a special education teacher during her language arts block; this also included small-group lessons.

When asked about small-group reading lessons, Teacher I described it in this way:

I usually go off my own ideas. Sometimes if it's a new book and I'm trying something on the fly, I might use the plans from the book. But I usually use the questions at the back of the book [leveled reader] to develop what kind of questions I would ask while I read it with the kids and I base it on whatever skills we're doing.—like main idea. I make sure we talk about the main idea and I'd relate it back to the story.
I would say I use the plans in the manual loosely. I usually look through it, but I don’t use it to actually teach from. I use it to help me figure out what I want to teach (June 16, 2011).

Therefore, Teacher I explained that before beginning a new instructional week, the special education teacher and she would sit together and review the scripted lessons found in the basal manual. Teacher I stated, “We [Teacher I and special education teacher] pretty much look at the scripted lessons when we are planning but then we kind of do our own things” (June 16, 2011). After looking at the key components of the small-group lessons, the teachers crafted their own lessons. Teacher I used the leveled readers to conduct these lessons with a small group of similar students and the special education teacher would use leveled texts from the district reading lab. Teacher I described her use of the small-group lesson plans as using them loosely, as quoted above. Teacher I used the program plans as guides, but did not implement the plans as scripted in the manual. Teacher I explained that she would structure her own questions and discussion elements around the focus questions in the leveled readers.

On a rare occasion, Teacher I stated that she would use the scripted small-group lesson if it was a spur of the moment situation and she needed a quick lesson to implement with a group; she stated, “Sometimes, if it’s a new book and I’m trying something on the fly, I might [use the lessons]” (June 16, 2011).
Supplementing the Program

As with many of the other teachers I interviewed, Teacher H and Teacher I both had unique approaches to supplementing the current basal program. The extent in which these two teachers supplemented the basal program was clearly dependent on the role standardized testing plays in grades three and four.

Technology: As mentioned with previous grade levels, the teachers incorporate technology to supplement the basal program. Teacher H has utilized an AV Rover at various times throughout the school year to engage the students and supplement the program’s curriculum.

Teacher H stated:

I have used the AV Rover. I don’t always do it right along with the actual Treasures series. But sometimes I’ll make copies of our transparencies or copies of certain pages of the workbook or the spelling pages—especially if there’s a big grammar thing [concept] that I want the kids to be able to do. A lot of times I’ll bring in additional supplemental things, like stories from the Internet (June 20, 2011).

Teacher H would occasionally used the interactive AV Rover to project grammar and practice workbook pages for the students to complete as a whole group. While this only utilized a basic function of the AV Rover, I imagine that it engaged the students and made the process of completing workbook pages more appealing.
Between the basal program and test preparation, Teacher I did not incorporate technology with the basal program.

When asked about technology with reading program, Teacher I stated:

I do not really use it [technology. I'll use the projector to pull up worksheets. I did try to use the AV Rover a couple of times with the grammar lessons. That's definitely something I'm trying to use more of, the AV Rover (June 16, 2011).

**Other Supplements:** Teacher H incorporated stories from the past basal program to align her reading instruction with science and social studies units. She stated that “I also use Spotlight, a series from quite a few years back. We use it in third grade because it aligns with some of the cultures we study in social studies. We use quite a few stories from it” (June 20, 2011). She was able to deepen background knowledge and understanding in the content areas using the older reading series. Teacher H explained that, “it was what the third grade teachers were already doing before I started third grade. And it works nice with our social studies units” (June 20, 2011). Based on her information, I inferred that the third grade teachers have been using the past basal program’s literature and was decided upon as an entire grade level. Based on my past teaching experiences, with the emphasis on standardized testing results, there is always a time crunch with science and social studies; by using literature connected with the content areas, the teacher was able to cover reading and content area curriculum.
Teacher I supplemented the basal program through test preparation lessons. She explained how, “over the years, we’ve developed a lot of writing prompts based on the New York State assessments. We’ll also give a lot of practice state assessments and use practice assessments as instructional tools and materials” (June 16, 2011). Therefore, Teacher I supplemented the daily basal curriculum with comprehension lessons and English Language Arts formatted writing lessons. Test preparation, as quoted above, was incorporated, in addition to the basal curriculum.

As noted in an earlier section, Teacher I felt that “teaching to the test was a double-edged sword” (June 16, 2011). I interpreted her comment to mean that test preparation demotes the objectives and curriculum goals of the basal program, but it is completely necessary and essential in fourth grade.

**Cross Analysis of All Grade Levels**

In the last portion of this chapter, I presented the findings for each subtopic based on the perspectives and information gathered across all grade levels; the perspectives and findings are grounded with data gathered from the study’s nine teachers. After looking at the insights from the nine teachers, I have a better understanding and foundation of the basal program across a spectrum of grade levels. In addition, I was able to see the areas that overlap and spiral into the subsequent grade levels. As a second grade teacher, I now have useful knowledge of how my incoming students previously engaged with the basal program, and I know what level my second grade students need to be at before moving into third grade.
Negotiating Essential Components

When looking across all grade levels represented in my data collection, I immediately noticed the shift from emerging readers to fluent, independent readers. All four of the first grade teachers stated that the phonics and spelling components of the basal program were essential to effective, first grade reading instruction. In addition to the phonics and spelling components, all of the teachers also stated that the site word vocabulary was essential. While one teacher mentioned comprehension as an essential component from the basal program, most of the responses were focused around word work: spelling, phonics, site words, and vocabulary. As Teacher C described in her interview, “they (students) are still sort of sounding out readers, they still decode the words instead of knowing them automatically” (June 9, 2011). In my opinion, the notion of developing and beginning reading stages played an important role in how the first grade teachers selected the essential components of the basal program.

Once I began the second grade interviews, I noticed that some of the same essential components were mentioned from the second grade teachers as the first grade teachers: spelling, phonics, and vocabulary. It was from the second grade data that I began to notice the shifts in effective reading components. All of the second grade teachers mentioned comprehension as an essential component of effective reading instruction at some point during the interview.

While there were overlaps in essential components from first grade to second grade, the role of comprehension became more apparent. I feel that as readers shift
from the developing to expanding reading stage, they become more proficient in independent reading skills. Second grade readers typically start reading beginner chapter books and nonfiction texts. Based on my experience and literacy background, as readers begin reading these more demanding texts, it becomes essential that comprehension is occurring. Like first grade, second grade teachers still focus on spelling and phonics patterns, but they are not the single most essential components of the basal program for second grade teachers. The first difference I noticed between grade levels, in regards to essential reading components in the basal program, was between first and second grade.

The second difference I observed between grade levels was between second and third grade. As quoted above, second grade teachers thought the spelling, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension were the most essential components of the basal program. This group of essential components was similar to that of first grade, with the addition of comprehension. In third grade, spelling and phonics were still deemed essential. However, Teacher H, the only third grade participant, explained that the emphasis on spelling and phonics lessened throughout the school year.

The other essential component of the third grade basal program was comprehension. The importance of the comprehension component in third grade was the driving focus of the interview with Teacher H, as described and quoted in the third grade section above. While spelling and phonics were important, they did not play an important role in the interview discussion.
This differed from second grade slightly. As described and quoted in the second grade section, second grade teachers continued to place an emphasis on spelling and phonics, but comprehension began to play a more prevalent role in reading instruction, especially when compared to first grade. In third grade, spelling and phonics were still important components of instruction; however, the role of spelling and phonics increasingly lessened as comprehension and state assessments became a driving component of the third grade reading curriculum.

Based on Penn State Institution for the Study of Adult Literacy (2010) third grade readers fall into the bridging readers stage of reading development; during this stage, readers engage with more demanding chapter books and can understand plot, character development, and other literary elements. As readers begin to engage with more challenging texts, it becomes essential to build reading instruction around comprehension skills and strategies.

Based on the developmental stage of third grade readers, it is fitting that Teacher H, as quoted in the third grade section, shifted the focus from spelling and phonics, or word work, to comprehension. Again, as with first and second grade, there was a noticeable difference in the essential components used in second and third grade.

Looking at the bridge between each grade level, I noticed shifts in the role of each component within each grade level. Fourth grade strictly focused on reading comprehension, which I quoted a great deal in the fourth grade section. Throughout my interview with Teacher I, one single word prevailed: comprehension. Based on
what Teacher I emphasized and described, I inferred that the other components of the program were present in daily and weekly instruction, comprehension instruction was the driving force in her classroom.

Based on my experience teaching fourth grade, readers can drastically range in reading abilities; some readers may be in the fluent stage, others in the proficient stage, and even some avid readers reach the independent stage. Despite the broad range of reading abilities found in grade four classrooms, comprehension is the essential component of reading instruction for each of the stages. The importance of New York State standardized tests also influenced Teacher I’s devotion to comprehension instruction.

**Sequencing Basal Curriculum**

For me, sequencing the basal curriculum for each week of instruction is the most challenging part of using a reading program. I was surprised when each teacher began her response to my question about sequencing the curriculum by ultimately saying there is too much content. While some teachers, mostly in the primary grade levels, tried to follow the scripted sequence for each day as close as possible, many teachers described how they have modified the sequenced curriculum to fit the time they have and the components they find most essential. I included those modifications in each grade level’s section above.

Every teacher that I interviewed had her own sequence for following the basal program: one teacher followed the scripted sequence for the first three days and then
modified the rest of the week, two teachers skipped main selections and covered some selections over a two week period, and a few teachers follow the scripted sequence for the components they felt most essential to their grade level. Regardless of how each teacher modified the sequenced curriculum, based on the interview data, it was obvious that each grade level lacked uniformity in how it sequenced the content of the basal program.

**Utilizing Program Resources**

The use of program resources looked very different at each grade level; when I reevaluated all of my data, I noticed how the resources from the basal program are used differently as students progress through the grade levels and become more proficient and independent with reading. The manner in which the teachers I interviewed selected and incorporated the program resources depended on the grade level, availability of the resources, and personal approach.

All of the teachers opted to use the program workbooks, whether it was the spelling, grammar, or practice workbook. Teachers in first, second, and third grade all incorporated the spelling workbook in their reading instruction; the use of the program spelling workbook ended in fourth grade, which was explained in the fourth grade section above.

While only the first, second, and third grade teachers used the spelling workbook, all of the teachers used the practice workbook in some manner: copying from the leveled editions, completing only the essential parts of the workbook, or
using most of the pages as independent seat work. It was informative for me to see how teachers incorporated the workbooks differently, even within the same grade level. The practice workbooks were not the only program resource incorporated in each classroom across the grade levels represented; all of the teachers with access to the program’s leveled readers used them on a daily and weekly basis. The leveled readers are short texts that are available at approaching, on, and beyond grade level. In addition to being leveled, the readers are aligned with the theme and core selection of each week’s instruction. While not all of the teachers had a set in their classroom, the ones who did have a set used it regularly to support small-group reading lessons.

Other resources were available with the basal program, but not to all grade levels. Resources that were unique to first and second grade programs were the retelling sequence cards and the oral vocabulary story cards. The first grade teachers included these resources on their list of important resources used in the classroom. The oral vocabulary story cards were one of the essential resources incorporated by all first grade teachers; based on the interview data, the teachers felt they allowed students to be exposed to the more challenging and diverse language, regardless of their reading levels. This concept was mentioned and quoted in the first grade section.

Not all of the second grade teachers used the oral language story cards; only one of the three teachers described regular use of these resources. These two program resources, retelling cards and oral vocabulary cards, were not available to the third and fourth grade teachers. The teachers were not sure why these resources were not
available to them, but my best assumption was that it related to funding and the state testing demands in third and fourth grade.

The workstations, on the other hand, were available in first, second, third, and fourth grade. Teacher H and Teacher I, third and fourth grade teachers respectively, explained that they did not have the time necessary for using these resources. Based on my experience with the program, the workstations are bundled as a set of six independent literacy activities that align with the program. The workstations focus on reading, writing, word work, and content area learning. Despite having access to the workstations, the third and fourth grade teachers did not incorporate these resources. The use of the workstations was most prevalent in first grade, where all four of the participants described how they incorporated workstations on a daily and weekly basis.

Based on the interview data, it seemed that most of the first grade teachers heavily incorporated the workstations to deliver reading instruction. Second grade teachers did not implement the workstations to the same degree as the first grade teachers. However, one of the second grade teachers, Teacher E, explained that she used the workstations fairly often, but had to modify the tasks to fit her students' needs. Her explanation was quoted in the second grade section above.

The use of program workbooks was rather consistent across the four grade levels represented; teachers used the workbooks in different manners, but all of the teachers incorporated the workbooks to some degree. Leveled readers were incorporated consistently across the grade levels as well, with the exception of two
second grade teachers, Teacher E and Teacher F, who did not have their own set of leveled readers.

The other resources mentioned: workstations, oral vocabulary story cards, and retelling sequence cards, were not universally used across the grade levels. Not all of the grade levels were provided with the same program resources, and therefore, the third and fourth grade teachers did not incorporate these resources.

In my professional opinion, the shift in reading stages and implementation of reading instruction changes from grade level to grade level. Therefore, I felt and inferred from the teachers’ perspectives that the resources needed and used shift with reading growth experienced within and between grade levels. As students move through the reading program, the role of primary-age resources, such as oral vocabulary story cards and retelling cards, diminishes.

**Incorporating Small-Group Lessons**

Based on the perspectives of the teachers, I found that across and within grade levels, each teacher had a different way of incorporating the small-group reading lessons from the basal program. Some teachers used the leveled readers and decodable readers to incorporate the program resources. Teachers who were unable to use the leveled readers, used the district leveled reading lab to support small-group reading lessons. Despite using similar texts for small-group lessons, there was not a lot of synchronicity within and across grade levels, on incorporating small-group reading instruction.
Three teachers, Teacher A, Teacher E, and Teacher F described their small-group reading lessons as more guided reading based. Based on my literacy background, guided reading consists of a book introduction, word work, reading, and discussion elements. While some teachers incorporated small-group reading lessons from the basal manual, other teachers used the scripted lessons as a guide to conduct the lessons. I found this more so in the primary grades, first and second grade. In the primary grades, the teachers utilized the decodable and leveled readers provided with the program, so the scripted lessons in the teacher’s manual fit perfectly with their texts. For the teachers using other texts for the small-group lessons, I found that they were the teachers using the guided reading format. Two of the teachers, Teacher G and Teacher I, stated that they used the scripted small-group lessons to guide their lesson planning; but, as quoted in their respective sections, they conducted the lesson using their expertise and judgment. For the most part, the teachers used the scripted lessons as guides or they used a guided reading format with their own teacher-selected texts.

In my opinion, based on the perspectives expressed during the interviews, it seemed that the teachers need training and/or professional development in the area of guided reading. Guided reading was one of the literacy initiatives that our building principal emphasized to the classroom teachers; however, after interviewing the teachers, I felt that more needs to be done to ensure that teachers are trained and confident in planning and implementing guided reading lessons. I have touched upon this conclusion more in chapter five.
Supplementing the Program

As I ended my interview with each teacher, I inquired about how each teacher supplemented the basal program with additional resources, programs, approaches, or technology resources. Since these additional parts of instruction were not dictated in the basal program, the responses provided varied. The manner in which teachers supplemented the basal program depended a great deal on time available and the resources available, the latter especially concerning the use of technology.

Three of the teachers I interviewed, Teacher A, Teacher C, and Teacher F, had immediate access to interactive technology within their classroom, either in the form of an AV Rover or Interwrite board. Two of the three teachers used the interactive technology to access engaging sites such as BrainPop Junior and Safari Montage, both being multimedia sites with lessons and clips related to all sorts of topics. These teachers were in first and second grade. Both teachers, which I have quoted in their respective sections, described that they used the interactive technology to bring background knowledge and experience to the classroom. Both would preview multimedia resources before reading selections from the basal program. In doing this, the teachers felt that they increased the students' background knowledge, vocabulary, and engagement. The third teacher with access to interactive technology used it strictly to project workbook pages for the students to complete interactively, as a whole class.

The remaining teachers, who did not have immediate access to interactive technology in the classroom, incorporated technology on student computers when
possible. The second grade teachers supplemented the basal program with a spelling website, Spelling City. Based on the teachers’ perspectives and my own experience, Spelling City provides students with engaging activities and practice games to build spelling skills based on the spelling list of the week, which is based from the basal curriculum. Other than the second grade teachers using Spelling City, a few other teachers said that they used the student computers and allowed students to practice typing their spelling words on Microsoft Word. Again, the teachers who supplemented the basal program with interactive technology were able to do so because they had the technology available and easily accessible in their classrooms.

Teachers also supplemented the basal program with other literacy activities, aside from technology. Our school district has provided teachers with licenses for Reading A-Z, a website that provides teachers with leveled books which can be printed out and used in the classroom. Furthermore, the website also has texts and resources aligned with our basal program. Multiple teachers, across all grade levels represented, teachers used this program to supplement the basal program and resources.

First and second grade teachers had longer lists of supplements than the third and fourth grade teachers. However, the third and fourth grade teachers expressed that while other grade levels supplemented the program with centers and word study programs, they had to incorporate test preparation lessons and tasks to prepare students for state assessments.
Summary

The interview process allowed me to hold one-on-one conversations with nine experienced, elementary teachers. In doing so, I gained insight and perspective on how teachers negotiate the complexity of the basal program, *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) used in the elementary building of our school district.

After I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data provided multiple times, I was able to draw conclusions about how teachers negotiate the basal program. The conclusions and implications I developed were based on the perspectives of experienced elementary teachers expressed during the interview process.

During the interview process, I focused on the following aspects of negotiating the basal program: negotiating essential program components, sequencing the basal curriculum, selecting program resources, incorporating small-group lessons, and supplementing the basal program. The findings I presented were grounded in the data provided by the participants and have been used to formulate conclusions, implications for students and the researcher, and recommendations for future research studies, all of which I present in chapter five.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The teachers' responses to the interview questions generated the study's findings. When I formulated the interview questions before beginning the data collection process, I looked at the areas of the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) program that I struggled with on a daily basis: negotiating essential components, sequencing the basal curriculum, selecting program resources, incorporating small-group lessons, and supplementing the program. These were five areas I felt were pertinent to my central question: how do elementary teachers negotiate the Treasures basal program?

I investigated the answers to my research question through interviewing experienced elementary teachers about their perspectives and insights related to negotiating the basal program. After I analyzed the teachers' responses from each grade level and across grade levels, I was able to draw conclusions about how the teachers negotiated the basal program on a daily basis and what factors affected their processes when using the program.

Conclusions

When I looked across of the interview data and the findings within each of subtopics, I was able to draw conclusions concerning the driving factors of how teachers negotiate the reading program. Interestingly, drawing conclusions is never an exact science; with our reading program, we teach students that when you draw a
conclusion you use the information provided and the knowledge in your head to form an explanation that makes the best sense.

Since drawing conclusions is unique to the reader, the conclusions I have made, based on my participants’ perspectives and insights, were influenced by my own perspectives and positionality, which I discussed in chapter three. I used my best judgment, based on the teachers’ responses of the interview questions, to connect all of the pieces implied beyond the surface details. When I looked across all of the grade levels represented, I crafted the following conclusions regarding how teachers negotiate the basal program: teachers use their professional judgment to make sound instructional decisions, teachers use principled practice to negotiate the reading program, and teachers finesse the components and resources of the program to deliver the best instruction.

**Teachers Use Professional Judgment to Make Instructional Decisions**

One of the driving themes that continuously resurfaced when I analyzed the interview data was the importance of professional judgment in how teachers negotiated the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) program. I concluded that many of the decisions teachers made, in regards to negotiating the program, were driven by the factors of time and the students’ developmental levels.

I concluded that the amount instructional time a teacher has greatly affects how she uses the basal program. In my opinion, one rarely hears a teacher saying, ‘I have too much time’. However, I have heard teachers say, many times, ‘There just
isn't enough time’. Therefore, the professional judgments and decisions teachers make when negotiating a basal program correspond with the amount of instructional time available. In addition to time, the developmental level of the students engaging with the basal program seems to also affect how teachers made instructional decisions with the program.

I concluded that teachers use their professional judgment of the students’ developmental levels to negotiate the program and make instructional decisions. I have included more insight on the role of time and developmental levels on teachers’ decision-making and negotiation of the basal program in the subsequent sections.

**Time:** Though not explicitly stated during the interviews, I concluded that time was a major factor in how teachers negotiated the many components of the basal program. Though the teachers did not explicitly state that time affected their decisions, it was stated, multiple times, that the amount of content in the program was too dense. In other words, there was not enough instructional time to teach the entire curriculum.

With time as a major factor on how teachers negotiated the reading program, teachers dismantled and digested the program to determine the essential components and resources, and more importantly how to sequence a condensed version of the program appropriately. Because of the large scope of content in the basal program and perceived lack of instructional time, teachers had to negotiate the essential components of the program to provide effective instruction. While there were other underlying factors that influenced the teachers’ decisions, the influence of time on
instructional decisions is a plausible determinant in how teachers negotiated the program.

With this in mind, the discrepancy between teachers' choices with the basal program can be supported and understood. The teachers do the best they can with the time available to them. This does not only encompass the components of the reading program, but other supplementary activities, tasks, and materials that teachers often use to enrich reading instruction.

**Developmental Level:** After examining the shifts in essential components used across the grade levels, I correlated how the teachers negotiated the components of the program with the developmental level, or reading stage, of the general, grade level population. Even though the program recommends and scripts lessons for the same components in each grade level, there were grade level patterns of what teachers chose to focus on the most.

In first grade, the teachers heavily focused on the word work lessons recommended in the basal manual. These lessons included spelling, site word vocabulary, and phonics. Even though the other components were included in the teacher's manual, the spelling and phonics components were the most essential components of the first grade program.

In second grade, the focus shifted from heavy spelling and phonics instruction to vocabulary and comprehension. This is not to say that the second grade teachers completely eliminated the spelling and phonics components from their list of essential
components. Two of the second grade teachers still implemented spelling and phonics instruction heavily, but comprehension became a key component in the daily instruction.

Third grade teacher focused even less on spelling and phonics instruction, and even more on comprehension strategy lessons from the basal manual. The fourth grade teacher strategically focused on comprehension as the critical component of the entire basal program. The shift in the role of word work and comprehension parallels the reading stages children progress through as they become more skilled at reading.

The progression of stages in reading and literacy development has taken on many different labels and indicators. Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill (1999) designates literacy development into six developmental stages: emerging reader, transitional reader, beginning reader, advanced beginning reader, consolidating reader, and accomplished reader. According to Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill, each pattern in literacy development has distinct indicators of advancement; in other words, there are specific behaviors that a child exhibits once he or she has reached a new stage of literacy learning.

Tyner (2009), whose work is endorsed by the International Reading Association, labels readers slightly different: emergent reader, beginning reader, fledgling reader, transitional reader, and independent reader. While the terminology used by Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill (1999) differ from Tyner’s (2009) terminology, the behaviors are similar in context. I refer to the categories from both Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill (1999) and Tyner (2009) to support my conclusion.
in how students' developmental levels play an important role in teachers' negotiation of the basal program.

After analyzing the findings embedded in my data, I better understood the shifts in critical components for each grade level in relation to the developmental stages of students; as students progressed through the reading stages or literacy patterns, the essential components and negotiation process of the teachers shifted as well.

In first grade, most readers are within the beginning reader stages (Soderman, Gregory, & O’Neill, 1999): they focus on letter—sound cues, recognize and expand basic site words, apply several cueing systems simultaneously, and develop phonemic awareness. Beverly Tyner (2009) correlates first grade reading behaviors, typically in the Fountas and Pinnell (2007) range of a level D to a level G, with the fledgling reader stage. Tyner includes the following behaviors in her description of fledgling readers: they begin to apply decoding skills, recognize approximately 50 basic site words, read simple text with significant picture support, and begin developing fluency. In my opinion, even though Soderman, Gregroy, and O’Neill (1999) have a different label for this stage in literacy development, the group of behaviors and indicators are much the same as Tyner (2009).

Based on the reading development of most first grade students, the justification for the teachers' choices in using the basal program seems justified. The teachers focused on word work, phonics, and spelling, the critical skills they felt were necessary to help their students progress from beginning readers to advanced readers.
(Soderman, Gregory, O’Neill, 1999), or from fledgling readers to transitional readers (Tyner, 2009).

Similarly, most second grade readers would be categorized in the advanced beginning reader stage, and some would even be considered consolidating readers (Soderman, Gregory, O’Neill, 1999). According to Tyner (2009), second grade readers would be in the transitional reader stage, which equates to a Fountas and Pinnell (2007) level I and level J. Within this stage of reading development, readers develop chunking strategies, develop cross-checking strategies, refine self-monitoring, and begin to orchestrate decoding and comprehension strategies in unison (Soderman, Gregory, & O’Neill, 1999; Tyner, 2009). In my experience, second grade readers can also read for a longer duration and engage with beginner chapter books.

When analyzing the patterns from the second grade teachers, I found that they were shifting the first grade focus of word work, to comprehension with a prescriptive dose a spelling and phonics instruction on the side. I find this fitting when considering the reading stage of most second grade students. Students are beginning to engage with more challenging texts and comprehension becomes a key player in reading success. However, students are still adding hundreds of new words to their site word vocabularies, and this justifies that spelling and phonics are still important in second grade reading instruction.

The largest shift in essential components, based on grade level, was in third and fourth grade. In third and fourth grade, most readers have progressed into the consolidating reader stage, and some into the accomplished reader stage (Soderman,
Gregory, O’Neill, 1999); or independent reader stage (Tyner, 2009). At this point in reading development, the behavioral focus shifts almost entirely to comprehension.

Regardless of the label for these developmental milestones, the behaviors the readers exhibit are the same across each category. Based on Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill (1999) and Tyner (2009), third and fourth grade readers exhibit some or most of the following behaviors: work to become automatic with word-solving and comprehension strategies, handle more complex texts, develop larger word vocabularies, develop strategies for complex texts, display characteristics of fluent reading, cope with challenges in more difficult texts, and negotiate information.

The third and fourth grade teachers from the study directed most of their interview responses around the role of comprehension instruction from the basal program. While there are spelling, phonics, writing, and oral language components of the program in third and fourth grade, it seems that comprehension is the ‘king of the castle’ when it comes to negotiating the program’s components. When cross-analyzing the behaviors of third and fourth grade readers presented in Soderman, Gregory, and O’Neill (1999) and Tyner (2009) with the elements the third and fourth grade teachers deemed essential, I determined that the teachers negotiated the most essential pieces of the basal program based on the area these readers need effective instruction: comprehension.

The correlation between students’ developmental stage and the process of negotiating and making instructional decisions with the basal program appear directly related. The developmental stage of the student population seemed to drive
every subtopic I addressed during the interviews: essential components, selecting resources, sequencing the curriculum, implementing small-group instruction, and supplementing the overall program. Teachers within each grade level seemed to approach each subtopic of the negotiation process with their students' developmental abilities in mind.

**Teachers Use Principled Practice to Negotiate the Program**

*Principled practice*, an idea of how teachers rely on a wealth of knowledge and sources to develop their own instructional approach, or principle, seems a perfect fit with the patterns and perspectives gathered from the participants (Shearer & Vogt, 2001). According to Shearer and Vogt (2011), when teachers develop *principled practice*, they combine two important bodies of information: experienced-based beliefs about effective instruction and evidence-based practice. Teachers must weigh what they know works best, based on their experience and knowledge, with what evidence and research claims is best practice. In considering and interlacing these two bodies of information, a teacher develops his or her own *principled practice*.

Once I was able to closely analyze the data from teacher interviews, I determined that teachers negotiate the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) program based on their own *principled practice*; teachers were given a 'scientifically-based' reading program, and yet they implemented their own best instructional practices attributed to their professional judgments. Based on *principled practice*, teachers directly self-selected which elements and resources of the program to use,
and not use. Also, teachers directly self-selected additional strategies and approaches to integrate with the program.

Some teachers implemented their own best practices by negotiating the many components of the program to best fit the developmental levels, or stages, of their readers. Other teachers carefully selected the most useful resources provided with the reading program to maximize success and guided practice. All of the participating teachers supplemented the basal program with their own approaches, activities, and best practices, despite what was scripted in the basal manual.

In our school district, teachers are given the professional courtesy to use principled practice and professional judgment with the basal program. Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) is not the ‘lone soldier’ of reading and language arts instruction; teachers self-select the elements of the program to implement or disregard, based on their principled practice.

Freedom and opportunity for teachers to exercise principled practice with the basal program may seem wonderful; teachers can directly self-select pieces and portions of the program to use, ignore, modify, enhance, or dismantle. However, the implications of such actions may not have such wonderful effects in the classroom.

In my opinion, using principled practice with the basal program would be powerful and beneficial in the instance that all classroom teachers are knowledgeable in the complexity of the reading process, components of effective literacy instruction, and research-based approaches (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). Without quality insights of effective and current literacy practices, the teacher-initiated decisions and choices
may not be effective or of high-quality. In that case, I speculate that principled practiced would be detrimental to reading instruction and students' growth when integrated with the basal program. Though this is not the case for all teachers who make instructional decisions when negotiating basal programs, it is important to consider that teachers create both advantages and disadvantages for students when applying principled practices with the basal program.

Teachers Finesse the Program to Individualize the Program

Pardo (2005) first introduced the concept of finessing in her study of beginning teachers' curriculum and assessment practices. In her initial investigation, Pardo described such practices with the following verbs: manage, balance, navigate, juggle, and sink or swim. Pardo adopted the term finessing to describe the general process teachers use in reacting to curriculum policies. Kersten and Pardo (2007) then expanded on the original adoption of the term to encompass the following definition, “a precise and complicated system of manipulating and maneuvering among the various aspects of the teaching context” (p. 147). In finessing a curriculum or program, teachers skillfully consider available options, make informed instructional decisions, attend to some components and disregard others (Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

Based on the teachers' responses during the interviews, I concluded that teachers certainly finessed their literacy practices with the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) program. Each teacher negotiated the elements and resources; resulting in a uniquely crafted and individualized approach for implementing the
program. The manner in which teachers attended to certain elements and resources within the program related to their values and experiences in the classroom.

The teachers did not only *finesse* the various components and resources of the program. The majority of the teachers seemed to *finesse* the basal program by supplementing the curriculum with additional resources: the Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006), Words Their Way (Bear et al., 2008), and various technology supplements. *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) does not stand by itself in classroom reading instruction; teachers *finessed* their reading instruction by negotiating the components of the program with their values, expertise, and outside supplements.

**Implications for Students' Learning**

Even though this study focused on teachers and their perspectives on the basal program, the impact on students' learning is still important to consider. In looking at the conclusions I have made, I determined that students most certainly benefit from the negotiations teachers make with the basal program on a daily basis, if the negotiations were based on high-quality and effective practices. Students benefit from teachers' negotiations of basal programs by receiving developmentally appropriate instruction, effective reading instruction, and a spiraling curriculum.

**Students Receive Developmentally Appropriate Instruction**

As explained above, the teachers' process of negotiating the basal program seemed to depend on the reading stage of the students. Despite having fully
developed lessons and scripted prompts for all of the program’s components, the teachers seemed to select the components, resources, activities, and supplements based on the needs of students. Even though the program dictates and suggests that teachers do A, B, and C, the teachers used their principled practice to deliver effective reading instruction.

Students undoubtedly benefit from experienced teachers who have knowledge of what works and effective strategies. No one can argue that an inanimate object, like a basal program, knows the students better than an effective classroom teacher. An effective teacher knows what the students are capable of, especially in regards to their developmental level and needs. Based on the perspectives and insights of the teachers, it seemed that the students are recipients of the best practices and components from the basal program and their teacher’s expertise. If teachers did not use principled practice with the reading program, I am not sure if students would benefit to the same degree. On the other hand, maybe students would benefit more if teachers exercised complete fidelity with the program instead of their own principled practice.

On this note, as mentioned above, principled practice does not equate to quality, effective practice. While it is ideal to believe that all teachers integrate effective, research-based practices with basal programs, not all teachers have the knowledge, education, or experience to support their basal programs with such practices. In the case that teachers are integrating effective principled practice,
students will benefit. However, teachers integrating ineffective *principled practice* are providing a disservice to their students.

**Students are Exposed to Effective Reading Instruction**

One reason school districts implement a basal program, such as *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009), is to provide students with research-based, effective reading instruction. While a basal program cannot deliver the instruction, teachers can implement the program by following the scripted lessons and recommendations. Whether or not basal programs advocate *effective* reading instruction is a separate debate that depends on philosophies, policies, and educational trends.

There is little debate, however, that teachers can use these programs to deliver effective reading instruction in conjunction with their own expertise. Teachers know their students better than an inanimate object, such as a basal program, and have an ideal perspective of what their students need to grow as readers.

Even though it was perplexing to see nine teachers negotiating the basal program in strikingly different ways, much can be implied about what these teachers truly care about: their students. In my opinion, students benefit more from a teacher’s *principled practice* than from a teacher who exercises complete fidelity with a scripted program; if and only if the *principled practice* is effective and of high-quality.

Though this may not be the case with all teachers, I interpreted my findings as teachers trying to improve the program with their experience, knowledge, and
backgrounds. In the grand scheme of everything, the students are the receivers of the instruction, whether it is verbatim from the scripted program or modified on the teacher's behalf to provide better instruction. Based on the perspectives of the study's participants, I concluded that in negotiating the basal program, teachers are advocating for effective reading instruction that is not strictly based on one viewpoint.

**Students Experience a Spiraling Reading Curriculum**

As teachers negotiate the components of the reading program, they create a spiral effect from each grade level. Instead of each grade level focusing on the same components scripted in the reading program, they each have their own essential focus for effective instruction. Each grade level seems to compliment the next. The essential components focused on by the grade one teachers compliment the focus in grade two. As second grade teachers place more emphasis on reading comprehension, third grade students and teachers benefits in turn.

It is much like a continuous spiral that amplifies through the grade levels. Even though the basal program itself spirals instruction from grade level to grade level, the teachers' processes of negotiating the essential components has extrapolated the spiral effect. Students benefit from this effect because they continue to receive effective reading instruction that is developmentally appropriate to their reading abilities and stages.
Based on the insights I gathered, the reading instruction teachers do at each grade level stacks on top of each other like building blocks. Without a solid foundation of the spelling and phonics skills, focused on in first grade, it seems nearly impossible for students to read at the level necessary for second grade. The spiraling effect created by the effective negotiation of the basal program across the grade levels benefits the students and their successes with reading.

Implications for My Teaching

Through this study, I acquired endless knowledge to inform, support, and extend my own negotiation process of the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program. While it will take me multiple years with the program to craft my own principled practice, the insights and perspectives of the experienced participants provided me with great knowledge for my future teaching career. Three of the critical implications I inferred from this study's findings relate to my growth in knowledge of: the program contents and organization, spiraling and expectations across grade levels, and my future role as a literacy specialist in my school district.

Better Knowledge of the Program Contents and Organization

The purpose of this study, as I noted in chapter one, was to gain a better insight of how experienced teachers negotiate the Treasures (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program, which our school district has now used for three years. Since it was my first year using the reading program, I struggled with daily planning
because of the many lesson recommendations and scripted components; there was simply too much content for the realistic amount of time a classroom teacher has during the day. However, after I interviewed the participants, coded and analyzed the data, and formed conclusions, I gained a better foundational knowledge of the reading program's contents.

Even though I currently teach grade two, it is likely that I will teach other grade levels in the future. Conducting this study provided me with a foundational knowledge of what the reading program looks like within each grade level. I have gained critical knowledge concerning how each grade level negotiates the essential components of the program, resources, and supplemental materials. I now know that word work and phonics are most prevalent in grade one instruction and comprehension is the major focus in grades three and four.

In addition to interviewing other grade level teachers, I interviewed the teachers within my grade level. Despite the many differences that I found amongst these teachers, I learned important information on how these teachers organize the program in their classroom, more specifically how they sequence the immense program on a daily and weekly basis. As I mentioned in chapter one, negotiating the entire reading program has been a struggle; not only was I new to the school district, but I was also using an entirely new reading program from what I used at my prior teaching position. While I certainly survived my first year with the reading program and found my way through the school year, I now have a stronger understanding and perspective on the role of the reading program in my classroom and how I can best
use the program in the upcoming school year. I learned strategies and approaches for using the program that I will certainly implement next year in my classroom. Even though some of the strategies the teachers discussed may not be conducive to my students, there is always the possibility that I will teach in another grade level where they will certainly be useful. The foundational knowledge I have acquired about the contents of the reading program and how the teachers organized the program will have lasting effects on my classroom instruction.

**Broader View of the Spiraling and Expectations in Other Grade Levels**

Teaching often feels like an isolated career; other than lunch and coinciding planning periods, teachers spend their day in a classroom teaching students. As I analyzed the shifts in how the grade level teachers negotiated the reading program, I began to wonder if other teachers have any idea of what the reading program looks like in the subsequent and preceding grade levels. Do the other second grade teachers know that the grade one teachers build the foundation of their reading instruction on phonics, spelling, and word work, and not so much on comprehension? Do the third grade teachers know that the second grade teachers focus a great deal of their reading instruction on spelling and workbooks?

I cannot help but think there needs to be more communication amongst the grade level teachers regarding the spiraling of the reading program and the essential components each teacher focuses on using experience and best practices. Equally as important, teachers need to be communicating within grade levels to ensure that all
children in the same grade level are receiving effective instruction, which focuses on the same essential components of the program. Personally, I was not incorporating a balanced amount of word work, spelling and phonics, in my daily reading instruction. However, after completing this study, I understand that my incoming second graders came from classrooms which heavily focused on word work.

As I gear up for another school year, I will be looking for ways to better balance a comprehension focus from the basal manual with word work and phonics lessons. Not to say that I will lessen my focus on comprehension and vocabulary, but I will find the best practices and methods that fit with my approach and philosophy of using the basal program.

The results from this study have deepened my knowledge of where my students are heading in grade three. Based on my interview and findings, I better understand the importance of comprehension and vocabulary in grade three. I learned that grade three focuses on spelling, but not nearly as much as grade two and grade one. Therefore, I determined that I need to incorporate more word work and mastery of word families into my instruction, so that my students have a strong foundation of these fundamental skills going into third grade. Like wise, I better understand the importance of student comprehension for third grade standardized testing. This study made me well aware of the expectations third grade teachers will have of students, and I can better prepare my students by knowing what is expected in third grade.
Knowledge of My Future Role as a Literacy Specialist

This study has allowed me to gain insightful perspectives from experienced, classroom teachers about how they managed to negotiate and finesse the reading program. I anticipate that the findings and conclusions I found from this study will have future implications on my role in my building and school district. As my graduate background will allow me to be certified as a literacy specialist, I will be called upon to be a literacy advocate and expert. From this study, I have identified areas in need of professional development and consideration. As a literacy specialist, I can advocate for areas in need professional development.

I found that, based on the participants I interviewed, teachers do not have a universal foundation of guided reading. Each teacher had her own approach for implementing small-group reading instruction; some teachers used the scripted lessons from the basal program and other used their own approach and layout. At the conclusion of my study, I happened to have a conversation with my building principal. In some way or another we began discussing guided reading and its impact on student growth. I mentioned to her that I felt teachers needed professional development in guided reading and what it really entails. She certainly agreed with me. Guided reading is a topic that I am passionate about. I plan on pursuing the possibility of professional development in guided reading in the upcoming school year. However, without this study, I would not have known that teachers are implementing guided reading without a strong foundation of its components.
From the quantity of data I collected from the nine teacher interviews, I was exposed to many perspectives concerning the current reading program. While the current reading program is only three years old, the school district will eventually evaluate new programs and packages, as the current reading program becomes outdated. As a literacy specialist, I will be able to use the perspectives and findings from this study to advocate for a reading program that fits the multiple perspectives and insights I experienced. Even though a committee is delegated with the task of analyzing and evaluating potential reading programs, my presence on such a committee would be beneficial to the other classroom teachers: I have interviewed classroom teachers and analyzed the insights they expressed. In addition, I know how teachers are negotiating the current reading program, and I believe the information will be valuable to administrators and committees when selecting a new reading program.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As with all research, this study had limitations in research design. Based on the limitations I identified in chapter three, future research in teachers' process of negotiating basal programs should be considered and focus on the following recommendations: balancing the sample, incorporating different school districts, and coordinating a quantitative study with control and variable groups. These are aspects that could, if considered in future studies, yield more perspectives and insights on teachers' process of negotiating basal programs.
Balance Sample Size and Representation of Grade Levels

As I discussed in chapter three, the number of participants representing each grade level was not balanced. While an adequate number of participants were available in grades one and two to reach data saturation, only one participant represented grade three and one participant represented grade four. While the perspectives presented in this study seemed to follow a pattern, the perspectives of the grade three and grade four teachers cannot be generalized for the entire grade level. Therefore, it would be beneficial to investigate the same research question with a larger sampling, specifically more balanced in participant numbers across the grade levels represented.

Broaden Research to Additional School Districts

To greatly increase the validity of the findings and conclusions I presented, further research could look at how teachers negotiate the basal program across school districts. The expectations placed on teachers varies from school district to school district. For example, the school district where this study was conducted had loose requirements concerning the use of the basal program. By investigating how teachers negotiate basal programs in other school districts, results that are more dramatic may or may not be obtained. In limiting the data collection to one school district, an effect of 'district' positionality seems present. Like a researcher having an effect on conclusions made at the end of a study, a teacher population from the same school district, with the same expectations and requirements, will have predictable
similarities. While I found many differences from teacher to teacher and from grade level to grade level, there was still a limitation in using participants from one school district and building. Therefore, conducting a similar study based on the same research topic, but within other school districts using basal programs, would increase the validity of the findings and conclusions.

**Explore Topic into a Quantitative Research Design**

One of the conclusions I found after carefully analyzing the data and findings, was that teachers’ backgrounds greatly influenced how they negotiated the reading program. Their backgrounds influenced how they selected the most important parts of the program to drive effective instruction, selected effective program resources, and incorporated small-group lessons. Teachers’ background greatly influenced how and to what degree they supplemented the reading program. However, teachers’ methods of supplementing reading programs are not included in the program package. It is hard to determine the effectiveness of a reading program if each teacher is negotiating and supplementing the program according to his or her background. If teachers are using and supplementing the program differently, other stakeholders, such as administrators and parents, may feel that some students are missing out and others are reaping the benefits of a teacher with more education and training.

To determine if and how teachers’ individual negotiations and supplements are influencing the implementation and outcomes of the reading program, it would be beneficial to conduct a quantitative study with two study groups: a control group and
a variable group. In doing a study of this nature, a researcher could monitor the influence of teacher negotiation and supplementation on the overall success of the reading program. With a control group, a researcher could monitor the success of a reading program when exercised with fidelity. A variable group could incorporate the additional expertise of a qualified teacher, who would ultimately negotiate, sequence, and supplement the program, as seen fit according to the teacher's background and students' needs. Further research of this nature would provide insight on the effectiveness of scripted, closely followed reading programs compared to a reading program negotiated and supplemented by a classroom teacher.

**Final Thoughts**

Basal programs have been a part of American education for decades (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). Basal programs are widely used, even in the twenty-first century, because they structure a uniform approach to reading instruction and they support inexperienced teachers (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). Despite the continued use of basal programs, it remains critical that the philosophy and approach of a program fits the needs of the students and teachers (Ediger, 2010).

Since the 1970s, research studies have heavily criticized various aspects of basal programs. In 1978, Dolores Durkin openly criticized the quality of literature included in basal programs. Durkin claimed that it was critical for teachers to supplement the basal programs with high-quality literature. In the 1980s, Shannon (1983) and Cloud-Silva (1987) conducted studies to investigate whether or not teachers lost their responsibility of making instructional decisions with the
implementation of a basal program. Both researchers hypothesized that basal programs created feelings of alienation and predicted that teachers would have negative feelings associated with basal programs. Both studies found that teachers did not have such feelings regarding the use of the basal program.

Almost 25 years later, I find myself using a basal program in my classroom. Luckily, basal programs are far more updated with literature and research-based recommendations than 25 years ago. However, publishers have packaged the programs with too much content. Prior to completing this study, I was overwhelmed with using the basal program effectively, as well as fulfilling other responsibilities as a classroom teacher. It was my hope that the study would reveal critical information to inform, support, and improve my own use of the program. The process of interviewing experienced teachers yielded insightful perspectives about negotiating the basal program.

After analyzing all of the data from the interviews, I concluded that experienced teachers negotiate basal programs using professional judgment in making critical instructional choices, principled practice (Vogt & Shearer, 2011), and by finessing the curriculum (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). I formed these conclusions based on the insights and perspectives provided from the interviews, and perspectives I gained through analyzing and coding the nine interviews. Based on these conclusions, I infer that students benefit a great deal from the negotiations teachers make on a daily basis.
From this study, I acquired a wealth of knowledge about the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) basal program. With the experiences and backgrounds of the teachers I interviewed, I was able to learn information about the basal program in each grade level represented. In gaining a better understanding about the essential components of each grade level's reading instruction, I have better knowledge about what my incoming students were exposed to and where my students need to be at the end of second grade.

While I learned immeasurable information about the basal program itself, I also found areas that I could advocate for as a literacy specialist; I uncovered some gray areas where professional development would improve the use of the program. As a future literacy specialist, I will be able to use the findings and conclusions from this study to support and advocate for literacy needs and development in our school district.

The purpose of the study was to gain better understanding, insight, and perspective in regards to how elementary teachers negotiate the basal program. I feel satisfied with the findings and conclusions I discovered. It is my hope that I will be able to use my findings and conclusions to enrich my use of the reading program and enhance all aspects of my literacy instruction.
References


Retrieved February 25, 2011 from http://treasures.macmillanmh.com


Appendix A

CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION

The purpose of this research study is to understand the ways in which teachers negotiate the *Treasures* (Macmillan McGraw-Hill, 2009) reading program. The researcher, Ashley Roberts, a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY, will conduct interviews with teachers to discuss their differing perspectives of and experiences with the reading program.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will take part in an interview and be asked about your perspectives and experiences in negotiating the *Treasures* reading program. Also, you may be randomly selected to be observed during a period of literacy instruction. This will allow the researcher to see how you use the reading program in your classroom. You have the option of participating in the interview and not an observation.

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

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. My name will not be recorded. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. My participation involves completing a personal information sheet regarding my education, experience, and certification. The information sheet will only be read by the researcher and only used for contextual information.
4. My participation involves answering 8 open-ended interview questions about how I negotiate the reading curriculum. The questions will be provided to me prior to my scheduled interview, so that I have an opportunity to gather any resources I would like to share with the researcher.
5. Time is a minor risk. My participation will be no more than 45 minutes.
6. The interview will be audio taped. The audio tape will be used for data analysis only, and the interview will be transcribed. Only the researcher will listen to the interview. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis by the researcher.
7. I may consent to the interview and refuse to be audio recorded.
8. All data, including audio tapes, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the researcher and will be destroyed by shredding after the research has been accepted.
9. My name may be randomly selected for an observation. I understand that I may refuse to be observed without penalty. Observations will not be
recorded. The researcher will use field notes to record observations. All field
notes will be shredded after the thesis research has been accepted.

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

I agree to participate in the interview and understand that I will be audio taped.
Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date:
______________

I agree to participate in the interview, but do not agree to be audio taped.
Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date:
______________

I agree to participate in an observation if I am randomly selected.
Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date:
______________

I do not grant consent for an observation.
Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date:
______________

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

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Appendix B

1. When you sit down to plan a week of reading instruction, what components of the teacher's manual do you consider first? Why?

2. Of all the components in the reading program, which ones do you place the most emphasis on over the course of a week?

3. How do you sequence the curriculum in the reading program?

4. What resources from the reading program do you use frequently and how? (e.g. leveled readers, workbooks, work stations, etc.)

5. Do you incorporate technology with your reading instruction? If so, how?

6. Do you use the program workbooks? If so, how often and in what instructional setting?

7. Do you use small group reading instruction? If so, what does it look like in your classroom and what resources do you use?

8. Are there any other literacy activities you use regularly that are not from the basal program? How do you select these activities?

9. Do you pull other resources to support the Treasures program? If so, from where and how do you use them?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about how you choose to use the different components of the reading program?
Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Participant Identification Number: ________________
Date of Interview and Time: ______________________________________

Purpose Statement: **Start audiorecording-Identify participant by number, the date, and time**
The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a better understanding of how experienced teachers go about using the Treasures reading program. For me, I often struggle to pick out the essential pieces of the program when I am planning my weekly reading instruction. Any insights and perspectives that you are willing to share will allow me to more effectively consider my personal use of the program. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questions I ask, you have the choice to not respond. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. Our interview will last 30 to 45 minutes and I will record the conversation for my data collection and analysis.

Questions:

1. When you sit down to plan a week of reading instruction, what components of the teacher’s manual do you consider first? Why?

2. Of all the components in the reading program, which ones do you place the most emphasis on over the course of a week?

3. How do you sequence the curriculum in the reading program?

4. What resources from the reading program do you use frequently and how? (e.g. leveled readers, workbooks, work stations, etc.)

5. Do you incorporate technology with your reading instruction? If so, how?
6. Do you use the program workbooks? If so, how often and in what instructional setting?

7. Do you use small group reading instruction? If so, what does it look like in your classroom and what resources do you use?

8. Are there any other literacy activities you use regularly that are not from the basal program? How do you select these activities?

9. Do you pull other resources to support the Treasures program? If so, from where and how do you use them?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about how you choose to use the different components of the reading program?

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

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