


January 2013

Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study

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Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study

by

Sarah Mirlenbrink Bombly

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Special Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
November 14, 2013

Keywords: progress monitoring, response-to-intervention, accountability, teacher voice,
phenomenology

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Chris Bombly, for his unending love, support, and encouragement, my mother, Elizabeth Ann McMahon Mirlenbrink, for her unending belief that anything I wanted to do would be possible if I simply believed in myself; our children, Zachary and Hannah, for their persistent curiosity; and lastly, to my entire doctoral committee, who like all great teachers, fostered the potential they saw within their student.

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely acknowledge and thank the professors who taught and mentored me throughout “the process,” especially those who served on my doctoral committee: Patricia Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Liliana Rodriguez-Campos, Ann Cranston-Gingras, and Christopher DeLuca. I will pay forward all of the hours you each spent with me in order to answer questions, provide guidance, and foster deeper thinking and reflection. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my fellow doctoral students who, like me, put their trust, faith, hard work, and determination into “the process,” especially; Georgina Rivera-Singletary, Aisha Holmes, and Stephanie Bennett. Additionally, I would like to thank the teachers who participated in this study because the process of this dissertation research has been a deeply personal one for both myself and the participants, Allison, Crystal, Gwendolyn, Sadie, and Abilieen. Gwendolyn told me as much in a brief note.

Thank you for listening and writing what it's like to work in a public school in today's time. Everything that I shared was a true and authentic part of my life. Thank you for giving me a voice to be heard by many.

Each of these passionate, wonderful women allowed me to share their story. For this privilege, I offer each of them my sincere, heartfelt, and humble gratitude. Therefore, it was my goal to present, to the best of my ability, the lived experience of their reading assessment practices as seen through their eyes, as felt through their hands, and as lived through them. Thank you, Ladies.

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Abstract

In this descriptive study, I researched five elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices as they worked within the context of IDEA (2004), NCLB (2002) and Response to Intervention (RTI). My own connection to the classroom and reading assessment practices brought me to this research. I presented my personal and professional connection through vignettes about my own classroom assessment practices. Relevant literature on both the context and culture of assessment were pertinent to this research.

I used a qualitative design, specifically, Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis. Data were three in-depth phenomenological interviews, relevant documents and artifacts, and use of a researcher reflective blog. I summarized the initial findings of this research through 10 clustered themes; shift of focus, ever changing accountability, independent efforts with data, collaborative efforts with data, working environment, interventions and reading assessment practices in action, authenticity in practice, lack of decision making power, teacher emotion, and teacher needs and wants and a composite narrative in order to describe the lived experience of these teachers reading assessment practices.

Implications from my research with regard to policy include a perceived incongruence between an RTI framework and the teacher evaluation system with regard to active collaboration. Those toward practice include difficulty with the day-to-day implementation of an RTI framework and the perception of a singular focus of RTI as disability determination. My recommendations for future research include an action research agenda designed to explore increased involvement of stakeholders such as students, parents and other school personnel.

Chapter One

Introduction

I remember one particular day from my first year of teaching. It was October, and by that time I had gotten over the jitters of being a new teacher. I had started to settle into my role as the one and only special education teacher in my small elementary school.

That morning the secretary gave me an odd look as I worked over the laminator. “You know that is wrapping paper you are running through the laminating machine? Right? And, it is gold wrapping paper if I am not mistaken! Why on earth are you running wrapping paper through the laminator?”

I explained I would use, the now expensive paper, to introduce the concepts of individualized education plans (IEP), goals, and progress monitoring to my first grade students. In response, the secretary gave me a, “now I have seen it all” kind of look. I smiled and went on my way.

Later that day I asked my students what a goal was. Devin’s eyes lit up. “I know Miss. M.,” my name at the time, “I know Miss M.! It’s what you do in soccer!” I was thrilled by Devin’s excitement. He usually hated reading and showed it in both his words and his body language. So, I welcomed Devin’s complete engagement. His hazel eyes nearly burst out of his head. Devin literally jumped up from the rug and began to imitate a soccer kick followed by a very loud shout, “touchdown!”

“Yes! That is right! A goal is a score, Devin! Do you all know that there is another type of goal as well? What do you all think the other type of goal may be?” I could see from both Devin and the faces of my 6 other first grade students the term “goal” was a new concept. I continued in my best teacher voice, “a goal is a promise or a dream and a plan to carry out that dream you make for yourself.”

We went on to talk about how each of the children in the class had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and within that plan, each student had specific goals designed to help him or her achieve. We then took those IEP goals and made them golden. We glued each student’s goals onto the laminated gold wrapping paper and kept them in our Golden Goals Box. Each week we reviewed our goals and monitored our progress based on student assessment data. When appropriate, we crossed out a goal that was achieved with the biggest, permanent marker known to mankind. The kids loved that part. But, I think I liked it even more than they did! I got to see this group of students, who by first grade, struggle with a disability and low self-esteem, achieve. Moreover, I got to see the moment when each student felt personal success. We, the little group of students and I, made significant personal and academic progress.

Goal monitoring became our way of work. I did not think it was anything overly special or out of the norm until my end of year teacher evaluation. At the meeting Aisha my principal, said, “Sarah, I don’t think you recognize how much progress you have made with your students. They understand what an IEP is and what their specific goals are. They also know when and how goals are met. What made you think of your Golden Goals?”

My response was from my heart. “Aisha, our Golden Goals are what I would want for myself. Honestly, I could think of no other way to address the specific goals on each student’s IEP. I am the only special education teacher here, and a new teacher at that! While my

university training taught me how to collaboratively create and monitor quality IEP's, I was still left wondering how I might translate my students' IEP's, progress monitoring, and assessment into the everyday life and work of the kids and me. You know, Aisha, our Golden Goals also met my personal teaching agenda of monitoring student progress, providing support and documentation for decision making, and implementing appropriate instructional interventions." Aisha shook her head, smiled, and said, "Sarah, keep up the good work. Your assessment practices are not common."

My purpose for sharing the lived experience of our Golden Goals may seem simple, but it is important. It connects my personal philosophy with my professional actions. It allows me to connect my teacher and researcher personas (Miller & Richards, 2005). I wanted to use the context of the ordinary, everyday life and work of teachers in order to situate the need for studies that describe and explain teachers' assessment practices in my dissertation research.

In order to paint this picture clearly, I must first define what assessment both is and is not. Assessment is not simply a set of tests teachers use with students (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008). Instead it is a process of gathering information (data) for stakeholders use in order to determine the sequence of curriculum content (standards), evidence of student academic growth, professional development needs, and resource allocation (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008). Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, district and school personnel, teachers, students, and parents. In other words, assessment is a systematic way of collecting data in order to inform a variety of decisions.

Therefore, studies, such as the one I conducted as part of my dissertation research, are important because of a shift in the context and culture of assessment in the current high stakes and accountability based settings found within schools (Brookhart, 2011). This has resulted in

an increased demand for teachers' assessment competence (DeLuca, Klinger, Searle, & Shula, 2010). Specifically, the recent mandates for standards- and assessment-based education issued through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 require teachers who have expertise in assessment and needs of diverse learners (Bolt & Quenemoen, 2006; Brookhart, 2011). For example, all teachers must be able to effectively express both content and associated depth of thinking for curriculum specifications (standards) in an easily accessible manner for a variety of stakeholders (students, parents, community, and of course other educators) (Brookhart, 2011). They must be able to answer specific, assessment related questions such as those posed by Bolt and Quenemoen (2006): "How did the lowest performing third-grade student perform in second grade? ... Have they [third-grade students] made progress within the third grade curriculum?" (p. 54).

Of course teachers do not stop asking questions at this broad school or grade level context. Now more than ever, they need to ask questions in order to deal with specific, individual student achievement. For example, teachers must answer questions such as those posed by Stiggins (2008). "Has Sarah, a third-grader, demonstrated appropriate reading fluency based upon a previously set goal or target? ... And, what specific actions need to occur to help Sarah with reading fluency?" (Stiggins, 2008). This shift in assessment is also partly a result of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the Response to Intervention Problem Solving (RTI) framework (Laframboise, Epanchin, Colucci, & Hocutt, 2004). Here it is important to stress, while assessment-based decision making has been a mandate since the original inception of IDEA (Chamberlain & Spencer, 2005), the RTI framework raises new challenges (Dorn, 2010). It is a break from the traditional achievement/intelligence quotient discrepancy model used for identification of specific learning

disability (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Instead, the RTI framework is a systematic, assessment-driven way to determine the types of support a child may need to succeed in the general education curricula and to explore the possibility that a child may have a disability and consequently become eligible for special education and related services (Castillo, Hines, Batsche & Curtis, 2011). Castillo, Hines, Batsche, and Curtis (2011) define RTI as a problem-solving model with the dual purpose of facilitating the development and subsequent implementation of child-specific, evidence-based interventions in the general education classroom and determining the extent to which a student responds to interventions through continuous progress monitoring (p. 9). From a practical standpoint this means teachers need to use assessment data to monitor the progress of all students and make instructional and academic intervention decisions (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Readers can find my more detailed description of the RTI framework and research regarding its implementation within Chapter Two.

It is precisely because of this shift in an assessment context and culture that I wanted to situate the need for a study that describes and explains the assessment practices of general education teachers within the everyday, lived classroom experience. My goal for this study is to add to the knowledge base on how instructional decisions and interventions are made with regard to student learning (Dorn, 2010; Ehren & Whitmire, 2005). The RTI framework has established the need to use assessment data to monitor student progress (Castillo, Hines, Batsche & Curtis, 2011). Within this framework, teachers are closely involved with providing and monitoring instructional activities and academic interventions through the use of assessment (Batsche, Elliott, Garden, Grimes, Kovalski, Prasses, Reschley, Schrag, & Tilly, 2007). Unfortunately, a picture of both what and how teachers accomplish this is unclear (Dorn, 2010; Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy & Brady, 2011). For example, Ehren and Whitmire (2005) argue that

NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) have “blurred the line between general education and special education in such a way that the expertise of personnel, typically assigned to special education programs can be utilized to assist and support students in general education and their teachers” (p. 169). Dorn (2010) echoed this when he stated there is now a need for studies to help define assessment practices educators use within the context of the Response to intervention (RTI) framework.

In addition to teaching skills needed in the area of instructional strategies, learning environments and instructional planning (Bolt & Quenemoen, 2006), teachers must also know the basics of assessment (Popham, 2009). From a practical standpoint, assessment is the crux of the dominant RTI framework (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldke, 2005) coupled with a reliance on assessments-based instruction requires teachers to be assessment literate (Popham, 2009). Assessment literacy refers to a teacher’s ability to choose, administer, interpret, and recognize instructional, ethical and legal implications of assessment (Black, Harrison, Lee, & Wiliam, 2004; Popham, 2009). Within the RTI framework, assessment literacy is important for teachers (Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2011). These teachers must know what numbers and tests scores mean before being able to make meaningful decisions (Matthews, Trimble, & Gay, 2007). Xu and Lin (2009) suggest that this idea goes much deeper. Teachers must be able to accept, understand and interpret these assessment data in order to make instructional decisions (Matthews, Trimble, & Gay, 2007) based upon the temporality, sociality and place in which they work. In other words, the context and culture of assessment and teachers lived experiences also shape assessment literacy (Xu & Lin, 2009; Shepard, 2009). Brookhart (2011) translates this idea into practice. She states, while standards for teacher competence in educational assessment have been proposed and widely accepted, the “... knowledge and skills

required for this essential assessment function are considerably different from the corpus described by the Standards” (Brookhart, 2011, p. 3).

The standards that Brookhart (2011) refers to are the 1990 Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment developed jointly by the American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, and the National Education Association (AFT, NCME, NEA, 1990). Each of these seven standards, at the time of their publication, represented the skill set that assessment-literate teachers should be able to demonstrate (<http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/article3.html>). More recently, Brookhart (2011) proposes an updated list of eleven necessary assessment knowledge and skill standards teachers need in order to be able to work effectively in this new assessment context and culture. These eleven updated standards include:

1. Teachers should understand learning in the content area they teach;
2. Teachers should be able to articulate clear learning intentions that are congruent with both the content and depth of thinking implied by standards and curriculum goals, in such a way that they are attainable and accessible;
3. Teachers should have a repertoire of strategies for communicating to students what achievement of a learning intention looks like;
4. Teachers should understand the purposes and use of the range of available assessment options and be skilled in using them;
5. Teachers should have the skills to analyze classroom questions, test items and performance assessment tasks to ascertain the specific knowledge and thinking skills required for students to do them;
6. Teachers should have the skills to provide effective, useful feedback on student work;

7. Teachers should be able to construct scoring schemes that quantify student performance on classroom assessments into useful information for decisions about students, classrooms, schools, and districts. These decisions should lead to improved student learning, growth, or development;
8. Teachers should be able to administer external assessments and interpret their results for decisions about students, classrooms, schools and districts;
9. Teachers should be able to articulate their interpretations of assessment results and their reasoning about the educational decisions based on assessment results to the educational populations they serve (student and his/her family, class, school, community);
10. Teachers should be able to help students use assessment information to make sound educational decisions; and
11. Teachers should understand and carry out their legal and ethical responsibilities in assessment as they conduct their work.

(Brookhart, 2011, p. 7).

In other words, these suggested revisions bring teachers' assessment practices into the current standards- and accountability-based context and culture of schools. Accordingly, for this dissertation research I described the reading assessment practices of elementary general education teachers within the context of an RTI framework.

Rationale and Significance

A study of teachers' assessment practices within an RTI framework is timely (Dorn, 2010). Within the current accountability context of NCLB (2002), the requirement for frequent monitoring of academic progress through IDEA (2004), and the perceived uncertainty and/or

lack of teacher's assessment literacy (Popham, 2004; Popham, 2006), a description of elementary general education teachers assessment practices makes sense. Such a description would most closely approximate a real life scenario (Personal communication with school district personnel, 6/21/12). Further, Black et, al. (2004) find that teachers who are competent in choice, administration, interpretation and recognition of instructional, ethical, and legal implications of assessment are more likely to have substantial gains in student academic achievement. Based on their meta-analysis of assessment-based teaching strategies, Black and Wiliam (1998) observed overall effect sizes of .4 to .7 with the greatest gain in initially low performing students. These low performing students, those with a disability or those benefiting from interventions determined through the RTI framework, (Murawskit & Hughes, 2009) sit in classrooms where these teachers are required to engage in assessment practices designed to monitor academic achievement (Haithcock, 2011; Mellard, Stern, & Woods, 2011). In fact, Ciolfi and Ryan (2011) claim there were nearly two million children aged six through 12 identified as having a disability in the United States in 2008. A large proportion of these children are educated in the general education classroom with support given by a special education teacher (Chamberlain & Spencer, 2005). In these classrooms, assessment is especially integral to teachers. These teachers are required to use assessment data to plan instruction and make decisions about student achievement (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldke, 2005; Mellard, Stern, & Woods, 2011). Therefore, I argue that teachers need to know how they think about, carry out and respond to assessment in order to plan effective instruction for students.

Additionally, within this current context of education and accountability (IDEA, 2002; NCLB, 2004), there is a stipulation that the education of all children, including the over 11 million US children with disabilities (Ciolfi & Ryan, 2011), be based upon state approved

academic standards and learner specific needs. NCLB requires that schools and school districts use assessment data to explain whether they and their students are achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is the state-determined percentage of students proficient in reading based upon the 2014 NCLB (2002) goal for 100% of US children demonstrating reading proficiency, a passing score on a state reading exam (NCLB, 2004) and promotion or retention at key grade levels such as third or fourth grade (Florida Department of Education, 2010). This suggests that the daily work of teachers' assessment within the context of reading instruction may mean the difference between success and failure and between promotion and retention (Florida Department of Education, 2010). Few studies examine evidence of teachers' assessment literacy as exemplified in daily classroom practice, including the ability to choose, administer, interpret and recognize instructional, ethical and legal implications of assessment (Black et al., 2004) as perceived by teachers (Coffey, Sato, & Thiebault, 2005; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009). Studies dating back nearly 25 years tend to leave out classroom observations (Brookhart, 2004). Fewer include in-depth teacher interviews (Coffey, Sato, & Thiebault, 2005; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009). Within her 2004 review of the classroom assessment literature, Brookhart (2004) simply implies that researchers may have forgotten the classroom.

Therefore, the purpose of my study was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers' assessment practices within the context of response to intervention and more specifically within the context of elementary level reading instruction. The significance of my study lies in its potential to bring voice to the forgotten classroom (Brookhart, 2004) and more specifically, the teacher herself. Further, it may help elementary general education teachers improve, refine, and/or reflect on reading assessment knowledge, skill, use and overall

assessment literacy. My study may also provide a possible outlet for suggestions for change within educational policy.

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Research Questions

The research questions about elementary general education teachers' assessment practices which guide my study were:

1. What is the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of my study I operationally define the following terms: assessment, assessment literacy, and Response to Intervention (RTI).

1. Assessment –Assessment is a process of gathering information (data) for stakeholders use in order to determine the sequence of curriculum content (standards), evidence of student academic growth, professional development needs, and resource allocation (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008). Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, district and school personnel, teachers, students, and parents.

2. Teacher selected/developed authentic assessment - a definition of teacher selected/developed authentic assessment practices is not clear-cut. Janesick (2006) provides guidance on characteristics of this authenticity. For her, assessment practices are authentic when they:
 - (a) Are realistic. In other words, match the characteristics of the student whose progress is measured;
 - (b) Require judgment and innovation on the part of the student. She or he must use their knowledge and judgment in a problem solving manner;
 - (c) Requires students to put together the steps or processes of a particular subject, topic, or job;
 - (d) Replicates activities students will encounter within the world outside of the classroom;
 - (e) Requires students to use many of their skills, in addition their verbal and mathematical set; and
 - (f) Includes a feedback loop designed for continual refinement.
3. Assessment literacy – Assessment literacy is the ability of stakeholders to choose, administer, interpret and recognize instructional, ethical, and legal implications of assessment (Black, et al., 2004); and
4. Response-to-Intervention (RTI) framework – The RTI framework is a problem-solving model with the dual purpose of facilitating the development and

subsequent implementation of child specific, evidence-based interventions in the general education classroom and determining the extent to which a student responds to interventions through continuous progress monitoring (Castillo, Hines, Batsche, & Curtis, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Research on teacher's assessment practices over the last few decades has fallen into three overarching theoretical frameworks (Brookhart, 2004). These include theories from psychology with a focus on motivation and disposition; theories of learning with a focus on application of assessment to learning, and theories from measurement with a focus on specific components of assessment such as score reliability and validity (Shepard, 2009). Survey research, the prevailing method associated with these theoretical frameworks and resulting research (Brookhart, 2004; Fernandez, 2009; Shepard, 2009) resulted in studies where data are seldom collected directly from classroom settings. This means survey research, through the very nature of the method, does not always allow a firsthand, personal account of, as Fernandez (2009) puts it, "tasks, students, teachers, processes and results" (p. 87). As I noted earlier, Brookhart (2004) points out, researchers may have simply forgotten the classroom. She (2004) also suggests that this forgetfulness should be addressed by taking a cross-disciplinary look at theories and methods in order to broaden perspectives and begin "pressing at the edges of theory and exploring intersections should contribute to richer understanding" (Brookhart, 2004, p. 455). Therefore, Social Constructivism served as my theoretical framework.

Constructivism

From my perspective, Constructivism presses the boundaries between these theoretical and methodological edges (Brookhart, 2004) because researchers who work from this

perspective study everyday life, its messiness, its ordinariness and its extraordinariness.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “constructivism connects action to praxis and builds on anti-foundational arguments while encouraging experimental and multivoiced texts” (p.184). It has roots in the work of theorists such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky (von Glasersfeld, 1996; Twomey Fosnot, 1996). At its inception, constructivism was considered cutting edge because it is “fundamentally nonpositivist and as such it stands on completely new ground”.... concept development and deep understanding are the foci; ... they are understood as construction of active learner reorganization“ (Twomey Fosnot, 1996, p. 10). Specifically, instead of a traditionally held assumption that there must be a real, external world that is separate from an individual and that knowledge “should be considered true only if it correctly reflects that independent world,” (von Glasserfeld, 1995, p. 6), there is a dramatically different assumption. Instead, from Piaget’s perspective, the world “is the result of our own perceptual activities and therefore specific to our ways of perceiving and conceiving. Knowledge, for him, arises from actions and the agent’s reflection on them” (von Glaserfeld, 1996, p. 4). In other words, knowledge exists within a person (von Glaserfeld, 1995; von Glaserfeld, 1996).

Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism (Phillips, 2005) takes the premises of constructivism a step further. From this perspective “reality is seen to be created through processes of social exchange, historically situated, social constructivists are interested in the collective generation of meaning among people” (Au, 1998, p. 299). In other words, it is not the individual, but the larger community and/or socio-political structure that actively constructs knowledge (Cobb, 1996; Phillips, 1995). While the intensity of this community and or socio-political construction of knowledge varies among those in this vast field (Phillips, 1995), there is an emphasis placed on

both the context and culture of individuals, their community and the importance both of these play in the construction of knowledge (Cobb, 1996; Phillips, 1995). As Au (1998) writes, “the emphasis is on the process of knowledge construction by the social group and the intersubjectivity established through the interaction of the group” (p.299). It is within these elements, the interaction between the individual and her community, the teacher and her context and culture, that I place my dissertation research. This interplay between context, culture in the construction of knowledge gave a strong foundation for me to interpret interactions between teachers and their reading assessment practices within a response to intervention framework. This perspective helped me fill the need to take a closer look at teachers, their backgrounds, and their perceptions so researchers and practitioners may gain more insight into this phenomenon (von Glaserfeld, 1996; Phillips, 1995). Further, from this theoretical framework I comfortably described and explained elementary level general education teacher’s reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Method

My purpose was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers’ assessment practices within the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework within the context of their everyday lived experience. I used phenomenology as my methodological perspective. In order to conduct a phenomenological study, a researcher must first have an intimate, passionate connection to the topic (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) writes, “in order to make a beginning, the phenomenologist must ask: What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation” (van Manen, p. 41). In fact, the first criteria Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) suggest for planning and conducting a phenomenological investigation is that researchers identify “a topic of personal and social significance” (p.495) and

that the topic be one that engages “her both intellectually and emotionally” (p. 465) because data is collected on both the researcher’s and participant’s experience of the phenomenon.

This brings me to my ultimate goal for my dissertation research and, as van Manen (1990) describes, the overall task and purpose of phenomenological research; “to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience” (p.41). This, in my case, was to use the concrete, day-to-day details of elementary general education teachers’ reading assessment practices, to interpret the essence or nature (van Manen, 1990) of this phenomenon. From these lived experiences, I created a textual interpretation of the phenomenon. In other words, each data source helped me create a lived experience description, through development of clustered themes and a composite narrative drawn across all participants, which includes a thick, rich description of the phenomenon and a thorough, personal reflective examination (van Manen, 1990).

My Connection and Personal Interest in this Study

Earlier in this chapter I describe the social significance of illuminating elementary education teachers’ reading assessment practices within the RTI framework. Here I present the personal significance these phenomena hold for me. For me, assessment, the process of gathering information (data) for stakeholders’ use in order to determine the sequence of curriculum content (standards), evidence of student academic growth, professional development needs, and resource allocation (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008), has a deep personal and social connection. Assessment use has literally swirled and whirled about me my entire life. According to psychological and achievement test data, I have little visual memory and reverse the order of letters and numbers” (Mirlenbrink Bombly, 2011, p. 30). This is most likely the result of a traumatic brain injury incurred through a car accident when I was 18 months old. It took me

many years (until my third year of doctoral study) before I came to realize my lack of visual memory, letter and number reversal, and 10 year stint in special education classes, means there is nothing inherently wrong with me. An entry in my personal journal from March 3, 2010 reflects this revelation.

Until recently, specific learning disabilities (my diagnosis)...eligibility was based upon a discrepancy model. That means there must be something inherently wrong, deleted, missing or just plain messed up with the individual. External circumstances (Self, text(s) and contexts(s)) were not necessarily taken into account. Put plainly, something must be wrong with the child. Now yes, I do reverse the order of letters and numbers, and I have a very difficult time recalling visual memories. But, does that mean that there is something wrong with me? NO! It just means that I am different.So, here is my point. There is nothing wrong with that. There should be no shame in that. Heck, having the ability to reverse or transpose the order of letters and numbers has made me who I am. And yes, I still believe, to the core of by being, that I can do things.

Research on assessment and its use as a disability diagnostic tool in a discrepancy model has suggested this perception may be the case in many other instances as well (Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Winzer, 1993; Yell, 2006; Yesseldyke, 2001). My years in special education and my eventual mainstream back into general education made me want to become a special education teacher. I did not, and still do not want, a child with a disability to have to feel pain or struggle unnecessarily while trying to learn (Mirlenbrink Bombly, 2011).

Assessment also helped shape and direct my undergraduate teacher education preparation. At this time, I took both Measurement for Teachers (offered through the Department of Educational Measurement & Research) and Educational Assessment (offered through the

Department of Special Education). I remember saying to myself, “Finally, AMEN! here is something that I can sink my teeth into.” I felt these courses were the link I needed in order to know when and how students with disabilities would make progress and eventually succeed in the general education classroom. I fell in love with assessment use. This love pushed me toward more advanced degrees. First it was a master’s in educational leadership. I then followed this with doctoral study in Special Education with an emphasis in evaluation and assessment.

Assessment again swirled and whirled about me in my role as a school district supervisor of research and evaluation. My primary responsibilities for this job included implementation of an online assessment tool and the development of common end-of-semester high school course exams. The best and worst part of this job was when I went into schools to directly work with teachers. Together teachers and I would review classroom level assessment data and then work on how to make instructional changes based upon those data. I rejoiced with teachers when we would see improvement in students originally perceived as not paying attention or just not understanding content. I felt defeat and discouragement when I would hear a teacher say, “I don’t test. Testing takes up too much instructional time. And, these kids need all of the instructional time they can get.”

Comments like this made me assume teachers did not necessarily understand the differences between a test and assessment. I also felt surprise and worry when special and general education teachers would ask questions such as, “I have all of these data, now what? I cannot make sense of it all!” Or, some teachers would even say things such as, “I do not have to worry about that. The special education teacher will take care of assessment stuff.” I had to ask myself; what really goes on the classroom with regard to assessment and decision making? Because this question was so much a part of my daily lived experience, this topic and this

research has become important to me. Why? Because, behind each of these teacher remarks and behind the assumptions and biases I bring with me, there is a child, her potential academic progress and her developing perception of herself.

Implications

My dissertation research may help elementary general education teachers improve, refine and or reflect on reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter I described the need for a study that describes and explains elementary level general education teachers' reading assessment practices. I began with my personal and professional connection to this research when I present a vignette about my own classroom assessment practices. Within the rationale, I described how researchers know what quality assessment looks like, how to put it in place, and that it works. However, what may be missing,, what researchers may not know is what it looks like from a teacher's perspective in the changed context of IDEA (2004), NCLB (2004), and RTI.

In Chapter Two, I review relevant literature on both the context and culture of assessment. In the section "Context of Assessment," I describe the historical impact of assessment on education. In other words, I address the why and how of how schools chose to implement the RTI framework and then connect this information to NCLB (2004) legislation. Within the section entitled "Culture of Assessment," I address details of classroom assessment and assessment literacy with regard to the impact on practice. I detail the connections between assessment and the everyday lives of teachers' work and a perceived gap in literature on teachers' assessment knowledge and use.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The purpose of my dissertation research was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Thus, my research questions about these teachers were:

1. What is the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?

The purpose and research questions led me to the following categories of literature I defined as the "Context of Assessment" and the "Culture of Assessment." The selection and development of these categories help me continue to paint the picture of assessment and the need to explore general education teachers' reading assessment practices.

Within the section entitled "Context of Assessment," I describe the impact of assessment on special education. In other words, I address the why and how of how schools chose to implement the RTI framework and then connect this information to NCLB (2004) legislation. Within the section entitled "Culture of Assessment," I address details of classroom assessment and assessment literacy with regard to the impact on practice. Of importance within this section, I detail the connections between assessment and the everyday lives of teachers' work. I also address the perceived gap in literature on teachers' assessment knowledge and use.

Context of Assessment

I summarize the conception and progression of special education and its relation to assessment in one simple phrase: from access to outcomes. Students in need of special education services, as well as the services themselves, have historically been in the margin of the everyday public school life (Dorn, 2002). For example, Winzer (1993) writes, “discovering who was taught, and when and how, is related far more to social, political, legislative, economic, and religious forces at work in a society than it is to the unique social and educational needs of disabled persons” (p. xi). Black and Wiliam (2010), leaders in the field of classroom assessment, state how they now better understand that the heart of assessment and resulting instruction may be “that interactive dialogue, between teacher and learners and between learners themselves” (p.47). Therefore, what has this context of both assessment and special education been like? This context came from a perspective of assessment for identification, and transitioned into a context of assessment for both instruction and intervention (Prasse, 2006).

Assessment for Identification

In order for me to address the context of assessment for the identification of disability, I must first start with the initial intent and purpose behind PL- 94-142 and its subsequent reauthorizations (IDEA, 1997; IDEA, 2004). According to Prasse (2006) the intent and purpose of IDEA was to “provide access to equal education opportunity for children with disabilities who had systematically been excluded from the nation’s public school” (p.8). In order to do this, children with disabilities needed, first and foremost, to be found by educators (Prasse, 2006). Once found, these children needed an identifiable disability, a label, in order to provide education opportunity. Assessment became the method of choice for determination of disability (Yell, 2006). In order to accomplish identification of disability, legislators created a categorical approach to define disability and stipulated that educators use used what Prasse (2006) calls a

"differential diagnosis" (p. 8). The most objective way to accomplish this was with the use of norm-referenced tests.

Of particular interest to my study and the process of teacher assessment practices are the category and eligibility criteria for specific learning disability (SLD). Here, assessment, usually performed by a trained psychologist, was the way to disability identification (Nolet, 2006). For the SLD category, children had to have an innate, significant discrepancy between overall intelligence quotient (IQ) and academic achievement as well as have an innate processing disorder (Shepard, Smith, & Vojir, 1983; Yell, M. 2006). Due to this type of assessment use, there was not always a real connection between teachers' assessment practices, classroom instruction and child specific academic interventions because categorical groups of children were identified based on presumed etiology and programs were developed for them (Shinn, Good, Parker, 1999; Townsend, 2002; Winzer, 1993). Special education and its' students became separate, distinct, and more often than not, ignored as a part of public schooling (Prasse, 2006; Yell, Rogers, Lodge Rogers, 1998). This is of course when the context of assessment and special education hit challenges as it transitioned into assessment for both instruction and intervention. Two of these challenges are the use of a differential or discrepancy model for special education eligibility and overrepresentation of minority children identified as those with a disability (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Townsend, 2002; Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Differential/Discrepancy Model for Special Education Eligibility

Reasons for the use of a differential/discrepancy model for special education eligibility may stem from an overreliance on the use of norm-referenced tests for eligibility decisions, the idea that intelligence (IQ) is in-born or intrinsic to an individual (Gould, 1996), and historically low teacher expectations of student academic achievement (Oakes, 1994). Nationally the

number of children with a disability has continued to steadily increase (Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011) The number of children found eligible for the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) category also increased exponentially between 1980 and 2000 and remained nearly the same from 2004 and 2008 (Hussar, et al., 2011). Examples of this within the literature are replete (Francis, Espy, Rourke, Fletcher, 1991; Yessledyke, 2001) and show this idea of intelligence and disability as innate characteristics going very deep within the context of public education. Yesseldkye (2001) asked teachers to watch a video of children receiving instruction in a classroom and to identify which children had a disability. What the teachers did not know is, according to Yesseldyke (2001), the classroom was full of “normal students engaging in normal activity” (Yesseldyke, 2001, p.300). However, these teachers still saw and identified behaviors characteristic of disability and were led to misidentification of these children because of, “stereotypical expectations resulting from assignment of labels” (p. 301).

Francis, Espy, Rourke and Fletcher’s (1991) in their critical analysis on the validity of intelligence test scores for defining learning disability conclude, “agencies responsible for dealing with the implications of such definitions need to recast their respective nets in establishing diagnostic criteria for determining eligibility for services” (Francis, et al., p. 41). For them, the conclusion that disability definitions need to be built upon more than a discrepancy score is important. Each group of children in their study had significant differences in the pattern of responses on neuropsychological test scores. Hence, Francis, et al. (1991) suggest that what may prompt these differences is the statistical correlation between standard IQ and achievement tests. Francis, et al. (1991) writes:

The very nature of the IQ-achievement discrepancy score criterion dictates that high-IQ children will be identified by this definition when the discrepancy is not adjusted for the

correlation between IQ and achievement. It should also be noted that the group showing the poorest performance in these verbal scale profiles is not eligible for special services in many states and provinces because those jurisdictions do not adjust for the correlation between achievement and IQ. (Francis, et al., 1991, p. 41)

Further evidence of challenges with the deficit model of disability eligibility is present in the work of Peterson and Shinn (2002). They report that only one of three particular approaches used for the identification of disability, the intra-individual achievement discrepancy model (IAD), the absolute achievement discrepancy model (AAD) and the relative achievement discrepancy model (RAD), only RAD was satisfactory. Peterson and Shinn (2002) found that both IAD and AAD were not satisfactory or adequate for identification of disability. These models, unlike RAD, placed the reason for deficit on the child while RAD, an ecological and systemic model proved the most satisfactory for identification of disability. With RAD, between 88% and 92% of students were also identified through the other traditional models of disability eligibility. However, there were no significant differences in the proportion of students identified as a direct result of a child's past academic achievement as is the case with the IAD and AAD models. This suggests that the personal and educational context of a child play a part in disability eligibility decisions.

Overrepresentation of Minority Students in Special Education

It may be of little wonder that a perception of disability as in-born to an individual carried over into the second challenge, overrepresentation of minority children in special education. Overrepresentation occurs when minority groups such as African Americans or Latinos are "represented in such programs [special education] in a greater percentage than their percentage in the school population as a whole" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 602). Examples of this

overrepresentation date back nearly four decades (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Reasons for overrepresentation of minorities in special education may also stem from historically low teacher and or related school personnel expectations (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994) and the tendency of standardized test scores demonstrating bias toward minorities (Niell & Medina, 1989; Townsend, 2002; Wicherts & Dolan, 2010). Further, Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009) propose that school counselors, special and general educators still identify “misinterpretation of assessment results” (p. 237) as a reason for a statistically significant overrepresentation of African Americans in special education programs.

A closer look at these issues brings readers to the work of both Artiles and Trent, (1994), and Zhang and Katsiyannis, (2002). Both sets of researchers present an historical perspective of overrepresentation. Artiles and Trent (1994) do this through a review of both Dunn’s (1968) and Deno’s (1970) seminal works on overrepresentation patterns and pathology as a means of disability identification while Zhang and Katsiyannis (2002) do this through a statistical analysis of state and federal government records. Interestingly, both groups of researchers ask why the problem of overrepresentation is still prevalent at the time of their respective publications (1994 and 2002). Still other researchers, Harry and Anderson (1994), trace the historical, social, and cultural perspective of overrepresentation. Harry and Anderson (1994) present summaries of landmark U. S. Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954), *Johnson v. San Francisco Unified School District* (1974), and *Larry P. et al. v. Riles et al.* (1979). They suggest that their historical social, and cultural perspective of overrepresentation requires a call for educators to explore the quality of instruction prior to a child’s placement in special education, the perceptions behind a decision to refer a child for

special education services, and the quality of instruction a child may receive within a special education setting. Most notably, Harry and Anderson (1994) suggest that educators “conduct assessments for the purpose of guiding instruction rather than determining program eligibility” (p. 615).

At this same time, researchers such as Niell and Medina (1989) inform and warn both researchers and practitioners with examples of bias within standardized testing toward students and the impact this may have on academic progress. Bias occurs when scores from a standardized test demonstrate statistical error, which is systematic rather than random error and therefore affects different groups of test takers differently (Joint Committee on Standards for Psychological Testing of the American Educational Research Association, 1999). Of particular interest for this review of literature are the implications Niell and Medina (1989) suggest for minority students’ academic achievement and goal setting as well as the impact bias may have on student progress and educational goals. Niell and Medina (1989) write, “by controlling or compelling student placement in various educational programs, standardized tests perpetuate and even exacerbate existing inequities in educational services, particularly for minority students” (p. 693). For example, they note how in the mid 1980’s nearly 50% of African American five year olds from California had to receive remedial service prior to kindergarten based upon the score from a standardized test.

Thirteen years later Townsend (2002) also writes about score bias and how it further harms African American students who are already overrepresented in remedial and special education classes. This is compelling because Townsend (2002) writes about the results of poor performance for minority, specifically African American students, which may stem from this bias. She concludes that African Americans who do not score well on standardized tests may also

develop an unhealthy perception of their identity and membership as an African American. In fact, Wicherts and Dolan (2010), in their study on factors which lead to measurement invariance within confirmatory factor analysis, write how without a statistical test of equality over groups a conclusions that bias within scores of intelligence (IQ) toward minorities is small when it is actually severe (p. 39).

Hence, what may have been missing from the context of assessment, and what may have also been a potential cause of both the deficit model of disability eligibility and overrepresentation of minorities, is a perceived lack of a systemic, multifaceted view of both the child and his or her educational context (Winzer, 1993). This is, until recommendations from the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education in 2002 and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 ushered in an effort to address the problem of over-identification as well as the pathologizing impact of assessment by introducing the option for schools to adopt "early interventions" also known as response to intervention (RTI) (Prasse, 2006; Yell, Rogers, & Lodge Rogers, 1998; Winzer, 1993). Such legislation did this by requiring schools to take a systemic look at both the child and educational context.

Assessment for Instruction and Intervention

Harry and Klinger (2007) as cited in Reid and Valle (2004) ask a question. "So why can't we see students' difficulties as 'human variation rather than pathology' " (p. 16) when exploring the possibility of disability? This is not a new question, as Samuel A. Kirk also asked something quite similar during early 20th century (Danforth, 2010). Danforth (2009) tells a poignant story of then graduate student, Samuel A. Kirk, the eventual father of learning disabilities, and a 10 year-old inmate of an institution for delinquent children. The two sit on the cold, hard tiled hallway whispering as the child learns to read. They whisper for fear of being discovered by

facility staff. It was, after all, 1929. Therefore, any child in such an institution was a “mental defective” (Danforth, 2009, p.1). Educational experiences for such children were few (Winzer, 1993). From this experience, Kirk asked how a teacher might effectively figure out how to best help a child (Danforth, 2009). This change in a perspective of in-born disability to a systemic look at both child and educational context through assessment, instruction and intervention is what IDEA 2004 intends (Prasse, 2006). This shift may also be what helped guide the context of assessment toward assessment for instruction and intervention and can be seen in federal legislation (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2002), changes in special education eligibility, and resulting actions such as implementation of an RTI framework within schools (Nolet, 2006).

IDEA 2004 and Response to Intervention

IDEA 2004 permits the use of data gathered from teachers’ use of scientifically based interventions, such as educational programs or products recommended on the Institute of Education Sciences’ What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>). These data may be used for both eligibility decisions for the SLD category (34 CRF §300.307-309) and to assist any student in the general education classroom who may not meet state standards (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007). A scientifically based intervention is an educational program or product, which has been examined using methodology based upon the definition of research suggested by the Educational Sciences Reform Act (2002). Hence, states and their respective school districts are not required to use a discrepancy model for identification of disability and now in place across the nation.

Berkeley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, and Saunders (2009), in their qualitative analysis of State level Department of Education Websites and interviews with State level RTI representatives, report in 2007 that only seven of the 50 states (Alabama, Alaska, Kentucky,

Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, and South Carolina) had some form of RTI in place and that the remaining states were either in a discovery or pilot implementation stage. More recent research (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008) also indicates that a full picture of RTI implementation in all 50 states is incomplete. However, one can find information about various state RTI frameworks through the National Center on Response to Intervention (<http://www.rti4success.org/>). This means that departments of education nationwide are now implementing a response to intervention framework for the purpose of monitoring student progress and increasing student academic and behavioral needs. Schools in these states participate in the “systematic use of assessment data to most efficiently allocate resources in order to enhance student learning for all students and to effectively identify those who are eligible for special education services” (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007, p. 4) which is the RTI framework. This also means assessment is at the very center, or crux, of an RTI framework (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldke, 2005).

It is important to further stress that RTI takes place in the general education classroom is a whole school as opposed to a special education initiative (Hazelkorn, Boucholz, Goodman, & Duffy, 2011). Some of the very first uses of an RTI framework in K-12 settings were by general educators (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2005). In these instances, the RTI framework was a way to look at school-wide data in order to provide interventions for students who struggle to meet academic expectations (Hazelkorn, Boucholz, Goodman, & Duffy, 2011; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2005). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) suggested that an RTI framework could also serve as an effective and efficient way to help identify children who do not make academic progress because of a learning disability. Moreover, Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) suggested that RTI could serve as a means to help identify children who may fall under the SLD

disability category (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006) because it is a break from a discrepancy or even a wait-to-fail model. Instead, an academic intervention, “a trial of fixed duration (e.g., 10-15 weeks) delivered in a small group or individually” (p. 95) and resulting data on student performance help make eligibility decisions.

One also can see this suggestion reflected in IDEA (2004). The law clearly specifies that criteria for the determination of SLD may not, in any instance, be based solely on a discrepancy score between intelligence and achievement. Determination of eligibility for SLD must also include a child’s responses to scientifically based interventions, and the use of data from classroom observations, curriculum-based measurement and parental input (34 CRF §300.307-309). Further, 15% of federal special education dollars are allocated for use in the general education population (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). These funds are used to frontload special education resources in general education so that, “fewer children will require special education on the backend” (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007, p. 130). One thing the IDEA (2004) law does not specify is a specific format, process, or formula for the implementation and continuation of an RTI framework (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007). In other words, researchers and practitioners alike have flexibility in how they choose to explore and or implement an RTI framework (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007).

Foundations of Response-to-Intervention Frameworks

The foundation of response to intervention frameworks is not new. Benjamin S. Bloom’s learning for mastery (1968) and subsequent mastery learning (1974) is similar (Guskey, 2007). According to Guskey (2007), Bloom suggested that teachers use assessment differently. Instead of summative or punitive grading, he suggested teachers should use assessment to help create quality intensive instruction and to provide students with a second chance to demonstrate their

learning (Guskey, 2007). This type of assessment use, corrective instruction and second chances are similar to the big ideas of an RTI framework.

According to Bender and Shores (2007), the real push behind RTI began with studies by Bergan (1977), Deno and Mirkin (1977) and Heller et al. (1982). These studies specifically employed the steps of defining a problem, developing specific, measurable goals and corresponding interventions, monitoring student progress through research-based interventions, and determining whether to continue or cease interventions based upon progress toward goals (p. 4). Bender and Shores (2007) also stress how RTI became a real option for the determination of specific learning disabilities when Marston (2005) indicated how research studies up to that time matched the recommendations presented within the “Common Ground Report” written by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (p.5). Further, the use of research-based interventions later became part of the eligibility criteria for specific learning disabilities within the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA.

Researchers and practitioners have flexibility in how they choose to explore and implement an RTI framework (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007). Hence, I need to stress that there are various models of RTI frameworks used by school districts (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldke, 2005). Two of the most commonly used include the standard treatment protocol (STP) and the problem solving model (PSM) (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007). Both the STP and PMS models have similar characteristics. These characteristics include:

1. A three tier approach of increasingly intensified interventions;
2. Variations in the frequency of interventions;
3. Individualized, differentiated curriculum; and

4. Instruction and assessment performed by others (i.e., special education teachers, specialists, or other instructional personnel) in conjunction with general education teachers (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs, 2007).

However, both models vary in initial approach. STP is standardized in order to provide an added measure of quality control to help insure fidelity of implementation and tends to be used more in research settings (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003). PSM is far from standardized (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2007). It is characterized by a collaborative, data-based decision making process which includes “a four-stage process comprising problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation” (Fuchs, et al., 2003, p. 160). Christ, Burns, and Yessldyke (2005) suggest that the most fundamental differences between STP and PSM are both the frequency and the use of assessment data to monitor student progress. For them assessment and intervention occurs within the STP model less frequently and has a more broad purpose of overall program or instructional effectiveness. While, on the other hand, the frequency and depth of assessment within the PSM model varies in order to determine the level of instruction and assessment needed in order to foster individual student achievement (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldke, 2005). This focus on collaboration of stakeholders (educational professionals and parents and systemic use by practitioners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Berkeley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, & Saunders, 2009) within the PSM model may be a closer fit with IDEA 2004 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006) and the purpose of this research.

RTI problem solving model. There are many definitions (National Research Council on Learning Disabilities, 2005; Christ, Burns, & Yesseldyke, 2005) of RTI PMS available. For example, the National Research Council on Learning Disabilities (2005) states that there is no

universal model and that RTI is understood to be a tiered model of instruction and interventions used to help students who may struggle with the curriculum. Chris, Burns, and Yesseldyke (2005) define response to intervention as, any set of activities designed to evaluate the affect of instruction, or intervention, on student achievement. RTI is an approach to evaluate a student's response to an ecological context of instruction and/or intervention, (p.2). More recently, the Florida Department of Education, within its support manual, *Guiding tools for instructional problem solving* (GTIPS), defines problem solving and response to intervention as, "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important instructional decisions. PS-RtI involves the systematic use of assessment data to most efficiently allocate resources in order to improve learning for all students, "(p. 5). However, in order fit the purpose of my research, which is to describe and explain elementary level general education teachers' reading assessment practices within a Response to Intervention Framework, I must describe and explain the RTI PSM model of the state and school district in which I plan to research. Therefore, for my study, the location of the school district plays a significant role because the RTI model a given state and school district uses is based on the needs of the students in that particular state, district, school, and classroom (Christ, et al, 2005; Personal communication with school district personnel 12/8/11). Hence, the definition of the RTI PMS framework I use is the definition used by the school district in which I propose to research. For this district, RTI PMS is:

a multi-tiered system of supports designed to provide high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs, using learning rate over time and level of performance to inform instructional decisions. It involves the systematic use of

assessment data to inform instructional decisions and efficiently allocate resources to improve learning for all students (Haithcock, 2011, p. 2).

The components of this school districts RTI PMS model include:

1. quality, research-based instruction in the general education setting,
2. continual progress monitoring,
3. universal screenings [assessment] of all students,
4. a three-tiered approach of increasingly intensified interventions, and
5. problem solving applied across each intervention tier.

(Haithcock, 2011, p. 2).

In order to implement this RTI PMS model, school personnel first ask, “What is the problem?” (Haithcock, 2011, p.2) and continue through a cyclical, iterative process in which they continue to ask, “what are we going to do about it?... [and] is it working?” (Haithcock, 2011, p.2). This PSM RTI requires schools to:

1. Define the problem by determining the discrepancy between what is expected and what is occurring. Ask, ‘What’s the problem?’
2. Analyze the problem using data to determine why the discrepancy is occurring. Ask, ‘Why is this taking place?’
3. Establish a student performance goal, develop an intervention plan to address the goal, describe how student progress will be monitored, and identify how integrity of implementation will be ensured. Ask, ‘What are we going to do about it?,’ and
4. Monitor student response to the intervention, and use the process-monitoring data to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Ask, ‘is it working?’ If not, who

will the intervention plan be adjusted to better support the student's progress?
(Haithcock, 2011, p. 2).

Here assessment, a process of gathering information (data) for teachers and students use in order to determine the sequence of curriculum content (standards) and determine evidence of student academic growth (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008), is used to answer each question within the problem solving process.

A deeper look at tiered instruction and interventions, as well what they mean within the context of my study, helps show how assessment is the center of an RTI PSM framework. Tiered instruction and intervention (Tier 1) begins with instruction based upon state approved curriculum standards, is research-based, and is provided to all students in the general education classroom (Haithcock, 2011). This instruction and the resulting interventions are progressively intensified at each tier (i.e., Tier 2 and Tier 3) (Haithcock, 2011). Both IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2002) define this as instruction and interventions are grounded in scientifically-based research (IDEA, 2004, 34 CFR §300.52; NCLB, 2002, 9101(37)). Of course, evidence (data) that “the instructional/intervention strategies are effective with students of a similar demographic to that of the student targeted for intervention and for whom the instructional conditions are similar” (Haithcock, 2002, p.1) are collected at each of these tiers.

Within Tier 1 the assessment methods used to determine intervention which occurs in small flexible, and in class groups consists of universal screening and benchmark assessment in core curriculum areas (e.g., Reading and Math). Universal screenings are standardized tests designed to get a snapshot of group performance. Benchmark assessment is any “formal structured tests that typically do not provide the level of detail needed for appropriate instructional correctiveness” (McMillan, 2007, p. 3.). The overarching goal of this first tier is for

80 to 85% of all students to respond to instruction (Haithcock, 2011). By contrast, instruction, interventions and assessment within Tier 2 is more frequent, intense, and given as an addition to what is done within Tier 1 (Haithcock, 2011).

For this particular school district, assessment at Tier 2 includes universal screening, benchmark testing, and monthly progress monitoring. These increased assessment, instruction and intervention are for a much smaller group, usually 10-15% of the overall student population and still provided in the general education setting. Accordingly, Tier 3 is the most intense of these levels. Assessment includes everything done within both Tiers 1 and 2, which includes universal screenings, benchmark testing, and monthly progress monitoring with the addition of weekly, or in some instances, daily progress monitoring (Haithcock, 2011). Instruction and intervention at this tier also includes everything done in both Tiers 1 and 2, which includes core instruction, small group instruction and more frequent assessment. However, within Tier 3, instruction, intervention, and assessment is unique. This means these are individualized, given within the general education classroom and only for the 1% to 5% of students who have not made significant progress (Haithcock, 2011). At Tier 3, it is the needs of the child, which always come first. Hence, this school district's model mirrors the intent of IDEA 2004 (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldyke; 2005). For this district, "the context and services to be evaluated in reference to the child's response rather than the child evaluated in reference to the context and service" (Christ, Burns, & Yesseldyke, 2005, p. 7).

A Connection to No Child Left Behind

This relationship between a child's response and the context of educational service is the connection between IDEA (2004), RTI PMS, and the purpose of my study. While many argue that the NCLB (2004) legislation is flawed (Soublis Smith, 2008), it has still been a major

influence in the education of students with disabilities (Hehir, 2008). For the first time in nearly 30 years, students with disabilities are recognized and included in standards-based accountability (Hehir, 2008; NCLB, 2004). In other words, students who have typically been on the margins of daily school life are paid more attention by educators due to their participation in high-stakes testing associated with standards-based accountability reform (Hehir, 2008). Hehir (2008) asserts, “the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform may be the most significant policy advance for these students since the passage of PI-94-142” (Hehir, 2008, p. 174). This is because a child’s response to instruction and interventions as well as the context of their educational service is a break from the perception of disability as in-born and, hence, subject to lower expectations than those held for children without a (Hehir, 2008; Winzer, 1993; Danforth, Solcum, & Dunkle, 2010).

Of course, while inclusion and standards-based accountability is perceived as movement in a positive direction, it also brings significant consequences for students and schools (DeLuca, 2008). These include, but are not limited to, things such as grade promotion/retention and academic remediation for students as well as monetary and or personnel sanctions for schools (DeLuca, 2008). For example, students are often the first group to receive punitive consequences from standards-based accountability systems. These punitive consequences are usually in the form of grade retention or denial of graduation (DeLuca, 2008; McLaughlin, 2010). On the other hand, schools and their faculty progress through a series of increased sanctions based upon failure to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) (DeLuca, 2008; Hehir, 2008; McLaughlin, 2010) For example, after three years of not meeting AYP, school staff may be reassigned, schools and funding may be reduced or removed (Townsend, 2002). What becomes problematic is when children with disabilities “need to become nondisabled in order to be promoted or to

graduate” (Hehir, 2008, p. 148). In other words it is a problem when students with disabilities have only the score on a high stakes test to show what she or he may be able to do or accomplish (Hehir, 2008). This, however, is where RTI PSM steps in as a holistic, systemic approach to looking at both the child and the educational context through the use of assessment within this policy environment. Hence, I want to describe and explain general education teachers’ assessment practices within the context of elementary schools and more specifically within the context of elementary level reading instruction using an RTI framework.

Culture of Assessment

As discussed in Chapter One, the context and culture of assessment have shifted over the last few decades due to the assessment- and standards-based accountability mechanisms of NCLB, IDEA and the RTI framework (Peterson, 2007). According to Hilton (2007), the RTI framework has a significant impact on instructional delivery within the general education classroom because it has changed how students who are at-risk and those with disabilities are served by teachers. In other words, what instruction and assessment looks like, sounds like and feels like is not the same as it was prior to IDEA and NCLB legislation (Hilton, 2007). Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, and Brady (2011) continue this idea when they state, “general education teachers must assess and evaluate students to determine the effectiveness of instruction (p.19). Hence, within this section, I address details of classroom assessment and assessment literacy with regard to their impact on general education teachers’ assessment practices. Again, of importance are the connections I draw between assessment and the everyday lives of teachers’ work and a gap within the literature on teachers’ perceived assessment knowledge and use.

Classroom Assessment

Shepard (2000) defines classroom assessment through her description of what it is not. For her, classroom assessment is not the type of assessment used for accountability (i.e., high-stakes testing and punitive sanctions on students, schools, and districts). Rather, Shepard (2000) writes that classroom assessment is, “the kind of assessment which can be used as a part of instruction to support and enhance learning” (p.4). In particular, classroom assessment is not simply a set of tests teachers use with students. Instead, it is a process of gathering information (data) for teachers’ and students’ use in order to determine the sequence of curriculum content, appropriate to instruction, and evidence of student academic growth (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008). Here the distinction is one of context because assessment is layered and complex (Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2008).

Stiggins (2008) addresses this layering and complexity. He writes, “truly productive assessment systems” (p. 4) recognize different assessment users need and different kinds of assessment information (data) provided at different intervals (frequency) and in different formats (types of assessment methods) (Stiggins, 2008). For him, assessment users are those at the classroom level (teachers and their students), the program level (principals, curriculum specialists, and teacher teams), and the institutional level (superintendents and legislators) (Stiggins, 2008). This means those at the program level need information that answers which academic standards groups of students at a given school master and which instructional programs are in need of improvement (Stiggins, 2008). In order to get these data, program level assessment users need more standardized, periodic, benchmarks such as common course exams or writing samples, given every few weeks at regular intervals (Stiggins, 2008). In contrast, those at the institutional level (superintendents and legislators) need information that answers whether

enough student groups in a given school district master academic standards, and what schools and or school districts, are in need for program improvement (Stiggins, 2008). Like program level assessment users, institutional level users also need standardized assessment methods such as state approved high-stakes competency exams that are often administered only annually (Stiggins, 2008).

Yet, neither program nor institutional assessment data are what classroom level users (teachers and their students) need. Instead of aggregate data on groups of students, schools, districts or states, the unit of analysis in the classroom is the child. Answers to what comes next in the learning process and how each child is either making, or not making academic progress are addressed. According to Stiggins (2008), this information must be gathered continuously and, in large part, under direct teacher control rather than through tests. As Good (2011) puts it, this process should be formative in nature and should reflect assessment *for* learning. If information needed by any of these groups are ignored or are informed by inadequate or substandard assessment methods, the resulting educational decisions are harmful to teachers and their students (p.4) because they cannot make meaningful instructional decisions. Wiliam (2011) drives this point home when he stresses that assessment is not formative if it does not inform instruction. Considering this perspective, formative assessment, or assessment for learning may, in fact, be what classroom assessment is (Brookhart, 2007; McMillan, 2007).

Formative and Summative Uses of Assessment Data

There is no clear distinction between a formative or summative method. There are, however distinctions with regard formative and summative when used to address assessment use (Wiliam, 2011). Scriven (1967) first developed the term “formative” within the context of program evaluation. His definition is in direct contrast to summative program evaluation which

“is conducted after completion of the program (for ongoing programs, this means after stabilization) and *for* the benefit of some *external* audience or decision maker (for example, funding agency, oversight, oversight office, historian, or future possible users” [italics in original] (Scriven, 1991, p. 340). Scriven (1991) writes, formative evaluation, “is conducted *during* the development or improvement of a program or product (or person, and so on) and is conducted, often more than once, *for* the in-house staff of the program *with the intent to improve*” [italics in original] (Scriven, 1991, pp. 168-169). As such, these terms, “formative” and “summative,” made their way into the language of assessment through the work of Bloom’s mastery learning (William, 2011; Guskey, 2007).

The use of data from frequent short-cycle assessment methods initially became known as the formative use of assessment or assessment for learning (William, 2011). Interpretation of these assessment data had the express purpose of informing day to day instructional decision making of both teachers and students in academic subjects such as reading and mathematics (Black & William, 1998; William, 2011). Less frequent, comprehensive assessment measures designed to examine overall learning after instruction is complete are known as summative assessment (Stiggins, 2008). William (2011) suggests that the term formative assessment is no longer accurate. For William (2011), there is no specific distinction between formative and summative assessment or assessment of and for learning. This means there are no formative or summative assessment methods. There are, however, formative and summative uses of data resulting from assessment methods (William, 2011).

The literature is replete with examples of what best practices for assessment should look like as well as examples of when assessment use is effective (Alanzo, Ketterlin-Geller, & Tindal, 2007; Black & William, 2009). Black and William (2009) describe the aspects of formative

assessment in a multi-tiered matrix, which includes three main groups of individuals (a) teachers, (b) peers and (C) learners. At each level assessment information is used to determine; (a) where the learner is going, (b) where the learner is right now, and (c) how to get the learner to his or her next level or goal (p. 8). Further, they highlight five key strategies including; (a) clarification and sharing of both intention and success criteria, (b) design effective discussion and learning activities, which should produce evidence of student understanding or mastery, (c) provide feedback in order to moves student learning forward, (d) use of students as instructional resources for each other, and (e) student ownership of learning. This means students and teachers need to know expectations for academic success from the start, use assessment methods such as antidotal documentation, pre/post testing and teacher observations involving the learner. More specifically, the teacher guides and monitors while students assume responsibility for content and mastery.

Similarly, Stiggins (2004) lays out components of successful formative use of assessment. He too stresses that student success (an increase in academic achievement) is the active engagement of both the teacher and student in data review. For Stiggins (2004), a view of successful formative assessment must have:

1. Teacher understanding of achievement goals standards before instruction takes place;
2. Communication of achievement goals or standards to students at age appropriate levels prior to teaching and learning taking place;
3. Use of data from classroom assessments to assist students in taking ownership for their learning;

4. Translation of assessment data into descriptive versus judgmental feedback in a frequent or timely manner;
5. Administration of frequent assessments where the standard for mastery is held constant so growth can be determined over time; and
6. Active involvement of all stakeholders in communication on student achievement progress.

Alanzo, Ketterlin-Geller and Tindal (2007) summarize another method for the formative use of assessments, curriculum-based measurement (CBM). CBM is a method of setting academic achievement goals and monitoring student progress. CBM was developed by Deno and colleagues during the late 1970's as a way to determine if the use of repeated assessments would assist special education teachers in improving their instructional practices (Deno, 2003). What makes CBM unique is the assessment methods. These methods or measures are a preview and review of academic standards required of students within a given academic year. Teachers develop assessment methods by taking a comprehensive sampling of the existing curriculum (Alanzo, Ketterlin-Geller, & Tindal, 2007). Overall, what may make CBM effective is the direct, teacher matching of classroom instruction and assessment methods based on the day-to-day work of teachers and students.

Practical Applications with Effective use of Assessment

Black and Wiliam (1998) noted that use of assessment produces effect sizes of one-half to one full standard deviation in improving summative assessment scores. Stiggins (2002), detailing the findings of Black and Wiliam (1998) stated:

hypothetically, if assessment *for learning*, ... became standard practice only in classrooms of low-achieving, low-socioeconomic-status students, the achievement gaps that trouble us so deeply today would be erased. I know of no other school improvement innovation that can claim effects of this nature or size.” (p.8)

The effect size gains noted within the Black and Wiliam study were definitely significant. Beyond that, Stiggins (2002) argues that regardless of minority status and disability the formative use of assessments can improve student learning.

To fully appreciate the magnitude of the effect sizes cited above, readers need to understand that a gain of one standard deviation, applied to the middle of the test score distribution on commonly used standardized achievement tests, can yield average gains of more than 30 percentile points, two grade-equivalents, or 100 points on the SAT scale.,,, Gains of this magnitude, if applied to the most recent results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, would have raised a nation in the middle of the pack among the 42 participating countries (where the U.S. is ranked) to the top five. (p. 8)

There are many other experimental studies that also support the formative use of assessment and some date as far back as the late 1980’s. These studies are in direct relation to the assessment practices of special education teachers because they are the study participants. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hamlett (1989) reported that special education teachers who used CBM to develop instructional programs had significantly higher levels of student achievement when compared to special education teachers who implemented CBM practices but did not use the data to make instructional decisions. Fuchs and Fuchs (1990) later reported even more examples of effective formative assessment. They found that when special education teachers received

graphical representations of both overall performance and skill related performance of data gathered through CBM, more specific instructional planning took place and significantly better student achievement was demonstrated when compared to a similar control group. Similarly, Allinder, Bolling, Oats and Gagnon (2000) reported special education teachers using CBM in combination with self-monitoring of personal CBM practices had students with significantly greater academic growth. Self-monitoring could be looked at as a form of CBM for teachers. According to Magg (1999), self-monitoring involves individual recognition of whether a particular behavior is or is not present within daily practices and recoding or collecting data on the occurrence of this behavior resulting in increased student achievement.

Assessment also provides clear and accurate means to provide extra attention and communicate progress to students, parents, and school officials on the progress of all students including minority students and minority students with disabilities. Guskey (2007) noted that what really makes a lasting impact, is what is done with these data after assessment methods are administered. Peterson (2007) echoed this sentiment when quoting a superintendent of a large urban school district: 'data tell you where you are and what's going on. The key is whether or not you use it to make changes' (p. 37).

A more concrete example of effective formative assessment in everyday action comes from Brown (2008). He reported on the following five large urban school districts:

1. Newark Public Schools,
2. Los Angeles Unified School District,
3. Whittier City Schools,
4. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and
5. Lawrence Public Schools.

Each of these school districts both implemented a model of formative assessment and had the foresight to change instructional practices allowing time for teachers and students to make data based teaching and learning decisions. The Los Angeles Unified School District began by implementing a coherent, standard K-8 curriculum throughout the district and regularly scheduled assessments were administered to all students. The district also provided each teacher with additional weekly planning time so that they could collaboratively review and plan instruction based upon formative assessment data (Brown, 2008). Due to these efforts “the average percent of students scoring proficient or advanced across grades 2-5 improved from 30% in 2003 to 35% in 2005. For math, the average percent improved from 43 to 51%” (Brown, 2008, Los Angeles Local District 3 section, para.10).

Newark Public Schools began by reviewing and using scientifically based practices and a classroom based coaching model for teachers called the Instructional Leadership Model. Within this model, the district incorporated a method for reviewing standards, assessments and professional development. The main work was providing teachers with time to cooperatively discuss, plan and make decisions based upon student data (Brown, 2008). These efforts lead to an increase in fourth grade language arts literacy achievement from 52% of students passing the state assessment to 71% passing. Similarly, fourth grade math achievement rose from 34% to 68% passing” (Brown, 2008, Newark Public Schools section, para.2).

Whittier City Schools, like Newark Public Schools, utilized the Instructional Leadership Model. However, Whittier City Schools also created school based assessment teams, strongly encouraged faculty and staff to use data based decision making, implemented a standard curriculum, and matched instructional materials to the standard curriculum. The school based assessment teams within the district took ownership of looking at data for each child within a

particular building (Brown, 2006). Due to these efforts, “in 2005, 10 of the district’s 12 schools met the state-mandated improvement targets on California’s Academic Performance Index compared with only 68 percent of schools statewide” (Brown, 2008, Whittier City Schools section, para.4).

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools did things a little differently. This school district moved funds from its higher performing schools in order to support its lower performing schools. In addition to reducing class size at lower performing schools, it offered teachers graduate school tuition in exchange for two years of service at a low performing school. Interestingly, the district also adopted a formative assessment strategy for all levels and actions carried out within the district. According to Brown (2006) this was called Plan, Do, Check and Act (np). This means that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district developed, regularly administered, and quickly returned results of quarterly benchmark tests. Most notable is that the district also required that both administrators and teachers receive a full day of professional development each month, which was to include training in specific content areas such as reading and math (Brown, 2006). Due to these efforts, percentages of students “in grades 3-8 ... proficient in reading, ... increased from slightly more than 70% in 1999 to about 85% in 2005. For math ...from just under 75% in 1999 to more than 85% in 2005” (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools section, para.9-10).

A last example comes from Lawrence Public Schools. This district began by electing to use a model called *Success for All*. The aim of professional development within the district became teaching teachers how to analyze and use data to make instructional decisions. Teachers now use data to guide and differentiate classroom instruction (Brown, 2007). Due to these efforts, “87 percent of the students in the class of 2005 passed the 10th grade high-stakes

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment system, ...compared to 71 percent of the students in the class of 2003” (Brown, 2008, Lawrence Public Schools section, para.6-7).

Based upon both research and concrete examples of effective use of formative assessment and significant increases in student academic achievement, we already know what works with regard to assessment within classrooms (Wiliam, 2011). However, we still see deficits in student achievement (Stiggins, 2008) as demonstrated by continuing achievement gaps and large proportions of students identified as having a disability (Townsend, 2002; Wiliam, 2011). Stiggins (2008) asserts, “we [researchers] know what teachers and administrators need to know and understand to assess effectively day to day and year to year... [and] what will happen to student learning if educators properly perform assessments” (p. 11). He is far from alone in his assertion (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1986; Natriello, 1987). Yet, reading and math scores have stayed constant over the last few decades (Wiliam, 2011). The achievement gap continues to rise (Stiggins, 2008). However, Stiggins (2008) goes on to suggest that because of pressures from external accountability, for example, high-stakes testing, both teachers and respective policy makers are not given the opportunity to learn to assess in a productive manner (Stiggins, 2008). He suggests that what is needed is a dose of assessment literacy (Stiggins, 2008).

Assessment Literacy

Assessment Literacy refers to stakeholder’ abilities to choose, administer, interpret and recognize instructional, ethical, and legal implications of assessment (Black, et al., 2004). For the purpose of my study, stakeholders include, but are not limited to, district and school personnel, teachers, students, and parents. A call for studies, which would explore the assessment needs, specifically teachers’ assessment knowledge and use, began in the late 1980’s (AFT, NCME & NEA, 1990). In response, the AFT, NCME and the NEA worked together in order to develop

the previously described Standards for Teacher Competence in Student Assessment (AFT, NCME & NEA, 1990) (Appendix A). Several studies during the 1990's and early 2000's addressed this topic from the perspective of the 1990 standards (Plake, Impara, & Fager, 1993; Mertler, 2003; Mertler, 2004; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Findings from these studies suggest that for teachers, both pre- and in-service, assessment knowledge and use may be either an unknown or an area in which they are uncomfortable. These findings are of importance because 10 years later Popham (2009) called for a continued examination of the assessment literacy of teachers. He based his statement on the current accountability context of the No Child Left Behind Act (2004), the increased use of inclusionary practices (Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007), and the changes to initial eligibility criteria for the specific learning disability category (Yell, 2006). For Popham (2009), assessment literacy is not faddish. It is fundamental to successful teaching and learning.

A Perceived Gap Between Assessment Knowledge and Use

Ogan-Bekiroulu and Akkoc (2009) write about how one's knowledge is demonstrated through skill. Hence, I must describe the extent to which assessment literacy skills are present in field/practical settings. Few studies explore this from the perspective of in-service teachers (Coffee, Sato, & Thiebault, 2005; Mbelani, 2008; Harrison, 2005). These unique studies on assessment use present perspectives from across the globe, including South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States and help give a glimpse into teachers' accounts of assessment use. Notably, most of this research is contextualized in pre-service education. Relevance of these pre-service studies to this review of literature rests in the knowledge and assessment use pre-service teachers may bring to their future classroom practice (Ogan-Bekiroulu & Akkoc, 2009).

In-service. Coffee, Sato, and Theibault (2005) conducted a four-year project designed to explore how two U.S. teachers, after receiving training in formative uses of assessment, change their daily environment in order to create conditions necessary for assessment that would support student learning. Researchers' used questions such as "What are teachers' assessment practices? ... [and] How do teachers actually improve their day-by-day assessment efforts to enhance students' learning?" (p. 196). They found that in order for any sustained change in practice to occur, programs and policies must take into account teachers' individual "priorities, visions, and contexts" (p. 182). Harrison (2005) also studied teachers' perspectives on assessment. Harrison (2005) found that secondary science and secondary English teachers from the UK were better able to implement changes in assessment practices when they were able to share what they were doing within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Mbelain (2008) adds another dimension to these in-service studies. He uses action research consisting of a critical self-reflection of his own assessment practices following the apartheid period of South Africa's history with students from his grade 10 English classroom. Mbelain (2008) addressed his three research questions, (1) What went well?; (2) What did not go well?; and (3) What needed to be improved if the same lesson were to be taught in the future?" (p. 102). He found that his approach to assessment was teacher centered. For example, Mbelain (2008) relied heavily on questioning and the use of rubrics as a means of student feedback and found that he needed a paradigm shift to more learner-centered assessment uses.

Pre-service. Two relevant studies, which explore assessment knowledge and use within the context of pre-service teacher education, are Campbell and Evans (2000) and Graham (2005). Campbell and Evans (2000) explored the assessment practices of undergraduate pre-service teachers within their field/practica setting after they had completed a course on educational

measurement. They used a sample of 309 lesson plans from 46 elementary and 19 secondary pre-service teachers and analyzed these lesson plans with a structured rubric similar to a modified checklist. The five specific areas analyzed were:

1. plans for assessment;
2. method of assessment;
3. learning goals/objectives;
4. degree of match between learning goals/objectives and assessment methods; and
5. inclusion of a scoring rubric for consistent scoring.

Campbell and Evans (2000) reported that of the 309 lesson plans, 59 did not identify or even mention an assessment method and only 89 provided a hardcopy of the proposed assessment method or a description of the stated method. Thirty-two of the lesson plans did not contain learning goals/objectives or an assessment method and none of the lesson plans included a table of specifications linking the learning goals/objectives to the assessment method. However, 25 of the plans allowed for indirect alignment due to presence of instructional objectives. Further, the most frequently used assessment method was paper-pencil, objective type tests as indicated by the 139 of 250 lesson plans containing assessments. Less frequent was oral query defined as “assessments required specific pupil response(s) to pre-service teacher queries from which general impressions of overall student achievement were drawn” (p.352), as indicated by the fact that only four out of the 250 lesson plans contained formal assessments. Only eight lesson plans contained a complete scoring rubric. Overall, Campbell and Evans (2000) reported 88% of the assessments within the lesson plans did not “demonstrate pre-service teachers’ appropriate use of measurement principles” (p. 353) and the lack of scoring rubrics reduced confidence in pre-service teachers’ inferences about achievement. Further, data from lesson plans indicated pre-

service teachers were able to demonstrate limited knowledge of technical aspects of assessment, e.g., test construction, but not the more theoretical aspects of reliability and validity. An important implication suggested by Campbell and Evans (2000) was that failure to implement assessment in the field/practical setting may not be the result of lack of knowledge but rather a relative “abstractness of reliability and validity” (p. 354) rather than the more “concrete, technical aspects...such as test and item construction” (p. 354).

Similar to the Campbell and Evans (2002) study, Graham (2005) also examined assessment practice based upon assessment knowledge. The purpose of the Graham (2005) study was to examine how both assessment theory and practice change as a result of field/practical setting experience. This two-year study included a sample of 38 pre-service secondary English teachers. The overarching research question was: “how do the working assessment theories and practices of pre-service teachers change in the enactment of those theories and practices in mentored learning environments?” (p. 610). Sub questions examined the following five areas:

1. prior assessment beliefs;
2. conscious changes to assessment practice;
3. influences on changes;
4. overall assessment ability; and
5. unresolved concerns.

Participants were asked to respond in writing to five individual prompts each examining one of the five sub questions and to provide evidence or artifacts to support the writing if possible.

According to Graham (2005) coding began without any predetermined themes. Emerging codes were discussed with colleagues; intra-rater agreement was not reported.

Findings for prior assessment beliefs indicated many of the assessment concepts presented within the classroom setting were previously foreign to the pre-service teachers and reasoning for using one method over another was arbitrary. Data for conscious changes to assessment practice indicated the pre-service teachers were now aware of the many forms assessment takes and utilized these when applicable. The findings for influences on changes indicated that the majority of changes were directly related to modeling by the mentor [cooperating/supervising] teacher. Those for overall assessment ability indicated the pre-service teachers could refine, rewrite, and question the alignment of goals and objectives to assessment methods. Lastly, results for unresolved concerns suggest that what the pre-service teachers experienced in the larger context of their field/practical setting did not always match the assessment training provided through the teacher preparation program. Graham's (2005) recommendations include careful selection and training of mentor teachers, making classroom assessment the focal point of all campus and field/practical setting training, and encouraging assessment professional development for college faculty.

Conclusions

Key findings from this review of literature suggest that the use of assessment from the perspective of the teacher is limited. Further, in the current accountability context of NCLB (2002), the requirement for frequent monitoring of academic progress through IDEA (2004), and the perceived uncertainty and or lack of teachers' assessment literacy (Popham, 2004; Popham, 2006), a rich description and explanation of general education teachers' assessment practices would address a critical gap in the literature. Thus, the purpose of my dissertation study was to describe and explain elementary level general education teachers' reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed relevant literature on both the context and culture of assessment. In the section “Context of Assessment,” I described the historical impact of assessment on education. In other words, I addressed the why and how of how schools chose to implement the RTI framework and then connect this information to NCLB (2004) legislation. Within the section entitled “Culture of Assessment,” I addressed details of classroom assessment and assessment literacy with regard to the impact on practice. I also detailed the connections between assessment and the everyday lives of teachers’ work paired with a perceived gap in literature on teachers’ assessment knowledge and use.

In Chapter Three I describe my theoretical framework, social constructivism (Twomey Fosnot, 1996; von Glasersfeld, 1995; von Glasersfeld, 1996). I also describe how this framework fits both the purpose and research questions of my study. I then detail the method and techniques I will use to complete my research. I specifically address participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. To wrap up the chapter, I include discussion about the pilot study I carried out and the very important lessons I learned along the way.

Chapter Three

Method

The purpose of my research was to describe elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework and layered within the context of their everyday lived experiences. I used phenomenology (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) as the undergirding methodological lens of my study. The research questions, which guided me were:

1. What is the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?

Theoretical Framework

Research on teacher's assessment practices over the last few decades has fallen into three overarching theoretical frameworks (Brookhart, 2004). These include theories from psychology with a focus on motivation and disposition; theories of learning with a focus on application of assessment to learning, and theories from measurement with a focus on specific components of assessment such as score reliability and validity (Shepard, 2009). Survey research, the prevailing method associated with these theoretical frameworks and resulting research (Brookhart, 2004; Fernandez, 2009; Shepard, 2009) resulted in studies where data are seldom collected directly from classroom settings. This means survey research, through the very nature of the method,

does not always allow a firsthand, personal account of, as Fernandez (2009) puts it, “tasks, students, teachers, processes and results” (p. 87). As Brookhart (2004) points out, researchers may have simply forgotten the classroom. Brookhart (2004) also suggests that this forgetfulness should be addressed by taking a cross-disciplinary look at theories and methods in order to broaden perspectives and begin “pressing at the edges of theory and exploring intersections should contribute to richer understanding” (Brookhart, 2004, p. 455). Therefore, from my perspective, social constructivism pushes those methodological edges and therefore serves as my theoretical framework.

Constructivism. As I stated above, from my perspective, constructivism presses the boundaries between these theoretical and methodological edges (Brookhart, 2004) because researchers who work from this perspective study everyday life, its messiness, its ordinariness and its extraordinariness. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “constructivism connects action to praxis and builds on antifoundational arguments while encouraging experimental and multivoiced texts” (p.184). It has roots in the work of theorists such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky (von Glasersfeld, 1996; Twomey Fosnot, 1996). At its inception, constructivism was considered cutting edge because it is “fundamentally nonpositivist and as such it stands on completely new ground”.... concept development and deep understanding are the foci; ... they are understood as construction of active learner reorganization“ (Twomey Fosnot, 1996, p. 10). Specifically, instead of a traditionally held assumption that there must be a real, external world that is separate from an individual and that knowledge “should be considered true only if it correctly reflects that independent world,” (von Glasserfeld, 1995, p. 6), there is a dramatically different assumption. Instead, from Piaget’s perspective, the world “is the result of our own perceptual activities and therefore specific to our ways of perceiving and conceiving.

Knowledge, for Piaget, arises from actions and the agent's reflection on them" (von Glaserfeld, 1996, p. 4). In other words, knowledge exists within a person (von Glaserfeld, 1995; von Glaserfeld, 1996).

Social Constructivism. Social constructivism (Phillips, 2005) takes the premises of constructivism a step further. From this perspective "reality is seen to be created through processes of social exchange, historically situated, social constructivists are interested in the collective generation of meaning among people" (Au, 1998, p. 299). In other words, it is not the individual, but the larger community and/or socio-political structure that actively constructs knowledge (Cobb, 1996; Phillips, 1995). While the intensity of this community and or socio-political construction of knowledge varies among those in this vast field (Phillips, 1995), there is an emphasis placed on both the context and culture of individuals, their community and the importance both of these play in the construction of knowledge (Cobb, 1996; Phillips, 1995). As Au (1998) writes, "the emphasis is on the process of knowledge construction by the social group and the intersubjectivity established through the interaction of the group" (p.299). It is within these elements, the interaction between the individual and her community, the teacher and her context and culture, that I placed my dissertation research. This interplay between context, culture in the construction of knowledge give a strong foundation for me to interpret interactions between teachers and their reading assessment practices within a response to intervention framework. This perspective helped me fill the need to take a closer look at teachers, their backgrounds, and their perceptions so researchers and practitioners might gain more insight into this phenomenon (von Glaserfeld, 1996; Phillips, 1995).

Dissertation Method

Van Manen (1990) suggests that personal experiences are an appropriate starting point when collecting data on lived-experience (p.54). Hence, I used a series of three in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) in order to give me a glimpse into the everyday lived experience of reading assessment practices for elementary general education teachers. Seidman's (2006) series of three in-depth phenomenological interviews include the collection of data on a participant's life history in context of the phenomena, specific details of the experience/phenomenon, and a reflection on the meaning of that experience/phenomenon. The goal of this process, through my use of in-depth phenomenological interviews, was to have participants share their life, their experiences, and their meaning making in order to reconstruct the experience/phenomenon (Seidman, 2006) of their reading assessment practices within an RTI framework. Each interview, life history, specific details, and meaning making (Seidman, 2006), was between 45 to 60 minutes long, held in a location of the participants' selection (e.g., a participants' classroom or workspace, a restaurant, or other pre-designated area), and spaced at a minimum of 24 hours and no more than one week apart (Seidman, 2006). Two participants requested that interviews take place at a location other than their classroom/workspace. Therefore, I asked for and received permission to view the workspace at least once during the series of interviews.

I designed these life histories, specific details, and meaning making interview protocols (see Appendix B) to get at the heart of lived experience of this phenomenon (Seidman, 2006). It is important to note that I also used Brookhart's (2011) revised standards for teacher assessment knowledge and skills as a guide for the development of the specific details interview protocol. For me, her standards, based on the 1990 Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational

Assessment developed jointly by the American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, and the National Education Association (AFT, NCME, NEA, 1990), bring the assessment knowledge and skills teachers need into the current standards- and accountability-based context. I also collected relevant documents/artifacts and kept a researcher reflective blog. Each of the data sources helped me create a lived experience description, clustered themes and a composite narrative drawn across all participants, which includes a thick, rich description of the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978) and a thorough, personal reflective examination (van Manen, 1990).

My researcher reflective blog served several purposes. I used it to refine my own understanding of self and my role as the researcher. More specifically, I used it as a *connoisseurship* in which I reflected on my own thinking, biases and understandings as I progressed through my dissertation process (Janesick, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This process, the *Epoche* (Moustakas, 1994), was the first and then on going step in phenomenological research. The *Epoche* is where I disclosed my thinking, biases, and understandings so that I could collect, analyze and later interpret the phenomena of reading assessment practices from participants while keeping a clear perspective on myself (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Equally important were the documents/artifacts I collected. Examples of such documents/artifacts included, but were not limited to, common assessment methods (tests, rubrics, teacher developed methods, etc.), snapshots of data organizational structures (i.e., spreadsheet formats, organizational recordkeeping sheets, etc.) and other materials most relevant to the instruction of reading (i.e., lesson plans). As van Manen (1990) suggests, these documents/artifacts were, “in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations” (p. 74). This means that although documents and artifacts may not be “verbal

language” (van Manen, 1990), they still gave me insight to the lived experience of these participants.

Participant Selection. The number of participants in qualitative research is entirely a matter of judgment (Creswell, 2007). Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that questions about the number of participants are dependent upon either internal or external constraints placed upon researchers and their respective participants. Hence, in order to shape the participant pool for my research, I combined both purposeful, criteria and opportunistic sampling (Patton, 2002). When one uses purposeful criteria sampling, one must think through the type of participant who will present an in-depth understanding of the phenomena he or she could learn the most from rather than those that may lead to a generalization of the phenomena (Patton, 2002). Opportunistic sampling is when one “follows leads, takes advantage of the unexpected, [and has] flexibility (Patton, p. 244). Opportunistic sampling means that I accepted the first five teachers who meet the purposeful criteria and agreed to participate in my study. This means I interviewed five practicing, elementary level general education teachers from a large, urban Florida school district. I also left myself the potential to interview up to 10 teachers in the event I needed more participants in order to reach saturation during my analysis phase or to replace participants due to attrition. All participants met the following inclusion criteria: Each participant, at the time at the time of this research:

1. Taught students in grades Kindergarten through Second;
2. Took part in reading instruction for at least 30 to 90 minutes of the school day;
3. Had between zero to 35 years of teaching experience;
4. Had earned teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (K-3); Elementary Education (K-6), or Elementary Education (1-6); and

5. Worked at a school that has had an RTI framework in place for at least three academic years.

Participant Recruitment. After approval from both the university and school district internal review boards, I collected each available name and e-mail address of all grade Kindergarten through second grade elementary education teachers through each elementary school's website. I then sent an e-mail to each of these teachers. In the e-mail I explained the purpose of my study and what would be expected should one choose to participate (see Appendix C). This research description included a brief description of my purpose, research questions, and reason for an invitation to participate. Further, I also included a link for a secure, encrypted electronic questionnaire through Survey Monkey™. This Survey Monkey™ account was password protected. All questionnaires were encrypted meaning I did not collect any information about potential participant's computer internet protocol (IP) addresses. The questions on this electronic questionnaire were designed to have teachers indicate if they meet the mentioned inclusion criteria and to provide me with their contact information (e.g., name and phone number).

I was not able to recruit any potential participants through the e-mail and secure, encrypted electronic questionnaire method. Therefore, I requested and gained permission to attend school faculty meetings. At these meetings, I presented my research study (see Appendix C) and left invitations as well as pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelopes that interested teachers used to send me their name and contact information (name and telephone number). From this faculty meeting method, I received the name and contact information of six potential participants. I then contacted the six who responded and offered an invitation to participate. Of

the six, five responded to my telephone contact, agreed to participate, and remained in the study through fruition.

Informed Consent. I collected informed, written consent from each teacher (van Manen, 1990) on the day of our first scheduled interview (see Appendix E). Prior to their signature on the form, I made it clear that participation in my research was voluntary and that those who agreed to participate could withdraw at any time for any reason. I also stressed that I would use pseudonyms in place of personal names, the name of the school district and the name of specific school locations. I also indicated how I would change any other information that could possibly identify a particular participant. Lastly, I told each teacher that those who did not agree to participate could do so freely, without concern for consequences.

Profile of Participants

In order to provide a candid, initial description of these teachers, I summarized their demographic information (see Table 1) and provided a brief profile of each (see Appendix G). In order to help insure anonymity and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for each teacher, their work location, and the school district.

Data Analysis

In-depth conversational interviews

Each in-depth conversational interview took place at a location selected by each participant. Locations included the classroom and a local bakery/coffee house. Additionally, I asked for and received permission to visit the classrooms of participants who chose to hold interviews at the bakery/coffee house. This glimpse into the classrooms helped me gain an even better perspective of each teacher participant. I was able to make a visual connection between what we talked about in the interviews and the settings the participants described. I served as the

interviewer and digitally recorded audio from each interview with their prior permission. I also took notes (Janesick, 2011; Patton, 2002) on things such as setting and participant interaction. These notes also included, but were not limited to information about, facial gestures and body language. I also transcribed each interview. Through completion of the verbatim transcription myself, I was able to better connect with these data, recall and relive each interview.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Study Participants

Participant	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience	Grade Level	Area(s) of Certification	Type of School Setting
Allison	Female	White	10	K	Elementary Education	Title I
Crystal	Female	White	10	1	Elementary Education Special Education	Non Title I
Gwendolyn	Female	White	10	K	Elementary Education	Title I
Sadie	Female	White	23	1	Elementary Education	Non Title I
Abilieen	Female	Hispanic	10	1	Elementary Education	Non Title I

This stage of analysis is where I also involved participants through member checks. In order to complete the member checks for this stage, I mailed each participant her respective transcripts. I asked each if the transcript was an accurate representation of our interviews. I also asked each participant if there was any content she would prefer removed or added. All participants agreed the transcripts were accurate and no content needed to added or removed. . Two participants wanted minor changes that I incorporated into the respective transcripts. Colaizzi's (1978) method, which emphasizes the use of description of lived experience, is fitting for my study because the purpose of my research was to describe and explain teachers' reading

assessment practices within the context of RTI. The application of Colaizzi's (1978) method helps immerse the researcher in her data. These seven clearly defined steps were also fitting for novice researchers such as myself (Saunders, 2003). My application of Colaizzi's (1978) method included the following:

Step One. I listened and re-listened to each audio recording of the interviews at least three times. I read and reread all transcripts in order to develop a personal feeling for each. After this listening and re-listening I did an overall holistic reading of each transcript at least three to four times. For the second set of interview transcripts I decided to take this listening and reading component a step further. After my listening, re-listening, reading, and re-reading I went back to listen and read the transcripts simultaneously. I also took notes as needed. This first step of analysis, listening and reading, helped me develop even more of a personal connection with these data (LeVassuer, 2003). After this process of listening, re-listening, reading, and re-reading, I moved on to step two.

Step Two. I extracted significant statements, in other words, I went through each transcript and extracted (highlighted) participant quotes that I felt directly related to the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). Software programs such as Atlis.Ti™ are available for such analyses. However, I found myself dissatisfied with the program. For me, Atlis. Ti™ was not user friendly nor intuitive. Therefore, I decided to conduct this analysis using a combination of technology (Steps two-three) and by hand (Steps four-five). For Step two, I highlighted significant statements from each transcript while each was in an electronic MS word document. I then copied these significant statements into an Excel spreadsheet. In this spreadsheet I also carefully kept a running count of the number of significant statements ($n = 640$), the specific participant, transcript, page, and line numbers as I proceeded. I then presented this step of my

research, extraction of significant statements, to a fellow doctoral candidate who has both training and experience in phenomenological research methods. I asked her to review the significant statements, to check them against transcripts, and to offer suggestions for removal or revision of these significant statements and then I incorporate this feedback into the statements (Saunders, 2003). With my reviewed and revised list of significant statements in hand, I moved into the third step of analysis.

Step Three. I constructed formulated meaning statements from each extracted significant statement. This means I read each significant statement in order to make sense, or meaning, of it. This is when the researcher, as Colaizzi (1978) writes, will “try to spell out the meaning of each significant statement” (p. 59). For example, the significant statement and resulting formulated meaning I made from a transcript are below. Here, Allison describes her thinking process and reliance on data as she determines a pass/fail decision for a child.

Significant statement: You know, you have to know. you guide yourself off your assessments. And, you know, if they don't make it, do you give them the next day to try to do something else? Sure. But, you can't keep giving them every single day and every chance. You have to go with what. And the data doesn't lie... (Allison, transcript 2, p. 22, lines 463-473). Formulated meaning: A pass/fail decision for a teacher is hard. Decisions must be made off of data from measures.

I constructed these formulated meaning statements directly into the Excel spreadsheet where I copy/pasted each significant statement. I placed each formulated meaning statement within a cell in the same row as its respective significant statement. Throughout this stage of formulated meaning, I used bracketing as defined by LeVasseur (2003). I questioned my prior biases, thoughts, and perceptions in both my researcher reflective blog and in a respective cell

next to each significant statement/derived meaning statement in the Excel spreadsheet. For example, the thoughts/feelings/comments I wrote in the excel spreadsheet for the significant statement and resulting formulated meaning statement above is below.

Thoughts/feelings/comments: I remember sitting at many initial staffing meetings with parents, the kind when a child is first found eligible for special education and or related services. And, the parent, although aware of the data, the decision making trail, still finds it hard to accept the term/label of a disability. It is as if there is a mourning, a disillusion of the initial dreams or plans a parent may have had for their child. Could this be an instance, on a smaller scale, of the same?

This process of bracketing helped me keep a “persistent curiosity” (LeVasseur, 2003, p.418) verses a suspension of my previous thoughts, knowledge and biases. Therefore, blogging became my means of Epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). For me, this means that I did not suspend or deny my personal biases, thoughts and perceptions. Instead, I questioned these prior biases, thoughts, and perceptions because as LeVasseur (2003) writes, a researcher “is to regard bracketing as extending only to our natural attitude, that is, to the ordinary lack of curiosity with which most of life is lived” (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 417). Further, this blogging process also served as a source of triangulation (Mathison, 1988) as I collected and analyzed these interview data. Just as I had done with the significant statement stage, I presented the formulated meanings to the same fellow doctoral candidate. I ask her to review the formulated meanings, check them against the significant statements, and offer suggestions for removal or revision. I then incorporated this feedback the formulated meaning statements. It was with these reviewed and revised formulated meanings that went into step 4 of analysis.

Step Four. This stage of analysis required the arrangement of formulated meaning statements into initial clustered themes (Colaizzi, 1978) and then final clustered themes (Sanders, 2003). Clustered themes are groupings of formulated meanings, which are common across all participants (Colaizzi, 1978). Sanders (2003) suggests that novice researchers take stage one of analysis a step further by, when possible, collapsing clustered themes, which may be extremely numerous, into a more refined emergent theme(s). This is precisely what I did. I completed this stage of analysis by hand in order to touch, feel and literally, surround myself with data. I printed out the excel spreadsheet row that contained each significant statement and formulated meaning pair. I then cut apart each of these rows (N = 640). Next, I read and re-read the formulated meanings in order to create an initial group of clustered meanings. As I read, I placed each formulated meaning in a developing clustered theme pile and later identified the theme with a working title. From this process, I developed 18 initial clustered themes. See Appendix H for a list of these initial clustered themes and examples of significant statements and corresponding formulated meaning statements.

Before I moved on to collapse clustered themes into the final clustered themes, I returned to technology. I added a column to the Excel Spreadsheet and recorded the initial emergent theme for each of the 640 formulated meaning statements. I used this column to sort and later print each of these themes. I then read each grouping of clustered themes before I collapsed them into possible final clustered themes. As with the initial clustered themes, I placed each formulated meaning in a developing initial theme pile and later identified the theme with a working title. While I worked through this process, I kept in mind how I must make sure that each formulated meaning, initial and final clustered theme are common to each participant (Saunders, 2003). This helped ensure that I was able to write a rich, thick exhaustive description

of elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within the context of RTI. Finally, just as I had done with the previous stages of analysis, I presented the initial and final clustered themes to the fellow doctoral candidate. I asked her to review the themes, check these against the formulated meanings, and offer suggestions for removal or revision. I incorporated her feedback before I moved on to the next stage of analysis. Additionally, I also mailed each participant the emergent themes. I asked each if they agreed with the themes and if each was an accurate representation of their life and work. I also asked each participant if there was any content she might prefer be removed or added. All participants agreed the themes were accurate and no content needed to be added or removed.

Step Five. With all of the final clustered themes in place (see Appendix I), I moved into the next step, the incorporation of final clustered themes into a further, rich, thick, exhaustive description of the phenomenon (a composite narrative). This description coupled with the emergent themes was the overarching goal of my research. Van Manen (1990) writes that within qualitative research, the research and writing process are inseparable and that the reporting of such research is not 'to let the data speak for themselves' (p. 167). Instead, "one must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and as well, be consumed by it" (van Manen, 1990, p. 153). In keeping with my theoretical framework and Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysis, I created a thick, rich textual description of elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within the context of RTI through the clustered themes. I wrote the composite narrative description of this phenomenon by, as van Manen (1990) suggests, weaving my phenomenological description "against the existentials of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and sociality (lived relationship to others)" (p.172). I included participants' direct quotes (formulated meanings), vignettes from interviews, use of the

emergent themes, examples from documents and artifacts and, when appropriate, excerpts from my researcher reflective blog.

Step Six. After I wrote the expanded thick, rich, exhaustive description (composite narrative), I moved into stage six where I “formulate[d] the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible” (Colaizzi, 1979, p. 61). This means I reduced the lengthy, exhaustive description of the phonema down to its “essential nature” (p. 300). In other words, I created a summary of the emergent themes and composite narrative.

Step Seven. Before I considered both the rich, thick, exhaustive description and the statement of identification, I, as Colaizzi (1978) suggested, returned to each participant for a member checks. I gave each participant hard copies of both the composite narrative and the statement of identification. I asked each to answer questions such as those posted by Colaizzi (1978). The questions Colaizzi suggested and I used are below.

1. How do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?
2. What aspects of your experience have I omitted?
3. Are these descriptions an accurate representation of your experience? (Colaizzi, 1978. p. 62).

Four of the five participants reported that they agreed and that, for them, it was an accurate representation of their reading assessment practices. One participant, Abilieen, suggested that I needed to further develop the theme, working all the time, within the composite narrative.

Therefore, she suggested I write more about how, for her and her teammates, there may not even be enough time within the constraints of a school day for a restroom break. I also gave the composite narrative to the doctoral student for additional review and revision suggestions. She

suggested that it was in line with my previous research steps and felt it was reflective of these dissertation data. I then incorporated this feedback into the description. I added more detail from the theme, then checked again with Abilieen. She said the revision was appropriate and adequate. See Appendix J for the final version of the composite narrative and the statement of identification.

Documents and Artifacts

The documents and artifacts I collected included publisher made tests, performance and product rubrics, lesson plans, and teacher selected/authentic assessment examples. All documents and artifacts were a result of my request for participants to give me examples of assessment methods used most often and/or those that are most relevant to the instruction of reading. These documents/artifacts did not contain any identifiable student or teacher information and were used as a way to triangulate my findings (Mathison, 1988). Therefore, in my attempt to stay close to my theoretical framework and my research design, I approached triangulation from the perspective of Mathison (1988). She suggests that, instead of the traditional approach to triangulation where researchers use several methods to cancel out biases or find where data may converge, qualitative researchers should consider a different approach. She suggests that data do not always neatly show patterns of convergence. Sometimes data converge, sometimes they are inconsistent, and sometimes they are even contradictory. Her method helped me to identify where data mixes and shows convergences, inconsistencies, and contradictions and that allowed me to incorporate both my own and participants' background knowledge of the program and phonema where the experience or essence of the phonema exists (Mathison, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Therefore, I used these documents,

(lesson plans, example assessment methods, etc.) as a means of additional support throughout each stage of data analysis.

Researcher Reflective Blog

Critical self-reflection is necessary due to the very nature of phenomenological research (Janesick, 2011). Hence, I kept a researcher reflective blog. I wanted to find a convenient yet secure place where I could keep track of my thoughts, feelings and progress throughout my dissertation research. The July 15, 2011 excerpt reflects my thoughts.

This is my very first blog personal blog. I am trying this out for two reasons. First, is to determine if this may be a good data collection tool for my dissertation. I may ask my participants to keep their reflective journals in this format. It may be quick, easy and allow them to see a record of their own assessment practices and decisions. My second reason is to determine if this may be a way that I want to keep track of my thoughts, etc. as I progress through the dissertation. Could this become my researcher reflective journal? If I chose to use this format, I would never have to worry about losing the Word document I keep my journal in due to technical difficulties.

In the same entry I stated why I selected www.blogger.com. My selection criteria included low cost and security of posts, and www.blogger.com exceeded my expectations in each of these areas. This is a free blogging site supported by Google and it is secure. Settings prevent my researcher reflective blog from identification and access by internet search engines. I also restricted permissions for both readers and editors. For example, the only individuals with access to this blog are myself and the members of my doctoral dissertation committee.

The blog served several purposes. I used it to refine my own understanding of self and my role as the researcher and use it as a connoisseurship in which I reflect on my own thinking,

biases and understandings as I progressed through my dissertation process (Janesick, 2011). In other words, I used my researcher reflective blog as a way to create Epoch (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This is where I kept my thinking, biases and understandings so I could collect, analyze, and later interpret assessment practices from the perspective of my participants and use my reflections as another source of data for triangulation (Mathison, 1998). I questioned my prior biases, thoughts, and perceptions because, as LeVasseur (2003) writes, it helped me keep a “persistent curiosity” (p. 418). An August 2013 entry from my blog reflects this sentiment.

Where is the mingling of self, text, and context for this post? I just got through another member check. The participant loved it. Sadie said that her profile was an accurate picture of who she is. She laughed and cried as I read it to her over the phone. Of course, she will give me written feedback, too. But, for today, she has renewed my desire and motivation to finally finish the process that, for the last few months at least, until today at least, I did not always place my trust.

Moreover, I found this blog an invaluable tool. It gave me a time, space, and formal way to further discover my researcher self through my own written thoughts.

Pilot Study

In order to gain a perspective on the viability of this dissertation research, I conducted a pilot study. Orcher (2005) explains that a pilot is “an initial study that is conducted to determine feasibility” (p. 96). He stresses that these types of studies are necessary because they help answer questions such as how many participants to include and what types of changes may need in areas such as instrumentation and/or method. Within this section about my pilot study, I address

participant recruitment, data collection, analysis, findings, implications, and most importantly, lessons I learned along the way.

Lessons Learned through the Pilot

From the pilot study process, I learned several valuable lessons I took into my final dissertation research. Of particular importance is what I discovered about personal connections and participant selection. I found that, because of my personal connection to the school district where I proposed to conduct my dissertation research, I was too close to the teachers who agreed to participate in my pilot study. This was the case because I had worked with these teachers or their respective schools in the past. Therefore, it was possible that, within the context of these initial pilot interviews, we, the participants and I, may have made several assumptions about understanding each other that may or may not be correct. In fact, Seidman (2006) warns against interviewing participants who may be a friend, acquaintance, or colleague. He refers to his own experience with this aspect of interviewing when he writes, “the easier the access, the more complicated the interview” (p. 40). Therefore, based upon these interview experiences and recommendations from my supervisory committee, I then extended this pilot study in order to have a more formal method for participant recruitment in order to avoid such issues.

Recruitment procedures. My initial attempts at participant recruitment for the pilot study were fruitless. I gathered the name and e-mail address of all general education grade K through 2 teachers through school websites. I then sent an e-mail to each teacher at elementary schools I randomly choose. Within this e-mail I explained the purpose of my study, participant expectations, and provided a link to a Survey Monkey™ questionnaire where I requested contact information so we, the potential participant and I, could set interview days, times, and locations (see Appendix C). I was unable to recruit even one participant and needed to try something else.

In order to figure this out, I called the Director of Research and Evaluation of this school district (Personal phone communication, 2012). I explained how I was not able to recruit participants through e-mail methods and that I would like permission to ask principals to recruit potential participants during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. She agreed. As part of this conversation, she recommended that I also consider the use of a mail out request to teachers via U.S. mail. The director's suggestion worked. I decided that I would first call an elementary school principal and explained my study to her. I asked for permission to attend a school faculty meeting, present my research study (see Appendix E), and leave invitations as well as pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelopes that teachers could use to send me their name and contact information. From this, I selected the first teacher who responded and who met all inclusion criteria. The two of us were able to develop a strong rapport and the resulting data collection and analysis were fruitful for the purpose of describing and explaining potential methodological and procedural changes to my dissertation research. Further, because of the success I had with this method of recruitment, I decided that I would not address participant recruitment through US mail.

Participant inclusion criteria. One major lesson I learned, and resulting decision I made, revolves around the special education teacher and the results of our interview process. I had originally planned to explain and describe the reading assessment practices of both special and general education teachers for my research. What struck me, and helped me focus on this phenomenon for elementary general education teachers, was the special education teachers' response to my question about RTI. My question and her verbatim response are below (Pilot Participant 1, Interview transcript 3, p. 5).

Sarah: How 'bout you, though. Think about like, right here [her self-contained special education classroom]. How does your understanding of response to intervention influence your assessment practices?

Pilot Participant: Not at all.

Sarah: Not at all.

Pilot Participant: Nothing. None. Nobody, "response to interventions" anything out here. ... Nobody cares about my lowest quartile. Nobody cares.

For this pilot participant, this special education teacher, RTI is not a daily part of her reading assessment practices. This made me think about other special education teachers and their reading assessment practices within the context of RTI. While it is also important to describe this group of teachers' reading assessment practices, I realized that they are not the best fit for my research. Her response also helped me remember that what occurs within the context of an RTI framework tends to happen in the general education and typically not the special education setting (Hazelkorn, Boucholz, Goodman, & Duffy, 2011). I also began to think about my methodological perspective of phenomenology. I thought about how I could not study both groups of teachers with this method. Studying both groups would set up a natural dichotomy, more specifically, a comparison of these two types of teachers. Comparison is not what phenomenology is about (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, my study needed to rest on general education teachers, not special education teachers, as participants.

Documents and artifacts. The documents and artifacts from the pilot study included sample tests, examples of how teachers organize student data, and graphs student use to monitor their own reading progress. Each supported a particular teacher's comment. For example, one teacher gave me an example of how she has students track their progress on weekly reading tests

when I asked how students know if they are successful. However, no participants gave me examples of authentic assessment such as portfolios, rubrics, performance/plays (Janesick, 2006). Therefore, within my dissertation research, I made a concerted effort to ask for examples of these types of methods. I also noted that teachers were not always able to hand me an example of a particular assessment method. Or, they only had those with student work on them. Therefore, one teacher suggested that I simply take a digital photo of these examples instead. This is what I did for the remaining pilot interviews and in the context of my dissertation research.

Researcher perspective. I learned that bracketing is hard. One cannot really set aside or suspend one's understanding, at least as suggested by van Manen (1990). Further, I found that not only could I not bracket in this way, I did not want to bracket in this manner. Therefore, I turned to LeVasseur (2003). She wrote:

In some essential way, we do bracket prior to understanding when we become curious. That is, we have to assume that we do not know or understand something in order to attain the philosophical attitude. When we begin to inquire in this way, we no longer assume that we understand fully, and the effect is a questioning of prior knowledge (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 417).

Based on the work of LeVasseur (2003), I realized that I would not deny, suspend, or put aside my prior knowledge about teachers' reading assessment practices. Instead, I would use bracketing as a way to question my prior knowledge. I would keep in mind that I, as the researcher, am an integral part of this research process. After all, I am the person who will write the detailed textual description about the phenomena of elementary general education teachers'

assessment practices in the context of RTI framework. I remembered, as LeVasseur (2003) puts it, to “become curious” (p.419) as I progressed through my dissertation research.

The pilot study process brought me both hands-on practice and clarity as I moved into my dissertation research. Moreover, I was able to adjust, adapt, and reflect on both the practical and theoretical aspects of qualitative research. From my perspective, I have a more cohesive, refined, and developed dissertation study as a result of each lesson the pilot study process presented.

Dissertation Study Implications

My dissertation research may help elementary general education teachers improve, refine and/or reflect on reading assessment practices within the context of an RTI framework.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter I described the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and method of my dissertation research. Of importance is the section on lessons I learned from the pilot study about the challenges of conducting research. In Chapter four, I summarize the initial findings of my research through the presentation of the final clustered themes.

Chapter Four

The purpose of my research was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework, layered within the context of their everyday lived experiences. I used phenomenology (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) as the undergirding methodological lenses of my study. The research questions which guided me were:

1. What is the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?

Therefore, in this chapter I summarize the initial findings of my research through the presentation of the clustered themes.

Findings

Clustered Themes

According to Colaizzi (1978), clustered themes are groupings of formulated meanings, which are common across all participants (Colaizzi, 1978). As I discussed in Chapter three, I presented the clustered themes I found within these data. I used direct quotes from participants. I also included my own thoughts, impressions, and biases from my researcher reflective blog,

notes written directly on sections of transcripts (in italics), notes I kept throughout the analysis process (also in italics), and related classroom documents and artifacts from participants. The final clustered themes I discovered through analysis are: shift of focus; ever changing accountability; independent efforts with data; collaborative efforts with data; working environment; interventions and reading assessment practices in action; authenticity in practice; lack of decision making power; teacher emotion; and teacher needs and wants. In keeping with the theoretical framework of my study, readers should consider these clustered themes as part of a larger, socially constructed meaning and not as an objective truth (von Glasersfeld, 1995; 1996). Table 2 provides an overview and summary of these themes (See Appendix H). In the paragraphs to follow, I provide an more detailed description of each of these themes. I also include illustrative quotes from my original transcripts as examples.

Shift of Focus

This clustered theme characterizes a jointly held perception of a philosophical shift in reading assessment practices from an unobtrusive and naturalistic application into an intrusive, formal, and pervasive one. Examples were presented early within the interview process. Participants would make comparisons between their K-12 educational experience and their perception of how children now experience K-12 education. As one participant stated:

We weren't assessed the way we are assessing children now. Um, assessment was just, it was just an every once in a while, like we would have a test or something. And, your teacher would teach you something and you would have a test. And then, it was okay (Allison, interview 1, p. 7, lines 129-132).

Drawn upon this idea of shift of focus, participants also make comparisons between what it was like at the start of and the current stage of their teaching career.

It has become very data driven. You know, almost like a scientific process. Whereas, ... for me, I would say, I have a student that needs help. They would say, here is somebody who can pull that student and work with them individually. And, that would be the end of it. (Crystal, transcript 2, p. 61, lines 1290-1293)

Participants paired this more pervasive role of reading assessment with the need for increased reliance on school leadership. In other words, the perceived climate of schools changed to include more reliance on school administration for matters than may have traditionally been handled at the classroom or team level.

I could feel confined if I had a problem. I could handle it and not go to the principal unless it was a problem. Which, we never really did. We never went to them. Um, for anything. And, I think that philosophy has changed now. Where, you don't want to handle those things because, you're going, ...there is no, um, protection for yourself if anybody calls you on things. Um, you want to have the principal handle it. So, if there is a problem with the parents coming back to bite you, you're not protected. Like, you don't have the um, the insurance and stuff like, we had back then (Gwendolyn, interview 1, p. 31, lines 697-705).

In light of this shift perceived by participants, classroom instruction and assessment practices are now more targeted, or explicit, instead of wholistically or focused on teaching children to love learning. For these teachers, there is a need to document student data more within the last few years than at the start of their teaching career. For Sadie, this means data she would have normally kept as antidotal or simply as mental notes, must be carefully recorded and available for later inspection by various stakeholders.

And, you have to document this. Whereas before, I would just do it. And, keep my anecdotes... It wasn't big. It wasn't like a, a, law or whatever. You know what I mean. Like, it was just what I did. Now, it's called something. I guess that is what I am trying to say in 1000 words or less (Sadie, interview 2, p. 5, lines 109-114).

Participants also described how attention to data collection and analysis paired with tiers of interventions are now used as documentation to support initial identification of disability instead of the traditional special education referral and testing process. Therefore, from their perspective, the process now rests on the shoulders of general education teachers instead of other, more specialized personnel.

It is much more on me to be doing as much as I possibly can in the way of individualization. There is just not the (pause), there is not the same level of help. That was, you know, way back when you needed help. Okay, here's somebody that will help you. Now, it's what am I doing for this student personally? And then, also collecting the data (Crystal, interview 2, p. 61, lines 1299-1303).

The culmination of this shift of focus clustered theme comes from participants descriptions of changing state standards. For them, the Common Core standards require a new way of thinking. For them, teachers must be aware of the level of thinking and cognitive complexity within these standards and therefore, shift their own thinking about both the type and depth of questioning and assessment practices they must use in order to be in alignment with these new standards.

The kids only know a certain amount of words. They know how to start sentences with like, [and] it, [and] the, [and] have. They can't do that. Because, then, that's like the old standards of writing. You can't do that anymore. And, it is like, you know, it's a no no. So, they have to really...I guess it is like debating. They have to analyze a text and ...

support it with evidence. Sounds crazy for five and six year olds. But, that's what the state is telling us to do. (Gwendolyn, Interview 2, p. 5, lines 109-114)

Ever Changing Accountability

This next clustered theme, ever-changing accountability and the related subthemes, portray how, from the perspective of these participants, accountability starts with expectations and ends with negative repercussions. These teachers are anxious about potential repercussions that may stem from poor student performance on mandated methods and impacts both themselves and their students.

Subtheme internally imposed expectations. For participants, accountability starts with internally imposed expectations. In their words, these participants held higher expectations for students than may be required by the school or district in order to make sure students are ready for the next grade.

But I think for us, the kindergarten teachers, we are always expecting more out of our kids than less. Like, it seems like we were looking over all the standards, um, like even for first grade. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, page 17, lines 376-378).

A further example of this was set by participants who are kindergarten teachers. These two (Allison & Gwendolyn) set expectations for students to meet each quarter because there are no hard and fast expectations set by the district or school.

I think that is good for them. Cause, we are always teaching above where they should be. And, we can tell when we assess them. Like, we just, well we are finishing up because it is the end of the quarter. And, we have to, um, see...where they are for their report card grades. And, what we do actually, isn't mandated (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 17, lines 381-385).

Notes from personal reflection also reflect this sentiment.

I had to stop and really think about student expectations and what this meant for reporting progress. With the exception of one second grader who was in my grade 3-5 class, I have always taught the older students. For these students, the report card is a straight forward, A, B, C, D, F grading scale. In early elementary, this is not the case. Therefore, I decided to ask a non-participant practicing teacher from this district about progress reporting practices. Her response supports the perception of these teachers.

This is from my perspective...I would say there are a few documents that help but unless the school has written up something I would say nothing with specific details for parents. There was a grading document that [someone from the district office] worked on. But, we were never trained using it. The report card covers have the best description but much is left to teacher discretion. Hope this helps!
(Personal communication with an elementary level teacher)

Lastly, in order to address the expectations these participants set for their students, they developed their own, unique set of reading assessment practices so that they could adequately gauge instruction and student progress.

We do running records. We do them for ourselves. No one says, ‘okay, you have to do them.’ But, we do it because we like to see where they fit... [And], They had maybe 2 sight words that they had to learn for that unit. Or, that week or something. And, that wasn’t enough. We wanted them to know more words. So, last year we came and we picked out, okay this is where they will see a lot in this book. And, um, so we devised up a list of ah, 72 words...And, so every quarter, we are seeing how many words they have learned. So, we do that as well. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, pp. 17-18, lines 385-396).

Subtheme externally imposed expectations. After accountability through internally imposed expectations, participants experienced externally imposed expectations. This subtheme illuminates what these teachers, these participants, perceive as expectations imposed from outside of their classroom. Examples include, but are not limited to, student performance standards from the state department of education and the school district. More specifically, these external expectations began with state department of education adopted Common Core academic standards and the potential of a new high-stakes accountability measure developed through the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC). Therefore, participants do their best to make connections to these external academics standards for students though indirect, age appropriate, child friendly language. These externally imposed expectations also trickle down from both the larger school district and school based administration.

That essential question would have to come from the standards. And, be written in [a] kid friendly [manner], and in a question form. Because, um, I have been told that, it's better for kids to have it in the form of a question because it gets them thinking (Crystal, interview 2, p. 28, lines 578-585).

These connections to the standards are made explicit, but at the same time, are ever changing. Further, presenting all of the required standards for a given week may be too overwhelming for students.

So, you know, thinking about it, I could probably put it up there on my reading task board. Because, there are so many different standards we are working on for reading. It could get overwhelming. Cause, there is a comprehension strategy, there's a phonics skill, there's a, um... (Crystal, interview 2, p. 27, lines 558-569)

The new Common Core academic standards have caused a rise in what was formally expected of students. They now must make a more meaningful, deeper connection to text that must be supported by examples from within the text while still in kindergarten. This means, that for these participants, there is little say in the lessons and resulting assessment practices they do within the classroom.

But, I think a lot of times, the district tells us this is what you are going to use. And, like it or not. And, so we just work with that. Um, it's pretty much the decision making we have, is very little in the whole broad range of things. But, I think we have a lot of control, maybe just in our classroom with our lessons that, okay we can do this because we know it works (Gwendolyn, interview 3, p. 3, lines 55-59).

However, for these participants, there is never an easy footing because the standards and mandated state tests are always in a state of influx. They do not always know when and what changes may occur in advance. *From my notes when developing the derived meaning statement – I remember hearing in both my undergraduate education and then again once I was a teacher that that teaching is like trying to fix a bicycle while you ride it. This is what I imagine from this statement.*

Crystal: I think they are keeping FCAT but I am not sure. You know, we just don't know what is coming next. But, we want to be prepared for whatever is coming next. And, we want to be sure the students are prepared for what is coming next.

Sarah: But, you don't know what is coming next.

Crystal: We don't know (laughs). But, we want to make sure, you know, that the students are meeting the standards. (Crystal, interview 2, p. 62, lines 1313-1321)

Additionally, the idea of a need for a period of time when the standards, the expectations remain level, and not raised in order to better allow children to develop at a pace acceptable for them.

You know, it's like, stop raising the bar and just let them learn what they are able to learn developmentally on their own pace. Just stop with all the, the stuff that is going on at district. Leave them alone, you know! (Gwendolyn, interview 1, p. 37, lines 833-836)

In summary, for these participants Standards must remain tight even though accommodations should be made on an individual basis. In other words, standards must be addressed though all instructional and assessment practices, no matter what those methods may look like.

So, I think instruction, you are working your way around the standards. And, pretty much, you have to teach the standards whether you are using one curriculum or another. (Gwendolyn, interview 3, p. 2, lines 39-41).

Subtheme negative repercussions. Building upon these expectations, participants perceived that those from external sources, (i.e., developed by those in a larger decision making role such as legislators, and school district officials) were too stringent or difficult for students of this age/grade and therefore will reflect negative repercussions for both the participants and their students. For them, this perception stems from poor student performance on mandated measures and a restriction on the types of sustained reading assessment practices that fit within the context of the classroom. For Allison,

The Capital and the County, and different places, forget that they are five years old. They are five. I mean that's, I will never forget...He said, when his mommy asked him, how do you like kindergarten, he goes, it's boring. And so, Mommy says, why is it boring? We take tests every day, Mommy (extended pause) and for a five year old to say that, it was heartbreaking (Allison, interview 1, p. 30, lines 617-621).

Repercussions for Teachers. For these teachers, accountability and potential liability is everywhere, in all actions and in all documentation. There is always the possibility of negative repercussions based on either action, or lack of action, in the classroom. Therefore, documentation is a must. For these participants, the teacher is accountable for the performance of all children.

I guess you just need to be careful of what you do and what you say to a child every day. Cause, legally, my lesson plans are a legal document. That's a legal document. That is why I have to turn them in every week. Because, if a parent ever came back and said, 'Hey, Ms. Stone didn't teach that in kindergarten!' its proof in the pudding. That's a legal document. It can be seized for court. (Allison, interview 2, p. 43, lines 903-908).

These teachers feel that this level of accountability does not feel as if it is a good fit because, from their perspective, many other factors, such as interactions with other school personnel and parents pay a part. In other words, all stakeholders play a role in the score a student earns on a mandated assessment method (i.e., a standardized test). Allison was explicit about this.

But at the end of the day, they still have to be assessed. And, I am the one who is graded for that, you know. Um, did I opt for merit pay? No. Cause, I think it is a bunch of bologna. Bologna! Cause, you know what, I know I do my job. I, I hate worrying about everybody else, you know, But, if their parents don't help them, then I can't get my job done and that's the part that these parents don't understand. (Allison, interview 1, p. 30, lines 642-632)

This type of accountability may place a restriction on the types of sustained teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices that fit within the context of the

classroom. It is the formal, mandated measures that determine the final pass/fail or successful/unsuccessful status of a child. In other words, there is no room for sustained, authentic assessment practices because of mandated, required methods.

Sarah: You know what I am not hearing...Authentic assessments. Or, more, I don't even have a word for it. Maybe teacher grown?

Crystal: um hm. Right.

Sarah: Does it fit here?

Crystal: um, I, ah, not really. Its its more, um, I am using what I have been provided. I guess. And, what is expected. And, I, I would if, I am trying to put this in a positive way (lowered voice).

Sarah: You don't have to.

Crystal: Okay. Well, That is true. My name is not going to be on this.

Repercussions for students. These perceived negative repercussions create a trickledown effect for the students of these participants. These teachers perceive the frequency, pervasiveness, and extensiveness of the formal, mandated measures as overwhelming for children of this age/grade and may result in outbursts in the classroom.

And, he's crawling underneath this table (laughs). There is always something. And, its challenging when you have 20 kids... (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 10, lines 211-215). Children must be reassured that not all assessment data will be seen by parents because of how parents might react to these data.

I tell them, don't, worry. It won't go home or anything. And and, they don't know it is just for us to see, us to do. Um, because we are told we have to have the data when we go to these, um, data days. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 9, lines 194-196)

Further, for them, there is little leeway for instruction and assessment practices with regard to when and how students demonstrate understanding. The standards should remain tight even though accommodations should be made on a per individual basis.

Oh you wrote three sentences! And here (pointing toward where another child may sit), You only wrote three sentences. So, there that's the differentiation. That's the, um, I still expect everybody to be writing sentences. And, it still needs to be the same content. But, I, I, think that's ethical that I would not be failing a student because they were not performing like this student (again, referencing where another student may sit) is performing. (Crystal, interview 2, pp. 65-66, lines 1391-1398)

In addition to the rigidness of implementing accommodations, it is the formal, mandated measures, not the more authentic teacher developed measures, that determine the final pass/fail or successful/unsuccessful status of a child.

Notes from my derived meaning statement work:

I felt this too. For as much progress as I saw, it was the FCAT and other outside mandates that made the final call, not me. This was always frustrating for me. I could have a child make more than two years of growth, based on my measures, still not pass FCAT, and still not move on. This must feel devastating for a child

For these participants the length of time needed to implement interventions and related assessment practices are too long and therefore, detrimental to the child.

Now, that I see like, really problems inside of a kid. But, I have to wait a certain amount of days. Or, I have to wait until this intervention is done before something more can happen. Because of RTI. So, sometimes, it kind of gets in the way. Where, you want it to be quick enough. You don't want to have to wait, you know, 30 days, 90 days, just to try

this intervention if you have already done something like this before and you know it won't help. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 36, lines 813-817)

Therefore, this extensive amount of time may delay identification of a potential disability and or assistance from other school personnel for a child.

I think it was easier back then. Um, to get a child help when needed. And, I think a lot. Not myself, but I have heard before, that it was easier to label a kid with whatever, um, special education label. And, you know, now, you know, you can't be labeled so quickly. Because, of these interventions you have to do, to really see if it's the child or if it's the curriculum. And, that's really what they want to see. They always compare it. Is it the fish or the water? And, I am like, it's the fish. This fish isn't swimming so well. The water is fine. Cause, everybody else is getting it. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p9. 36-37, lines 819-825)

Independent Efforts with Data

A large part of participant's work is collaborative within an RTI framework. However, before such collaborative efforts can occur, independent efforts must happen. This clustered theme, independent efforts with data describes those efforts. For participants, all children receive the same, or a universal reading assessment practices. This means, there is a measure of accountability and timeliness for data collection. Allison feels this tension on a regular basis. She states, "Right now, I have to put in, right now, and give my team leader all my scores for, um, all my children who are in team-time. I have to write down..." (Allison, interview 3, p. 8, lines 152-154).

Participants must be responsible for collecting data for each child who receives an intervention as well as the intervention session itself. Crystal explains what this looks like for her.

One problem I think they were having was that they were wanting to know how long each session was. They wanted to know if any students were absent. Because, that way they could better determine if, you know, attendance [was] an issue. Or, if the student had missed a lot of the intervention. Then, maybe that's why it didn't work. Then, down here, the names [points to an area of a data collection form]. Every other week, we take a data point. Which, in this case is the [secondary basal reading series] assessment (Crystal, interview 2, p. 16, lines 330-341)

This means data are collected frequently by participants. As the needs of students increase, the intensity and frequency of reading assessment practices increases.

Week 1, week 2, week 3, week 4, week 5. So, this is every week what they got on the test. But, this only is looking for kind of, every other week. Or, you know three data points is what they want. So, we figured, for a six week period, after two weeks, after four weeks, after six weeks (Crystal, interview 2, p. 17, lines 345-348)

This is not always an easy process, as Crystal explains. The majority of data entry, electronic and hard copy, is the responsibility of participants.

Oh, I don't do this [enter student names in a spreadsheet]. It's already with the spreadsheet, once we fill in the matrix. Their names are automatically on here... And then, I just fill in the 0's and 1's, and it automatically gives me the percentages. And that's um, [points to a column] total listening comprehension, [points to the next column] total fluency.

Gwendolyn echoes this sentiment as well.

They have a binder. Every kid has a binder with, um, all their, like all the copies of the assignments. And, then, we make graphs out of them. The specialist, you know, the reading specialist, the math specialist, they make all the spreadsheets for us to fill out with the kids.

When data collection does involve other school personnel, the process becomes more difficult.

Gwendolyn explains,

Well, we can't do an IQ (intelligent quotient) test on him. Which, um, you know that was suggested. So, we are trying to get a language screen on him. But, then, it's like, we have one speech therapist. And, she is so backed up. And, she just doesn't have time. When, when she wants to pull him, he may not be there. He might be absent. So, it's the roundabout process.

Additional independent efforts also include initial analyses of data. For participants, a multifaceted look at data in order to interpret the meaning of what conflicting scores may mean for a child is important. The importance rests in the need to gain a complete picture of student progress. Crystal explains,

Now, the reason that even though this is green, [and] that some of these have 0's is because of what this, this is what they actually...scored on the [basal reading series] diagnostic test. So, I kind of look at this data, and that's how I decide...

Additionally, such initial, independent analyses help participants provide an overall snapshot of student progress in their class as a whole as well as for students who may be in need of more intensive remediation or interventions.

And this [points to a graph] shows what level [children scored]. We wanted them at this time, to be at least a 1.1 or a 1.2. That was a targeted area. So, these [students] did not.

These are the ones that did not meet that target. They had also scored approaching on there [a different standard on the graph]. And so, that was kind of how I determined, um, intervention groups, um, based on that. (Crystal, interview, 2, p. 22, lines 458-464)

Collaborative Efforts with Data

This clustered theme describes the many facets of collaborative efforts associated with reading assessment practices between participants, teammates, students, other school personnel, and parents. For these participants, collaboration begins in the classroom with teammates and students. Collaborative efforts then advance to school and parent levels.

Subtheme team level collaboration through data sharing. Meeting together with each other on a regularly scheduled basis is a way for team members to discuss the children they serve and make sense of data together.

And we say, okay, how is this going? And, how is this child doing? And, things like that. So, we are always like, monitoring everybody. And, making sure that everybody is doing what they can. And, um, as a team [they share and discuss data]. (Allison, interview 2, p. 25, lines 536-542)

Team level collaboration also involves team-time, a collaborative effort among the participants and their same grade/team peers who group and then share students in order to provide specific, targeted interventions for areas of reading such as phonemic awareness and fluency.

We chose the kids by, we went through every, every number we had for the kids. And, put the lowest kids. And, we took their numbers. And, we chose those kids to be our most needy kids. And then, we took that group of kids. And then, we decided who was going to teach RTI. (Sadie, interview 2, pp. 18-19, lines 384-387)

In other words, participants and their teammates take responsibility for all of the children, not just those formally assigned to each teacher, in order to develop, implement, and monitor (use reading assessment practices) all children's progress. Questions such as whether a child is meeting an established goal and how a child is performing in a specific, targeted intervention group are discussed.

...and so, we would have to decide. Do they [the children] need us to step it up to the next level? Do they need to then work on phoneme deletions or whatever? (Crystal, interview 2, pp. 18-19, lines 388-397)

For these participants, a level of trust, camaraderie, and interdependence must exist. Problem solving and sharing among teammates is a necessity. Collaboration between teammates is both positive and beneficial because of shared planning for instruction, application of standards, and implementation of assessment practices.

I feel comfortable that if I need support, or I am having difficulty, or I need ideas. It is a constant discussion, if you will. Um, you know, if I, I'm having difficulty and I see that that particular, um, strategy isn't working with a child, I have no problem turning my seat around and saying, 'hey, have you had this situation? You know, what have you done? Do you have any ideas?' We meet at least once or twice a week. (Abilieen, interview 2, p. 16, lines 331-336)

Collaboration between team members is beneficial because of shared planning for instruction, application of standards and development of assessment methods.

I think since we all took it upon ourselves in kindergarten to do these assessments, I think they are helpful for us. Um, and I am glad we all believe in the same thing. That, this is what we should be doing. Cause, then, um, it doesn't matter, you know, if you have that

kid or you have that kid, at least, we all know, um, what they know and what they don't know when, like, we rotate kids for team time. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 7, lines 1450148)

Further, data for all children on the team and make decisions for instruction and reading assessment practices as a team.

And, we also meet, once a week. And, we also meet, we get together in the morning and talk. I mean, we are always talking as a team about the kids on our team. We have a specific RTI meeting time where we talk specifically about, okay, this kid, you know tell me this. Tell me. And, we go through every kid and every piece of data. (Sadie, interview 2, p. 18, lines 367-371)

Subtheme student level collaboration through data sharing. While participants constantly share data with their teammates they concurrently share data with students. They allow children to graph and track their own data, and see it as a small release of responsibility from the teacher to the student. Time to celebrate learning is an important part of reading assessment practices. Data sharing with children is a way participants help make the children aware of their own learning and help foster increased motivation.

Yup, it's instant gratification for them so they know right then, what is going on. Cause, they need it. They are five years old. They need to know, Am I awesome? Tell me what I am doing? Yeah! They need that now. (Allison, interview 2, p. 32, lines 672-675)

This also means that participants feel that taking time to celebrate learning is an important part of reading assessment practices so students know where they have been, and where they need to go.

I always tell them, that's the book of them [the student data binder]. And, every little one of them has a book of them. And, everything you ever wanted to know about them is inside a book about them. (Allison, interview 2, p. 30, lines 637-645)

Subtheme school level collaboration through data sharing. Moving beyond the team, the next stage in the process is a school based intervention team (SBIT). This meeting occurs when everything at the team level has been exhausted for students who participants perceive as those who struggle.

It's if you have any concerns or worries about children. The little girl and boy I have here for team time are SBIT students. They have been talked about with our team. And, if you are not getting any, um, like if you are not, your team isn't coming up with enough ideas, and it's not getting better, and you know, thrown out all your bag of tricks and everything like that with your team, then, you move to SBIT. Which, is like ah, helping figure out what's the next step? Do they need special programs? Are they maybe needing to go down the path of special education or something like that? Because, things are not. They are kind of an outlier in kindergarten. They are not like everyone else. (Allison, interview 2, pp. 26-27, lines 559-570)

This increased level of collaboration also means more active involvement from additional school personnel who may have more clout in presenting data to stakeholders, is a meaningful step to participants.

I always have a kind of sigh of relief when we get to that point. Cause, I feel ...that people who have other, like the school nurse, or the school social worker, if there are problems. If the student needs glasses. Because, as a teacher, um, you know, we don't want to overstep our bounds. And, I might not be qualified to say that the kid needs

glasses. But, the school nurse saying it, has a little more, um, you know. (Crystal, interview 2, p. 36, lines 739-745)

Therefore, for participants, it is normal and necessary to have other professionals in and out of one's classroom in order to work with both the participants and their students.

I mean, it is very normal to have people in your classroom. So, I mean, its like, you know, um, the intervention process. The change. Cause, we are having to learn so many different things all the time. Cause, we have different people in all the time giving us ideas and supplementing. Cause, its necessary (Allison, interview 2, p. 38, lines 789-792)

Outside of the classroom/team level, data from mandated reading assessment practices are the information used to discuss a child and his/her difficulty.

The other way this is helpful [mandated reading assessment practices] is if you do have that student [who] is not responding to the interventions. And, you are going to an SBIT. You can bring this and you can compare how that student did when the rest of the students in the class. So, you can say, well, the average for the class was 100% [for a particular skill]. But, they [the child] didn't get any of them [all of the other concepts this mandated assessment method] right or something like that. So, it's it's helpful for comparison that way. (Crystal, interview 2, p. 59, lines 1251-1255)

Subtheme parent level collaboration through data sharing. In order to avoid surprises, sharing data and concerns with parents as stakeholders starts early, before any formal progress monitoring, and continues through the many phases of collaboration with stakeholders. As one participant put it when she referred to initial parent contact, "I might be contacting you in a few weeks with concerns. Um, not concerns, discussing [a] progress monitoring plan for your child. So, I kind of, I have already kind of broken it to them" (Allison, interview 2, p. 28, lines

600-607). However, Parents may not be privy to the quantity and variety of data collected about their child unless there is a specific need.

Those [data] binders stay in class. The parents wouldn't really see that until like, conference time. So, um, and of course, some of the kids are with the parents during conference time. So, they will know, um, how they did. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, pp. 33-34, lines 753-756)

Further, sharing results, that a child is not meeting expectations, is difficult when the stakeholder is a parent because, this is a first time experience for parents.

Because it's so hard as a kindergarten teacher to tell a parent that their child is not making, meeting expectations. (Allison, interview 2, pp. 21-22, lines 458-459)

In addition to this difficulty of sharing data with parents, participants perceive that this group of stakeholders do not always recognize the extensive time, energy, and effort teachers put in each day. In other words, there is a perceived disconnect between parents and teachers with regard to how much work goes into teaching their child.

And, everything. Its oh my goodness, so crazy right now. It's the craziest week. No parent knows. No parent knows. They just see it and say, oh, its adorable. And, I am like, you have no idea! You have no idea how any hours I have been doing this. No idea! But, it is for the kids at the end of the day. (Allison, interview 3, p. 10, lines 207-210)

Participants also perceive that sharing data with parents that may point toward their child, who may not meet a standard or expectation, may be viewed as a purposeful, hurtful action.

That is what we always have to tell the parents. We are not doing this to be hurtful or mean. We are not. It's not. The data is reflecting [sic] that they are not making gains. So,

these are the intervention that we have tried. And, they are not working. (Allison, interview 3, p. 3, lines 68-71).

Therefore, these participants try, but are not always successful in getting their point across to parents. Parents may not accept or understand that their child is not meeting an expectation or state standard.

‘Cause, I can’t, as a teacher. I can just say you might want to think about going to your pediatrician and consider that. Um, and he is all over the place...And, his grandmother/mom has not returned my calls in three days about how I have to make my PMP (Progress Monitoring Plan) determinations. And, I mean, I have another little girl too. The mom, I called. And, she is just in such denial. (Allison, interview 2, pp. 23-24, lines 499-506)

And, parent stakeholders are not always receptive or responsive to data shared about their child who may be struggling in academics.

I have shared my hopes and fears for them [the child]. Um, they [the parents] seem to tell me things like, we are just not ready to do that yet. And, quite frankly, um, I think that is unacceptable. But, as a professional, I say this. And, for some reason, the weight of it is not understood as the other, when other things are told to people. Like, when a doctor would tell you, you have deep diabetes. Um, it is almost like we speak but we are not heard. So, I feel that a lot. (Abilieen, interview 3, p. 5, lines 94-99).

Lastly, parents do not always agree with teacher generated data and resulting recommendations.

Parents will come back and say, well, I don’t want my kid labeled. (Gwendolyn, interview 3, p.8, line 168)

Working Environment

This clustered theme, working environment, as perceived by participants, encompasses much more than the day-to-day interactions with students and other school personnel. For them, work never ends and, although there is an effort to separate one's personal and family life, teacher work will always creep in. Moreover, the physical demands that are a result of formal, mandated reading assessment practices place a toll on both them and the students they teach. Consequently, these formal, mandated reading assessment practices also impact the day-to-day instruction of the general education curricula as well as interventions administered through the RTI framework.

Subtheme working all the time. Like many teachers, work beyond the contractual day is the norm for these participants. In other words, the end of the day is not the end of the day. Teaching, and the extra hours of time needed for associated reading assessment practices takes a personal toll. For example, data/record keeping is a time consuming process that may eat into the personal or non-contractual time. Allison explains how this happens for her.

Yeah, I have to write down their letters and sounds, how many letters they know. How many sight words they know. What their running record level is. I have to have it all done by Friday. I have, have to have ALL this done by Friday. And, it is very demanding because my daughter's birthday is this week. And, you know, it's like, her birthday this week. Daisies [girl scouts] is tomorrow. You know, and it's like, my, my daughter will say to me, 'Mommy, you work all the time.' ...I always try to do it [work] when she goes to bed. But, she will see me. And, she is like, 'Mommy, you, are you still working?'

Teacher planning time is not always available for planning. Therefore, participants struggle during the school day to adequately prepare for instruction and assessment practices. Gwendolyn notes:

And, there really isn't ever a planning day for us. Which, we're, um, very upset over. 'Cause, if we are not planning a lesson study, then we are doing our professional development in the mornings, Or, sometimes we are doing it in the afternoon for our, um, like intervention meeting.

Further, the school day moves quickly, therefore the end of the day often arrives quite unexpectedly. Determination of how best to spend the limited time and resources within the day and adequately use reading assessment practices is difficult. Crystal states:

Figuring out how do I? How do I best use my time? And, how does each? How is each student's time being best used? And, and what, um, what materials do I need to use? Or, what practices do I need to use to make the quickest, um, leaps and bounds for that student to be pulled up to the standard or where they need to be?

Rounding out this subtheme are the participants feelings of resentment toward their workload. Abilieen is terse.

Abilieen: Oh, I have got it! 'Unrealistic expectations cause resentment.'

Sarah: Oh.

Abilieen: and, that's very true. And these, and these expectations are unrealistic in that, teachers do not have the time to meet them (long pause). And, as a result of that, there is a lot of resentment. No to mention, stress and ...having me consider possibly looking at choosing another career. Not believing that I could do this for the rest of my working years. Un, it's just too much. Too much.

Gwendolyn, on the other hand, expressed this same sentiment in a softer tone and suggests what sees as a potential implication for the field.

People stay after work so long. And, they take work home. And, they are working over the weekend. And, just keep working, and working, and working, and working and working because you have to time in your class to do anything. Or, not time during your planning time to do it. And, I think we are going to lose a lot of good teachers out there. Some we have already, you know, lost. Because, there's, it's just too much. So, we will just go try and find something else we can do.

Subtheme physical demands resulting from mandated reading assessment practices.

Participant sentiments toward their perception of working all the time led naturally into the next subtheme, physical demands resulting from mandated reading assessment practices. They express exasperation at how long the mandated methods (e.g., reading tests) take to administer, and how they pull participants from directly teaching and implementing more authentic reading assessment practices. Gwendolyn explains the logistics of this as she and her teammates experience it.

Usually we build in about two weeks for assessment, um.

Sarah: So, does that mean that there is no, like, small group or anything?

Gwendolyn: ...That's the hard part. Because, we don't want to give that up. But then, what other part of the day can we do it?

Further, these formal, mandated (the tests) are long, and from the perspective of the participant, cumbersome for students of this age/grade level. As one participant put it, "Now, in kindergarten we test every three weeks, um, after a unit is done. And, it is not a small document by any feat. It is 22 questions, um, probably 7 pages for a kindergarten child to go through" (Allison, interview 1, p. 11, lines 569-574).

Moreover, children express what participants, in this case, Allison, perceive as exasperation when working through a mandated measure.

And, they [the children] are just counting the pages. Cause, they are like, ‘Oh my gosh! Is this ever going to end?’ It’s it’s terrible sometimes. But, I have to do it... And, I have to teach them, ‘You have to do this. It’s just for fun!’ I always tell them, ‘It’s just for fun!’ And, we will like, make a joke. We are like, ‘Yeah!’ They are like, ‘No!’ (laughs).

Group administered formal measures are not the only type of reading assessment practice. These teachers, the participants, also administer a lengthy, one-on-one standardized reading test to every child. For them and their students, behavior management of students who are not administered the one-on-one mandated measure is a challenge and quality testing conditions may not be feasible. Gwendolyn states this point explicitly.

And in that kind of a setting, where there [are] other kids going a little wild in the room, ‘cause, maybe you are by yourself and you (pause). What are you going to do with 19 other kids when you are just testing one? There is only so much you have them be quiet for.

Behavior management coupled with the mandates, the formality and fidelity in proctoring required by the formal, mandated reading assessment practices bring an unneeded intensity into the classroom.

These assessments came down the line for reading, and having to do them every three quarters, I mean, every three weeks, we were like (throws head back and laughs), I can’t wait (*I perceived a hit of sarcasm in Allison’s words. I also perceived this same sense of sarcasm as she would later say, “No!” but shook her head indicating, yes!*)! We were like, No! And, we fought it. And, it was quite a burden. Cause, you have to stand in front

of these children, and read a paper. And, walk around. And, you are in charge of 18 children and making sure that everybody is listening to the right page. And, everybody is listening to what you are saying. And, you have on the ELMO and making sure its working and, yada, yada, yada. And, I mean, it is so intense. (Allison, interview, 2, p. 15, lines 311-318)

Participants must also teach the mechanics of taking a mandated measure.

You know, and breaking things apart. And, you know, circling pictures, and putting X's and doing all of these things is hard. Some of them [the students] are not read for this at all. You know, the first time I gave an assessment, you know the one, I am always like, 'Oh my gosh!' My heart breaks, cause I am like, they do not have a clue. They don't have a clue. And they are looking at me like... (Allison, interview 2, p. 16, lines 349-352)

Thus, these teaching of test taking strategies and skills for required/mandated measures (bubbling, highlighting, clicking, etc.) takes away from valuable classroom learning time and take away from any perceived value data these formal, mandated reading assessment practices may hold.

Um, FCAT, I think is a joke. I think it takes away from so many hours of instruction that could be used wisely. That you have to practice for the FCAT. I mean, you have to...you have to practice bubbling in a circle. I mean, that is a practice skill. I got kids doing this (draws circles on a sheet of paper in front of her and fills in the circles in a variety of ways). I am like, No. No. No. No. No, you know. So, it just takes time out of instruction, that I don't think, I think it is ridiculous. I don't think the scores show. (Sadie, interview 2, p. 29, lines 602-608)

Subtheme mandated reading assessment practices impact on instruction. For these participants, there is a direct impact on the planning and implementation and assessment practices of Tier1, the general education curricula. Allison puts this bluntly.

Yeah. Everybody has to be doing exactly the same. Like, I can't be like, doing it different than the girl next door to me. Everybody has to do it exactly the same. And, we can't, you know, um, do small group. If, if everybody chooses to do small group, we all have to do it. If we all do whole group, everybody has to do whole group. Like, we can't.

Everybody has to do the same. Kindergarten is a very strong knit group. We all have to stay the same, because they [administration] believe in that.

Participants also stress how time spent with students used to identify and verbalize why a particular answer choice for an item (question) on a mandated method (test) was wrong is an important task. Crystal states this very directly.

At the guided reading table, they get their privacy folders and I hand them their tests. And, we have privacy folders because we don't need to share it with everybody. It's just for ourselves. And, we go back through every question on the test and talk about what the answer was. And, why it was the answer. And, I especially talk about what the answer was. And, why it was that answer. And, I especially talk about the comprehension and how, if you were reading this, you really needed to go back and look. Here, is where it was! And, so, we go through the whole test. And, they can see how they did. And, then, and they're really good at this. Oh, I have gotten them, I have trained them well.

Coupled with the participants lack of flexibility in curriculum implementation and time spent on review of formal, mandated measures, there is little room for sustained, teacher selected or developed authentic reading assessment practices.

Sarah: Well, what about, you know, book projects? Or, readers theater?

Crystal: Ah! (Laughs, ha, ha, ha) Wouldn't that be nice! Yeah. We don't have time for that. We have an hour and a half. We have got to get our guided reading in. We have got to get our whole group instruction. And, we have got to move on to the next subject. So, I love readers theater. I love, you know, book reports. No dioramas. Nothing like that. Now, we do have homework that we send. But, again, [it] goes with the skill. (Crystal, interview 2, p. 47, lines 985-990)

Notes from my derived meaning statements: I don't know how I feel about this. Am I a rebel? Can't these things still fit into what is going on? As home projects? As center work? As part of content (Science/Social Studies)? Perhaps, could it be??? Is it the sustained, or ongoing component of these more teacher grown or authentic practices that may be the missing link?

A summary of this theme, from the perspective of the participants would also suggest that there is little time within the school day to teach things such as citizenship, art, or humanities, because of the mandates and required reading assessment practices in place within the response to intervention framework. Abilieen expressed this through what I perceived as heartfelt concern.

There is a conflict of what I feel they need in addition to the education. An, how do I say this? Yes, I need to teach them how to read, write. But, they also need to develop relationships. They need to learn manners and reinforce what their parents are teaching them about manners. They need to play. And, it seems like there is no time for that anymore. There is time for art. They need time for art.

Interventions and Reading Assessment Practices in Action

There is a direct impact on the planning and implementation of Tier1, or the general education curricula. Limited time within the school day and the need to provide interventions

and related reading assessment practices may result in some children, the most needy as determined by data and team based decisions, to miss core, Tier1 instruction in areas such as science and social studies. For Crystal and her teammates, this means that students miss Tier1, general education curricula, in order to receive Tier 2 interventions and related reading assessment practices. For her this is a rub, or a dilemma.

Sarah: I am appreciating this. When do those kids get their science/social studies instruction?

Crystal: Well, that's the, that's the rub there. Um, they, they are out of the room for half an hour. So, this is something we are struggling with...I don't know if that really meets the, you know, what they are supposed to do. The know, understand, and do. The curriculum map and all that. So, that's that's a challenging. Other schools, I think, what I have heard, is that they are doing NA, not applicable, for that [science and or social studies] grade. Ah, for that subject for those kids. Because, the parents are aware that their students are being pulled for these groups. And, to us, that's the most important thing is to get them reading. Because, if not...

Therefore, a student who receives Tier 3 instruction and related reading assessment practices has a significantly altered day.

Yeah. They are there. But um, that's where we are at right now. So, I mean, there's a little boy who is in kindergarten right now. And, he is at tier 3 because I had him last year [in kindergarten] And, he still does not know letter sounds. And so, he as to have 30 minutes outside of the reading block. And also, he is seeing somebody else. So, I mean, it is whoosh, whoosh, whoosh! (Allison, interview 3, p. 3, lines 58-62)

As a result of a decision that a child is not making progress, she receives interventions, she will have her progress monitored, and her parents are invited to discuss her progress and interventions. Crystal explains one such instance.

She is the one that I just added to my intervention, um, my [below level basal reader] group. So, she is now going to be getting, in addition to the whole group and the approaching small group, the third. Well it is really a tier 2 intervention is what we call it. Um, it's more intensive materials and that kind of thing. More time, and then, in the coming month, what I am going to do on the report card is put, um, mark, ah, conference is requested. I am going to have her mom come back in. and, I am going the set her up with a progress monitoring plan. So, that I can formally have that, um, on paper that she is getting this extra help. And, that she would then need to have her progress monitored.

And, the intensity of interventions increases, so do the related reading assessment practices.

We will look at where they are ... and what they are struggling with the most. And then, that's the thing that we will be practicing in RTI for the next six weeks. So, you reevaluate, 2, 4, 6, every six weeks. And, which is what we are in the process of doing right now. And then, we will restructure. (Sadie, interview 2, p. 19, lines 401-405)

Overall, participants teach students [those who are not assigned to the participant as teacher of record] tier 1, or the general education curriculum, while her most needy students [who are assigned to her as teacher of record] go to another teacher to receive intensive reading instruction and related reading assessment practices.

1:10-1:50 is specials. 1:50-2:40 is science or social studies. And, we do our Science and Social Studies lesson. That's the time when there are also RT, ah, response to intervention groups being pulled in the first grade team. So, I have um, half of another

teacher's class come in. And, I teach them science and social studies. While she, is taking a couple of my kids. Ah, I have three that go out for groups. Um, for that intervention time. (Crystal, interview 2, p. 11, lines 230-235)

Children spend a large portion of reading instructional time without direct teacher contact due to the necessity for small group center work and independent work.

So, I may have those four kids in my, my little reading group while the rest of the other kids have to be occupied doing something else. um, either on the computer or finishing, ah, work from the day. But, it's a challenge because then, they are not being as quiet as you would like them to be. And, it's just being that age. You know, and you're you're constantly telling them, 'you have to be quiet so these kids [the reading group with the participant] can learn. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 8, lines 165-171)

And finally, children do not always receive reading instruction and or interventions from a certified teacher.

As I do one reading group, she [an instructional assistant] will do another reading group. And then, we will switch. Cause, I have four reading groups. I have 20 kids. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 3, lines 71-72)

Authenticity in Practice

Within this clustered theme, reading assessment practices are delineated. For participants, there are two sets, or kinds, of reading assessment practices. The first are the formal, mandated practices (e.g., administration of state assessments such as FAIR and district assessments such as the required ones from the basal reading series, or specific measures used within the RtI framework). Most data from these formal, mandated practices are used in a summative, high-stakes manner by outside stakeholders and not by participants and their students. Conversely, the

second type, and the focus of this clustered theme are teacher selected or developed authentic reading assessment practices. These practices are teacher selected and not mandated by other stakeholder groups. Participants take great care to match these authentic practices to the specific needs of their students. For them, most data from these low-stakes practices are used daily in a formative manner inside the classroom by participants and their students. Many do not transfer into the tiers of an RTI framework because reading assessment practices in those instances are not left to individual teacher choice. Unfortunately, from their perspective, these formal, mandated reading assessment practices do not take away authenticity completely, just the ability, for these participants, to have more sustained, long term authentic practices. Instead, they are only short, spontaneous, or on the spot reading assessment practices.

Subtheme teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices. For participants, teacher selected or developed reading assessment practices used in a formative manner are evident every day. Gwendolyn explains:

I think even assessment comes with every day also. So, assessment is a very broad word because it it's just kind of like when you are just teaching. You can just tell who is getting it and who is not (laughs). So, then you wouldn't want to wait a few weeks, to do a formal one. Um, I think we are assessing all the time, though. Even though we don't just think about it, I think that's just part of our nature. We can tell by their facial features if they are getting it.

Therefore, participant's data from these teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices are the most important. For them, these practices inform day to day instruction.

However, these data are not as important outside of the classroom when compared to from the formal, required, mandated reading assessment practices. According to Sadie:

Data [that are] most important to me, [are] data that I have in my head and on the thing [her notes], and who is doing what...Data [that are] most important to the world, apparently, [are] data that, How did they do on the weekly test? Or, or the unit test? You know what I mean.

Examples of these teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices are those that encourage connections to what participants call, the real world, or world outside of the classroom, and rely heavily on oral questioning, antidotal notes, and student written responses to texts. Allison describes one such connection to the real world.

And so, they are trying to make those connections [to the real world], like, the unit is about food. And, you know, we should know what a menu is. Like, like little things like this. Um, so, was are doing that all the time. Like, making the connections. Even when we go to lunch. Do you know what is on the menu today? ...It's it's very verbal.

Especially with this age. It's not like, oh let's write down our vocabulary words and a definition.

In a similar fashion, Sadie explains the importance of anecdotal notes. For her, “[M]y assessment method really is just notes, on my own. I mean, other than the weekly tests. And, other than formal assessment. I assess by keeping notes of what the kids are doing and who needs what” (Sadie, interview 2, p. 13, lines 280-284). Crystal explains how she uses student written responses. “So, I would tell them...here's the book that you're going to read. Um, read the book and then go back through the book and determine the main idea and three supporting details that follow the main idea” (Crystal, interview 2, p. 5, lines 92-99).

For the participants, these examples mean that they have quick, immediate results that only take them a few minutes, and in many instances are second nature for them. Gwendolyn made a point of sharing this idea.

I think...assessment comes with every day...So, assessment is a very broad word because it's just kind of like when you are just teaching. You can just tell who is getting it and who is not (laughs). So, then you wouldn't want to wait a few weeks, to do a formal one. Um, I think we are assessing all the time, though. Even though we don't just think about it. I think that's just part of our nature. We can tell by their facial features if they are getting it.

Therefore, for these participants, the definition of assessment is broad, yet meaningful. Again, Gwendolyn is explicit about this point when she states:

My definition of assessment would be, I think it's really in the hands of a teacher. They have to go and find something that would work for their class. So, um, not these lengthy tests. I wouldn't consider [those] assessment. I think it was just, being, okay, I am going to teach a certain amount of time, or unit or something. And, I am going to do maybe little checks. Little assessments in-between um, to see if they are catching on.

Therefore, participants will step out from the formal, mandated reading assessment practices when they feel it is necessary and right. Sadie was brief, yet to the point when she addressed this.

Sarah: Is there room for teacher, authentic?

Sadie: There is in my room!

She later went on to state,

There is a lot of stuff that we have to do...a lot of teachers take that very, very, very, very seriously. I do what I am supposed to do and I take ... most of it very, very seriously. I am a rebel, actually.

This means that there is an importance and vitality for teacher selected/developed reading assessment practices. In Gwendolyn's words:

I will, everything that we [she and her teammates] have done, I think, for me, I've done other than what we were required to do. I am doing the ones I feel are appropriate in getting the, I guess the knowledge that I want to know. Okay, how are they doing? And, required assessments aren't telling me that. So, I have to go use my own.

Subtheme matching teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices to the child. In addition to the need to use teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices, participants perceive incongruence between the formal, mandated reading assessment practices and student need for differentiation or accommodation.

It is very difficult. Because, I have a very big power struggle with it. Cause, if they are not prepared, how do I, how do you assess a child that way? Show me the cover of a book. Okay. I can do that. But, we don't do [that kind of reading assessment practice] any more...it is gone. We don't do that. Now, it is just letters, and sounds, and sight words.

It's if you don't know these, baby, you are in for a tough road ahead. (Allison, interview 1, p. 31, lines 647-652)

For them, children who have difficulty on the mandated measures may be frustrated because the administration procedures do not allow teacher involvement. Participants see this as a barrier because, "provision of a scaffold, such as reading a specific word to a child, may help avoid or reduce this frustration" (Crystal, interview 2, p. 40, 835-845 if need it check the line numbers).

More specifically, there is incongruence with the mandated reading assessment practice and classroom instructional practices. Gwendolyn expresses this from her point of view.

It is the way they are tested on that test is not like the way we teach. Where, you know, the beginning, um, entering the test. I have to read a little story on the computer to the kids. And, the kids have nothing to look at. There's no pictures. There's no nothing in front of them to look at. And, that's not how we teach them. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 27, lines 599-603)

Therefore, children need space outside of the mandated reading assessment practices in order to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. According to Sadie,

You know, some kids just can't do this. But, they can show me in a different way... And some of the kids, I let them go with a different type of. You know, I will individualize the assessment.

So, there is a willingness to adjust or differentiate, based on student need while no modification to student expectations occur.

I try to differentiate. But also, I don't want to move the bar. Like, I, I, still want to get to this place. But, I am willing to move in increments with certain kids that might need that. But, still, we are trying for this (holds hand up indicating an imaginary bar or standard) (Crystal, interview 1, p. 16, lines 333-336).

Moreover, accommodations for test administration are important and will be offered to all students including those who do not have a formal, documented need (such as an IEP or 504 plan) because this way, there will be a more accurate gauge of student progress.

Lack of Decision-making Power

This clustered theme depicts the concept of a perceived lack of decision-making power. For participants, there is a perception that their decision making power, outside of their own classroom or team context, is limited. At certain times, even inside the classroom, decision making is not always their own. Stakeholders with the least amount of decision-making power are the students. For this group, teachers use data to make decisions, students do not.

Decision-making power within the classroom begins with the types correct/incorrect responses a child may give. Such correct/incorrectness is often determined through participant's formal, mandated reading assessment practices. Crystal expresses her disagreement about this point candidly.

How am I going to say that a kid is failing reading when I don't agree with, or you know, that they failed that question or something, when, I don't agree with the way the question is written? Or, I don't agree, you know! We talked before about how in some of these unit assessments. Well, we, this appears [points at a list of student responses (correct (1) incorrect (0)) for a particular concept measured on a mandated test] one time during the lesson.

This classroom level power then transitions into decisions to move a child from tier to tier within one's team. For participants, such a move is based on both data and belief that a child simply needed more time to gain a particular skill. For Crystal, this is important.

She can read when I am reading with her. You know, the books and everything. I, um, didn't pull her in an intervention group at that time. I felt like, again, they are 6 [years old]. She just needs a little more time. Let me let me give her a little time and see how she does. And, she was doing well on the weeklys [the mandated test] at that time. but

then, as it got harder, she wasn't. and so, that's why, then, [I] have determined that she needs a little more ah, support and is [now also] in my um, [intervention], group now.

Participants also have a say, or decision-making power, in the assignment of report card grades (E, S, N, U) but little or no voice at school level RTI data meetings other than to simply present data. In other words, participants and their suggestions for student interventions are not always considered at RTI meetings.

For Gwendolyn, this is a very personal point of contention.

And, you talk about him. But, then, everybody else just kind of talks back and forth to each other. And, and I don't really have any say to say, okay, I really think he needs to go in this type of a classroom because the curriculum I am giving is not working. But, you know, this other one will, or something like that. I think that's more like administration. They have the whole say in it. Maybe, maybe it's just this school. I don't know if it is like that everywhere else. but, um, you know, I just sign the forms that I was there, pretty much.

Overall promotion/retention decisions also fall outside of participant's decision-making power. For Abilien, this lack of power is disheartening. Her recommendation to retain a child who did not make significant growth, was based upon years worth of reading assessment data.

Last year, for the very first time in my career, I recommended that a student be retained. And, um, my reasons for that came as a result of ah, data that had been collected in kindergarten. And, data that I collected the entire [first grade] school year that reflected that the child had not made significant growth.

This was not a decision she entered into lightly.

Any data that I collected throughout the year, um, I used that data, in addition to the student. I considered the student. I considered his past history. I considered the expectations for second grade. And, how that would impact him. And, um, that is how I made the decision that he should be retained.

For Abilien and her teammates, stakeholders are not always receptive or responsive to data shared about a child who may struggle academically. This perception became evident through her statement, “Unfortunately, he was not retained, because the parents disagreed with me. But, it wasn’t a decision that was made lightly” (Abilien, interview 2, p. 13, lines 274-275). For her, decision-making power lies, instead, with parents.

Sarah: So, the ultimate decision then, came down to the parents.

Abilien: It came down to the parents.

Sarah: And, administration did what the parents requested.

Abilien: Yes.

Sarah: Even though they [administration], of course, saw these data, too?

Abilien: Right.

Teacher Emotion

The thoughts, feelings, and emotions these participants have are not always left at the threshold of the classroom. They, like their reading assessment practices, enter into everyday work. Participants express positive, passionate feelings toward the students they teach and equally as passionate, yet negative emotions toward their formal, mandated reading assessment practices. For them, this clustered theme, teacher emotions, wraps up in the perceived level of trust in their professional knowledge and judgment given by stakeholders.

For participants, it all starts with the children. They care passionately about those whom they teach. Sadie, expressed this early in the first interview, “And, they are like my kids. And,

each one of them, you know, will always mean something. I am going to get sappy” (Sadie, interview 1, p. 34, lines 708-709). Moreover, a personal benefit of teaching is the recognition of what one has done for a child as reflected in that child’s growth.

...They [other school personnel] could not believe that she [a student] sat there with me so quietly while her mother sat across the table and could not do anything for her. It was the most amazing thing ever, I had ever seen. That I could see a child reform who could not sit down for two minutes...It was amazing... It’s, it’s like, wow! You know, you can’t believe the things you can do for a child. (Allison, interview 1, p. 9, lines 523-531)

Therefore, participants hold very high self-expectations and take a deep, personal interest and investment in the success or lack of success of their students. In other words, there is a deep connection between her own feelings and how a child may perform on a particular reading assessment method, because, in Allison’s words, “it is personal.”

It’s stressful. Because, you pray to God when you are testing that child. You pray to God! And, sit here and you say a little prayer as soon as you pull them up. And, you are like, please let so and so whatever, do well. Because, you feel like it’s a reflection on you. You take it personally. Because, you have taught them all these things for a whole quarter or more. These babies have been with me. I hope to God!! They have gained something and gotten an understanding for reading. And, understanding it. ‘Cause, I don’t want to pull those interventions in place for them. Because, I have given them all the tools. And now, they need to use it properly. And, that is what you are praying to God when they are sitting back here. Please, make sure you do well! And, I am like, slow down! Think about what you are doing! And, I can’t give them help, helpful hints or anything. I just have to tell them, mmmm, are you sure? Like, but it’s hard. Because, you want to make sure. You

worry. You worry and you are like a little mama hen. You worry so bad for them.

Because, you want them to do well. And, you don't, you know, you don't want to have to go down the path of RTI. (Allison, interview 3, p. 10-11, lines 213-229)

This personal commitment extends to include a connection between participant's own life experiences with formal, mandated reading assessment practices and a heartfelt compassion for their perception of their students' experiences with formal mandated reading assessment practices. For Gwendolyn, stress from high stakes tests can cause anxiety and possibly failure.

Gwendolyn states:

Sarah: Yup. The ...[college exam] test.

Allison: I couldn't pass that. I am not a test taker. When it comes down to the nitty-gritty.

Like, [names a few other high stakes tests] (makes a guttural sound I perceive as a reflection of her opinion of such tests). I like, stress out bad. And, put so much pressure on myself. So, I would miss it always by like a few points...and then finally, I passed. And, it was so embarrassing to say that as a teacher, I know. So, I understand where my children come from. Because, I know how much stress and pressure those children are under.

Participants also share how they may feel heartbreak or sadness because one may perceive that what she has been able to do with a student may not, due to the outside influences, been enough. Allison was vehement about this. In her words,

I am like, oh my gosh! Poor kid. So, maybe [he] came to school two or three times a week. Tops. And...I had to give U's and I hated it. I hate it. Because, he doesn't come. Or, when he does come, he can't remember what you have taught him. So, when you sit him down to test, because you have to take them the day they come, or you have nothing.

So, you have to go with what the data says. And, you feel like, this awful person. Cause, you are sitting there, and they can't read anything. And, you are sitting there. Okay, tell me these sight words. There are 72 of them, and they just look at you blankly. Because, they don't know one words. Because, he hasn't worked with anyone except for you, when he comes to school. So, it's heartbreaking.

This feeling is exacerbated for participants when they perceive fear or anxiety in the faces of students when they first present a formal, mandated reading assessment method. Allison discusses what this experience is like for her.

Can you imagine the fear on their face the first time that [a mandated test] is ever presented to them? And, I stand there on the ELMO and pretend that this is a fun little thing. Okay, we are going to read a story now. And, I am going to ask you some questions. And, I want you to circle those things. And, it's very overwhelming for a five year old. And, it kills me.

Further, this use of formal, mandated assessment practices invokes a feeling of hatred or perhaps strong anger in the participant, in part due to the complexity of the measure and the youth of the child. Again, Allison recognizes this within herself.

'Cause, I have to stand there and pretend like it is not a big deal (long pause) I hate it. I absolutely hate it. I hate it because when I start, I am like, Turn your page! Find the alligator at the top. Find the bear. Find the bee. Find the camel. Whatever! I stand there and go, this is so ridiculous. Like, they are five years old! They should be learning like [the words] and, to, and we.

For them, there is a process of self-questioning. Participants may ask of themselves what she may have done wrong or what more she could have possibly done.

And, it's, as a teacher, especially kindergarten, you worry Because, what did you do wrong? You know, what did you do wrong? What didn't you put in place? What more could you do? And, you, you are the one who takes it so personally, I think, sometimes more than the parent. 'Cause, you are so stressed out because you are like, okay. I have done this And, I have done that. And, I have done these things. And, I have gone to my team. And, I have gone to administration. And, I have gone to the parent. And, what am I not doing? Why doesn't this child know anything? Why don't they know sight words? Why? (Allison, interview 3, p. 12, lines 248-261)

Participants went on to express the feeling of loss in control over how best to teach and then measure student progress. In such instances, there is perceived anguish, the need for prayer and hope, that what should be taught, is taught because sometimes, things are skipped.

And, you are like, ah, I don't know if I really want to teach that. And, sometimes, you do skip. And, you don't go as deep. And, you always pray to God. Oh my gosh, I hope I taught as much as I needed to for the day. But, you go back. Absolutely. 'Cause, constantly you are reviewing and making sure and assessing your children. (Allison, interview 2, p. 43, lines 909-913)

Therefore, they must care about and create a balance between collecting data and being scientifically based and the creation of a genuine love of reading for students so that children of this age/grade are not turned off by reading in later life.

I learned, which was, get kids to love reading and to love books. Especially at this age. Because, the K through 2 you know, really kind of lays the foundation and and, um, shapes the attitudes. So, if you make a kid miserable, trying to get him to read, like if the reading becomes not fun, then I worry that we lose some kids later on that, 'Oh, I hate

reading!' you know. that that it becomes (pause). Because, they are just still so young.

They are still just so young. (Crystal, interview 1, p. 20, lines 418-429)

Above all, participants express that tone or feelings a teachers sets in the classroom (positive or negative) determine if a child will learn or not.

I think that if kids are happy in the environment that they are sitting in, and working in, they are going to learn. I don't care what kid it is. If they feel comfortable (taps table) and safe, that they can ask me anything, be a dufus in front of me. We can, you know, I feel like, if they are in an environment where they love where they are. Cause, I hated every grade I was in (Sadie, interview 1, p. 29, lines 609-613).

For them there is a delicate balance to one's emotions in the classroom. They see some teachers manage this balance, while other others cannot and stop. In other words, teachers must find a balance between getting done all of the things that they must get done and giving the children what they feel they need. Sadie expressed this bluntly.

It's very difficult. And, it's actually why so many people just go ahhhh! Forget it! 'Cause, you either have to be able to hit the ground running. And balance all the things you are trying to do. Or, you, or you can't do it. It is a tricky, tricky thing. I think it will put good teachers out.

Abilieen would confirm this sentiment with an expression of imbalance with her emotions.

I wake up in the morning, um, I really don't want to come to work. Um, as sad as it sounds to say that. Um, it's becoming increasingly difficult to have the motivation and um, the desire to come to work because I am experiencing some overwhelming, um, you know, thoughts. Ah, expectations are really high. And um, quite frankly, it is not as fun to come to my job as it used to be.

And later, a potential choice to leave teaching.

I have come to the conclusion that stress kills. And, I have to be careful. I love this job.

But, I have to be careful of the impact it has on me. And, I need to be wise in the decisions I make so that I can be here for a long time.

Subtheme lack of trust in teacher knowledge and judgment. In addition to the emotions participants feel toward their students, and toward formal, mandated reading assessment practices, they express a deep trust in their own professional knowledge and judgment. For them, this trust exceeds any information from data from the formal, mandated reading assessment practices. For them, there needs to be a return to a trust in teacher knowledge and judgment from stakeholders. Abilieen is passionate about this through her statement, “No one asks. Again, I am here. I am in the front line. And, no one asks. You know, no one [no person] who can make a difference” (Abilieen, interview 3, p. 7, lines 149-150). Sadie echoes this with her adamant words, “Good teachers know how to respond to intervention. Um, and I, I, over assessing is killing kids. And, ah, that’s it. That is all I have to say” (Sadie, interview 1, p. 7, line 142). In other words, participants trust their own professional knowledge and judgment more than data from the formal, mandated reading assessment practices she must use. Allison puts this in the perspective those who taught before her.

She [Allison’s mother, a retired teacher] lived in the age of running records and kind of the age when you knew your child. You knew your children. By heart. And, you could tell about everything. I still live in that age, ‘cause I can do that. And, I mean, assessments are kind of on the back burner for me. Are they important? Yes. But, I don’t live off of them. I don’t. I don’t. I don’t. I find merit on them to some degree. (Allison, interview 1, p. 4, lines 77-82)

From their perspective, determination of a child's progress in reading is dynamic. It involves judgment and questioning such as, Does a child use picture clues? Does a child clue into how sounds and words come together to form meaning in a sentence?

It's so much. Because, a child comes in here who is in kindergarten. And, they are five years old. And, they might never ever, ever, ever have been exposed to a book in their whole life. And, you show them a book. They don't even know where to open it. Possibly, they don't even know where to begin on a page...um, so you have to guide them. You have to break down and say, okay, there [are] three words on a page. So, how many times should we say, you know, any words? We would say three words only on this page and not make up a whole story...They have to look at, does that make sense? Does that sound right? So, many different dynamics when you are doing reading assessments, um for children. You know, you have really go slow and make sure they are understanding. And, there is the dynamic of comprehension. You know, do they understand what they have read? You know, or you know, do they just zoom through the page and say, okay! It was a dog. Was it (laughs)? Because, I didn't see a dog in the story. Um, you know. So, it. Assessment is important for reading, 'cause it tells you as a teacher. Did my children understand what I worked with them on? So, so, it's a lot of questioning.

However, with the exception of report card grades, data from formal mandated measures that make the final determination of student progress, not the teacher. This general lack of trust in teacher knowledge, and judgment from other educational stakeholders is paramount for Abilene.

I always often think that teachers of the past, of our past, knew exactly what our students needed in order to succeed. And, sometimes we just need to remember that, and trust

that...But, we can't forget the knowledge that teachers have already. And, that they have gained in experiences. Um, yes, there may be a research based reading series, but why are we not trusting that we know how to manage it and that we are professionals in this classroom?

This teacher knowledge and judgment will come into play even during lower stakes mandated measures with regard to accommodations because for Crystal, it is common sense. It is ethical.

Again, this is just jumping out at me. But, using my common sense. So, if I have a test that has a ridiculous question that, no, like, this is the worst worded question I have ever heard! I have thrown out questions before. Now, I still put them on here (the data recorded for larger school use)! But, come on! You know. And, and, and just using my judgment. Using my teacher digression about, um, you know, about this. And um, and so yeah. That's that's what I would say would be ethical aspects.

For them, one must work as hard as possible, for as long possible and then, measure progress with a method that best matches the child. For Saide, this means, reliance on data from, formal, mandated methods instead of the teacher does not work.

If we would just all do what we are supposed to do with figuring kids out and assessing and knowing where they are at, even the school grade. We are giving a number to something. I, I, don't. I don't think it's a valid assessment. How is that for rational and normal? I don't think it's a valid assessment. (Sadie, interview 2, p. 30, lines 626-629)

Instead, from their perspective, student progress needs to be a determination made by teachers.

I'm just not a proponent of testing. I, I, I think. I, I think I could make a difference without a lot of this stuff. But, I am pretty sure. I mean, I know we need something. But,

they are asking teachers to take on so many more things. And, and, it's more, and more, and more, more, more. (Sadie, interview 2, p. 31, lines 656-659)

Teacher Needs and Wants

Despite the intensity and magnitude of emotions participants express, their needs and wants are few. This clustered theme describes those needs and wants. For them, there is a desire, to not have to give the frequent, mandated reading measures to student and instead, use something of their selection. Allison states,

Well, I know that it's important and it needs to be done. And, it's something that I have had to, I guess, come to terms with. 'Cause, there is nothing I can do about it. I have to assess my children. Do I wish it was just running records? Absolutely.

Further, for them, reading assessment should include small, formative checks collected over long periods of time that can then also serve in a more formal, or formative manner as well.

According to Abilien,

It should be a tool that is given in installments or periods, for periods of time. to allow a teacher or a person to get feedback on how well a child is doing. In addition, to areas where the child needs. In addition, areas that need improvement so that instruction could be guided according to the information that is being collected.

More practical needs begin with the organization, or grouping of students. More explicitly, participants feel there should be a variety of student ability levels in a given classroom, because that is what is best for children. For Sadie, this means multi-age classrooms.

We had a multi-age, like I was telling you about, we could mix the kids. You know, and the big ones and the older ones learn from the younger ones, the you know, putting all

these little kids in one place is just putting, it is not even, you know they don't even get role models they don't get, they don't get to see the other kids.

More of these practical aspects include the need for more hands-on, daily assistance in the classroom in an effort to make the RII framework work more fluidly. For Sadie, this means more peoplepower.

There should be another teacher. I wish there was a specific person that would come through at a certain time of day and spend those 30 minutes with those kids. And, and then somehow, I would like to also work it in so that they don't miss the curriculum they are missing during the 30 minutes. That's my frustration with RTI. It is just the scheduling of the whole, how it works.

Participants also asked for a longer period within the work day (longer than 30 minutes) for teachers to refresh and recharge because, for them, teaching is extremely demanding. Abilieen shared her vision for this.

Which, if I could have a dream come true, it would be to extend...because, I feel, as teachers, our jobs are so intense and hectic that it would be nice to have a full hour so that we could really rest. And um, talk to our friends and coworkers about our day. And, really get things off our shoulders. Or, ask for input. Really, 30 minutes is not sufficient.

Above all, participants need recognition from the children/families they work with. This expression of appreciation does not need to be lavish. Allison explains,

You get those notes and it does make you feel like, okay, it is a worthwhile balance. Because, then you will get, you are so terrific! We need more people like you. You know, and you don't, you don't get those notes. You don't get those notes from people. So, when you do, you are so blessed and think to yourself, Thank God! Somebody notices

what I am doing every day you know, and they are thinking you for what you do.

Because, you feel like, is this worth it?

Clustered Theme Summary

Clustered themes are groupings of formulated meaning statements, which are common across all participants (Colaizzi, 1978). In the presentation of these clustered themes I used direct quotes from participants. I also included my own thoughts, impressions, and biases from my researcher reflective blog, notes written directly on sections of transcripts (in italics), notes I kept throughout the analysis process (also in italics), and related classroom documents and artifacts from participants. The main clustered themes I discovered through analysis are (1) shift of focus, (2) ever changing accountability, (3) independent efforts with data (4) collaborative efforts with data, (5) working environment, (6) interventions and reading assessment practices in action, (7) authenticity in practice, (8) lack of decision making power, (9) teacher emotion, and (10) teacher needs and wants. In keeping with the theoretical framework of my study, readers should consider these clustered themes as part of a larger, socially constructed meaning and not as an objective truth (von Glasersfeld, 1995; 1996).

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, I described the findings of my dissertation research. Of importance are the participant profiles, presentation of clustered themes, based on my application of Colaizzi's (1979) method of phenomenological analysis and my perspective through the theoretical framework of social constructivism (von Glasserfeld, 1995; 1996). In Chapter five, I present a discussion of this findings, potential implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of my dissertation research was to describe and explain elementary general education teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework. Thus, my research questions about these teachers were:

1. What is the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?

In order to situate these research questions within the current assessment- and accountability-based context, I reviewed relevant literature on both the context and culture of assessment. In the section "Context of Assessment," I described the historical impact of assessment on education. In other words, I addressed the why and how of how schools chose to implement the RTI framework and then connected this information to NCLB (2004) legislation. Within the section entitled "Culture of Assessment," I addressed details of classroom assessment and assessment literacy with regard to the impact on practice. I detailed the connections between assessment and the everyday lives of teachers' work and a perceived gap in literature on teachers' assessment knowledge and use.

Given my purpose, research questions, and review of relevant literature, I needed to situate my study within a theoretical framework. Therefore, I selected social constructivism as

this framework. For me, this framework fit because, as Brookhart (2004) suggests, research on teachers' assessment practices over the last few decades has fallen into three overarching theoretical frameworks (Brookhart, 2004). These include theories from psychology with a focus on motivation and disposition; theories of learning with a focus on application of assessment to learning, and theories from measurement with a focus on specific components of assessment such as score reliability and validity (Shepard, 2009). Survey research, the prevailing method associated with these theoretical frameworks and resulting research (Brookhart, 2004; Fernandez, 2009; Shepard, 2009) has resulted in studies where data are seldom collected directly from classroom settings. Through the very nature of the method, survey research does not always allow a firsthand, personal account of, as Fernandez (2009) puts it, "tasks, students, teachers, processes and results" (p. 87). As Brookhart (2004) points out, researchers may have simply forgotten the classroom. Brookhart (2004) suggests that this forgetfulness should be addressed by taking a cross-disciplinary look at theories and methods in order to broaden perspectives and begin "pressing at the edges of theory and exploring intersections so as to contribute to richer understanding" (Brookhart, 2004, p. 455). Therefore, as I previously stated, Social Constructivism served as my theoretical framework.

With this theoretical framework in hand, I used a series of in-depth-phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) and Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis that emphasizes the use of description of lived experience. As I moved through Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis, I kept up my researcher reflective blog, held member checks, discovered clustered themes, and ultimately arrived at what Colaizzi (1978) describes as the rich, thick, exhaustive description. It was within the context of the clustered themes and this description where I, a qualitative researcher, answered each of my research questions.

Furthermore, it is where I place these answers in the context of the everyday, lived experience shared by the research participants. I expressed these answers through the clustered themes of chapter four and my use of composite narrative (See Appendix H). Lastly, I arrived at four breakthroughs that represent a contribution to the literature on classroom assessment.

Breakthroughs

Four major breakthroughs emerged from my dissertation research.

1. These five participants perceive themselves as having two distinct sets of reading assessment practices, a formal/mandated set and a teacher selected/developed authentic set.
2. Participants feel deeper trust in data collected through their own teacher developed/selected authentic reading assessment practices rather those collected through the formal, mandated practices. They may feel resentment that the results of their authentic practices are not as highly valued by other stakeholders.
3. For participants, there is a perception that their decision making power, or voice, outside of their classroom or team, is limited with regard to decisions made about student progress.
4. Each participant has a need for positive recognition from the parents/families of the children they teach.

My first breakthrough was that participants perceive themselves as having two distinct sets of reading assessment practices, a formal/mandated set and a teacher selected/developed authentic set. Janesick (2006) writes how “as a result of their dissatisfaction with typical standardized tests, high-stakes testing, and a misplaced emphasis on rote repetition, ... many professionals, researchers, and educators have begun to search for a better way to assess student

work” (p. 3). Therefore, there was a push or movement for authentic assessment of student progress (Janesick, 2006). However, a definition of teacher selected/developed authentic assessment practices is not clear-cut. Janesick (2006) provides guidance on characteristics of this authenticity. For her, assessment practices are authentic when they:

- (a) Are realistic. In other words, match the characteristics of the student who’s progress is measured;
- (b) Require judgment and innovation on the part of the student. She or he must use their knowledge and judgment in a problem solving manner;
- (c) Requires students to put together the steps or processes of a particular subject, topic, or job;
- (d) Replicates activities students will encounter within the world outside of the classroom;
- (e) Requires students to use many of their skills, in addition their verbal and mathematical set; and
- (f) Includes a feedback loop deigned for continual refinement.

The first set of reading assessment practices is the formal, mandated set, are practices required through initiatives created by state, school district, and in some instances, school level administration. Examples of such practices are prevalent within the presentation of the clustered themes and the composite narrative (See Appendix J). These include, but are not limited to, administration of state mandated reading tests and fidelity to the required core reading series assessment methods.

The second set of reading assessment practices is the teacher selected/developed authentic set. This set mirrors the characteristics suggested by Janesick (2006). I found

participants used this set frequently, and often without an acknowledgement of the practice being authentic in nature. For example, Crystal would often ask her students to self-select a text and then, through their own use of independent inventive writing and spelling, bring meaning to the text. Allington (2013) suggests that such practices, as noted through the research by Adams (1990) help develop a child's sense of phonemic awareness and alphabetic understanding and should be an important part of teaching a child to read. I also discovered through my dissertation research that the formal, mandated reading assessment practices are so frequent and pervasive that, for the five participants, they leave little room for more sustained teacher selected/developed reading assessment practices. In other words, participants, use cooperative dialogue between students, anecdotal notes, and oral questions/answers frequently. However, these practices are short in duration and occur within the context of a given lesson. Such practices may not find their way into the formal lesson plan. No instances of such teacher selected/developed assessment practices are present within the lesson plan Crystal shared with me. For them, there is no place for teacher selected/developed authentic projects, products, or performance indicators of student learning that are more sustained or prevalent. As Crystal stated, "We sneak it in." For them, this lack of sustained teacher selected/developed assessment practices are perceived as a loss of trust in their professional knowledge and judgment about student progress.

My second breakthrough was that each participant has a perception of deeper trust in data collected through teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices rather than data collected through the formal, mandated reading assessment practices and therefore may feel resentment that these are not as highly valued by other stakeholders. Sadie clearly expressed this sentiment.

What data is most important to me, is the data that I have in my head and on the thing [antidotal notes on her electronic tablet], and who [a given student] is doing what. The data that's most important to the world, apparently, is the data that, how they did on the weekly test. Or, or the unit test. You know what I mean (Sadie, Interview 2, p. 14, lines 286-289)

Young (2006) describes how levels within the organizational structure of a school, leadership on data use, as well as established norms within grade levels or teams can either help facilitate or hinder collaborative use of student data (p. 532). The findings of this dissertation support that. Participants met regularly, often daily, with their team members to review, collect, and discuss data on student reading progress. However, Young (2006) goes on to state how “district leaders convey to teachers which data matter and the expectation that they use those data through curriculum and assessment polices and related practices” (pp. 532-533) and are monitored or organized through school level administration.

In the current standards- and accountability-based context of K-12 public schooling, such directives on what and how to measure student progress will not soon disappear (Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004). However, there may be a ways to incorporate more sustained teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices with stakeholders through SBIT (School Based Intervention Team Meetings) that are integral part of an RTI framework. As Wiliam et, al. (2004) suggest, this would not be a straight forward process, yet is possible. For these participants, and the school personnel who serve on SBIT teams, a shift in thinking, or what Young (2006) refers to as norms would need to change to include such data.

My third breakthrough was there is a perception among participants that decision making power, or voice, outside of the classroom or team, is limited with regard to decisions made about

student reading progress. In other words participants feel left out of school level collaborative or shared decision making. As I also wrote in Chapter four, Gwendolyn poignantly expressed this point.

And, you talk about him. But, then, everybody else just kind of talks back and forth to each other. And, and I don't really have any say to say, okay, I really think he needs to go in this type of a classroom because the curriculum I am giving is not working. But, you know, this other one will, or something like that. I think that's more like administration. They have the whole say in it. Maybe, maybe it's just this school. I don't know if it is like that everywhere else. but, um, you know, I just sign the forms that I was there, pretty much.

According to Meyers, Meyers, and Gelzheiser (2001), in order for shared decision making to be effective, stakeholders who participate (non-classroom teacher educational personnel, school administration, families, etc.) must learn or adapt to new roles. Meyers, Meyers, and Gelzheiser (2001) also suggest that a shift in leadership from the principal as the decision maker and enforcer to more of shared leadership will help facilitate more involvement from stakeholders. More specifically, for teachers, their voice, or authority comes from their everyday lived experiences within the classroom (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). Therefore, as Meyers, Meyers, and Gelzheiser (2009) also suggest, leadership within a shared decision making process can and should be used by any member (teachers, parents, other educational professionals) of the team, not just those who hold traditional leadership positions.

My fourth breakthrough was how participants have a need for positive recognition from the parents/families of the children they teach. This is not something new. Lortie (1975) indicated that psychic rewards, those that "consist entirely of subjective valuations made in the

course of work engagement” (p. 101) were of most importance for teachers. For the purpose of my dissertation research, these psychic rewards were in the form of participants’ need for a sense of trust and recognition of their work from parent stakeholders. Allison, Gwendolyn, Crystal, Sadie, and Abilieen needed to know that the decisions they made each day based upon their reading assessment data were respected by this group. For them, this recognition could be as common place as a thank-you note with words of affirmation for the time, energy, and effort each put into their job. Again, Allison expressed this sentiment.

But then, you will get those notes. And, it does make you feel like, okay, it is a worthwhile balance. Because, then you will get, you are so terrific. We need more people like you. You know, and you don’t, you don’t get those notes from people. So, when you do you are so blessed and think to yourself, thank God! Somebody notices what I am doing every day. (Interview 3, p. 8, lines 164-170).

In other words, these participants have a deep need to know they are noticed by the parents/families they serve. This is not always an easy task, O’Toole and de Abreu (2003) suggest that not all parent stakeholders feel safe or comfortable in the school environment. Parents may not have had a positive school experience themselves and therefore, may not expect positive encounters when their children start school. Further, parents may not always be able to participate in activities during the school day on school grounds. They may not even be able to participate in a phone or have access to communication methods such as e-mail, etc. (lack of technology, not permitted during one’s working hours, etc.).

Anderson and Minke (2007) suggest that it is the personal invitation from the teacher to school related events (not conferences, not negative behavior issues, etc.), a hand written note where the parent/family name is at the top, that entice a parent to come to school or a location

near parent homes (a local community meeting place). Once at such events (a science fair, an ice cream social, a carnival, a fundraiser) positive interactions and welcoming of families can occur. Then, when needed for other more academic reasons, parent conferences, etc., there is more of a willingness to participate, create a relationship and develop both trust and open communication.

Reframing Reading Assessment Practices from a Social Constructivist Perspective

Prior to the sections on implications, recommendations and suggestions for research, it is important to discuss a reframing of reading assessment practices from a social constructivist perspective. Based on my dissertation findings, a starting point for such a discussion begins with this question: Testing and related assessment practices: are they good or bad (Feuer, 2010)? In his 2010 article, Feuer suggested educators and policy makers address such a question by asking instead, “whether the good that can come from deployment of any given technology justifies both the magnitude and distribution of the potential harm“(Feuer, 2010, p. 62). Therefore, as a result of this research, an important next step is to think about teachers’ reading assessment practices from a social constructivist perspective. As I discussed in Chapter Three, social constructivism (Phillips, 2005) takes the premises that there is no objective reality and therefore, knowledge is created by the individual, a step further. From this perspective “reality is seen to be created through processes of social exchange; historically situated, social constructivists are interested in the collective generation of meaning among people” (Au, 1998, p. 299). In other words, it is not the individual, but the larger community and/or socio-political structure that actively constructs the meanings and values of assessment (Cobb, 1996; Phillips, 1995). Shepard (2000) points out that in order to do this researchers and policy makers,

have not only to make assessment more informative, more insightfully tied to learning steps, but at the same time we must change the social meaning of evaluation

[assessment]. Our aim should be to change the cultural practices so that students and teachers look to assessment as a source of insight and help instead of an occasion for meting out reward and punishments (Shepard, 2000, p. 10).

This requires a reconceptualization of past theoretical perspectives that undergird the last century of assessment practices (Shepard, 2000; Dorn, 2010). It means taking what we know works with regard to assessment practices (Wiliam, 2011) and concurrently creating new “contexts and cultural expectations” (Shepard, 2000, p.13) of assessment practices. Such a step also means that consideration must be taken for the voice of stakeholders who have not typically been as prominent (Goodson, 1991). Based upon my dissertation research, these voices include, but are not limited to teachers, students, and parents.

Implications

In this section, I detail implications for policy and practice with regard to teachers’ reading assessment practices. Implications from my research with regard to policy include a perceived incongruence between an RTI framework and the teacher evaluation system with regard to active collaboration. Those toward practice include difficulty with the day-to-day implementation of an RTI framework and the perception of a singular focus of RTI as disability determination.

Implications for Policy

An implication I found surprising was a perceived incongruence between an RTI framework and teacher level accountability as implemented through the teacher evaluation system. Recent legislation (2011) within Florida, the state where my dissertation research took place, made sweeping changes to the teacher evaluation system (Student Success Act 2011; Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012). In March of 2011 the state legislature passed the Student

Success Act (SSA). What makes this legislation so impactful for teachers are the requirements to use a value-added model to address student academic achievement and the direct, individual connection to the impact of a teacher, required performance pay, and the removal of long-term professional service contracts (Student Success Act 2011; Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012). Moreover, the law requires that a minimum of 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation be determined by an indicator of student growth as measured through the statewide assessment method or as measured by school district assessment methods for grade levels not measured by the statewide method (Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012). For participants, this incongruence between RTI and the teacher evaluation system lies within the concept of active collaboration. RTI necessitates active collaboration (Ehren, Laster, & Watts-Taffe (n.d). This means that RTI requires “deliberate, intentional, ongoing collaboration – not to be confused with cooperation” (n.p.). Therefore, active collaboration, in this context, and as defined by Ehren, Laster, and Watts-Taffe (n.d.) on behalf of the International Reading Association's Commission on RTI is the, “joining of forces, pooling of resources, and sharing of expertise in order to meet shared goals for instruction and assessment” (n.p.).

The current teacher evaluation system may not foster a sense of collaboration. In their 2011 review, Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster (2010) found this potential for lack of collaboration among groups of teachers. Jacob and Springer (2008) also report similar findings. From their sample of over 1000 teachers, 56 percent agreed that incentive pay may be destructive to collaboration. Moreover, as I also indicate in Chapter four, accountability through the use of the teacher evaluation system may be perceived to be a lack of good fit because of the student achievement component. For these participants, many other factors, such as interactions with

stakeholders play a role in the score a student earns on a mandated assessment method (a standardized test) and cannot be factored out. Allison expressed this sentiment:

But, at the end of the day, they [students] still have to be assessed. And, I am the one who is graded for that, you know. Um, did I opt for merit pay? No. Cause, I think it is a bunch of bologna. Bologna! Cause, you know what, I know I do my job. I, I hate worrying about everybody else (Allison, interview 1).

Instances of this implication are also present within various groups of teachers. Goldhaber and colleagues (2011) note how “teachers who have a higher sense of trust and respect regarding their fellow teachers are less supportive of merit pay, whereas those who have a higher sense of trust and respect in their principal are more supportive of merit pay” (p. 451). Moreover, according to their research, two aspects of utmost importance play into these findings. The first is the context of the everyday, lived experience of teachers and their perception of their daily work. The second is their willingness to accept or reject an evaluation system.

Implications for Practice

An implication for practice connects to how participants found it difficult to implement the response to intervention framework within the time constraints of the school day. For them, some children miss portions of the general education curriculum. According to Crystal, Sadie, and Abilieen, the children who struggle the most with reading regularly miss science and or social studies instruction. Crystal was very blunt about this point.

Well, that’s the, that’s the rub there. Um, they they are out of the room for half an hour. So, this is something we are struggling with...I don’t know if that really meets the, you know, what they are supposed to do. The know, understand, and do. The curriculum map and all that. So, that’s that’s a challenging [sic]. Other schools, I think, what I have heard,

is that they are doing NA, not applicable, for that [Science and or Social Studies] grade. Ah, for that subject for those kids. Because, the parents are aware that their students are being pulled for these groups. And, to us, that's the most important thing is to get them reading. Because, if not...

Furthermore, these children receive intensive reading instruction and related reading assessment practices, consider Tier II and Tier III of their RTI framework by participants, from a teacher even, in some instances, a paraprofessional. Gwendolyn suggested as much when she stated,

As I do one reading group, she [an instructional assistant] will do another reading group. And then, we will switch. Cause, I have four reading groups. I have 20 kids. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p. 3, lines 71-72)

Meanwhile, peers who do not interventions receive science and social studies instruction and related assessment practices from a teacher who may not be the formal teacher of record. In other words, these other students, who do not receive more than Tier I instruction, get science and social studies from a teacher who is not, ultimately held responsible for progress those children as demonstrated through formal, mandated measures. Further, as indicated by the direct quote from Gwendolyn, many children also receive reading instruction and or interventions from an instructional assistant/paraprofessional who is not ultimately held accountable for the progress of these children. Instruction by paraprofessionals presents an implication for the learning outcomes of children because this group is usually "the least expert adults working with children in schools" (Allington, 2013, p. 523). Moreover, Allington (2013) cautions how this has been both a concern of the Federal Title I program and cites how research into the use of paraprofessionals

for reading instruction and interventions may not lead to a significant improvement in a child's reading ability.

Another implication for practice from my dissertation research is the possibility of a perception that the overarching purpose of an RTI framework is potential determination of disability. Gwendolyn brought the perception of RTI as a simply means of disability determination light.

I think it was easier back then. Um, to get a child help when needed. And, I think a lot. Not myself, but I have heard before, that it was easier to label a kid with whatever, um, special education label. And, you know, now, you know, you can't be labeled so quickly. Because, of these interventions you have to do, to really see if it's the child or if it's the curriculum. And, that's really what they want to see. They always compare it. Is it the fish or the water. And, I am like, it's the fish. This fish isn't swimming so well. The water is fine. Cause, everybody else is getting it. (Gwendolyn, interview 2, p9. 36-37, lines 819-825).

Here it is important to note that the RTI framework raises new challenges. I state in chapter one, RTI is a break from the traditional achievement/intelligence quotient discrepancy model used for identification of specific learning disability (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

However, as defined earlier, RTI is a problem-solving model with the dual purpose of facilitating the development and subsequent implementation of child specific, evidence-based interventions in the general education classroom and determining the extent to which student respond to interventions through continuous progress monitoring as well as potential disability determination (Castillo, Hines, Batsche, & Curtis, 2011; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, McKenna, 2012). The finding that these participants lack recognition of this broader purpose of an RTI

framework is important because the potential of RTI to improve classroom practice is lost if it is viewed only as a system for eligibility determination of special education. According to Martinez and Young (2011) research on the study of stakeholders' perceptions of RTI is limited. Further, findings may vary across stakeholder groups, as in the case with Swanson, Solis, Cuillo, and McKenna (2012) and their research on the perceptions of elementary level special education teachers. While Martinez and Young (2011) did not specifically address the potential perception of a singular purpose for an RTI framework, they found that [participants'] "comments indicate that RTI and standardized testing such as IQ and achievement tests inform eligibility decisions more than one or the other process alone" (Martinez & Young, 2011). Additionally, while results from their study were not reported by stakeholder group (administrators, teachers (general and special) diagnosticians, and counselors) and were instead reported by aggregates, Martinez and Young (2011) suggest that the major of participants (57%) "thought students were better served prior to the RTI model" (Martinez & Young, 2011, p. 50).

Recommendations

In this section, I detail recommendations for policy and practice with regard to teachers' reading assessment practices.

Recommendations for Policy

In order to address the implication that there was a perceived incongruence between an RTI framework and teacher level accountability as implemented through the teacher evaluation system in regard to active collaboration, I suggest a less high-stakes and more collaborative accountability system. This accountability model would look significantly different from the current version of the SSA (2011). Currently, the annual evaluation of a teacher is based upon the following three components: "a 30 percent instructional practices status score..., a 20 percent

deliberate practice score, and a 50 percent student growth calculation” (Identity Identifying Reference, 2013). The instructional practices status score is a value determined through formal classroom observations of best practices as defined by Marzano and Brown (2009). Next, the 20 percent deliberate practice score is determined through targeted attention to specific best practices. Lastly, the 50 percent student growth calculation is a score determined through the state’s value added model of student achievement as measured through the state assessment program. Within the Florida model, a value added score is developed through a statistical model designed to account for the academic achievement of students for whom one is teacher of record (Florida value added model white paper, n.d.). According to the State of Florida, the score is derived from “a covariate adjustment model that includes two prior test scores..., a set of measured characteristics for students, with teachers and schools treated as coming from a distribution of random effects” (Florida value added model white paper, n.d. , p. 3). This means that a statistical model is used to control for past teacher and school effects (influence) and therefore the score is meant to only reflect the instructional impact of the current teacher of record on a child’s state mandated achievement test. Based upon these three scores, a teacher is identified as highly effective, effective, developing (for those with three or less years of experience), needs improvement, and unsatisfactory. Those teachers who do not teach a topic covered by the state mandated achievement test, a district developed test, or other standardized measure of student achievement receive a value added score based upon an aggregate, or school wide, value added score derived from scores on the state reading, and or mathematics (as applicable per teacher) mandated achievement test.

In light of this breakdown of the teacher evaluation system under SSA (2011), I recommend several changes. This first change is to the use of student achievement data and the

use of a value added model as applied to specific classroom teachers. The first recommendation is an adjustment to the weighted percentages of the evaluation system so they reflect more of a priority on a teachers instructional practices (instructional practices score) and her reflection on those practices (deliberate practices score) and less on the student achievement component.

The exact proportions of these evaluation criteria, should be determined through negotiation with professionals, school unions, legislators, etc., should keep in mind the potential to foster active collaboration among teachers. As described by participants in my study, use of high-stakes student assessment data as part of teacher evaluation provides a disincentive in collaboration. I also recommend that the student achievement component (the value added score) look different in an effort to foster active collaboration. Instead of a value added score meant to only reflect the instructional impact of the current teacher of record it could, instead, be derived from an aggregate, whole school growth model of student scores from the state mandated reading and mathematics mandated achievement test. As before, the selection of the specific growth model and percentage of growth across an academic year should be determined through negotiation with professionals, school unions, legislators.

Recommendations for Practice

In order to address the implication that teachers have a deep, personal need for positive recognition from the families of the children they teach, my recommendation is pointed toward school-based administration. This group of stakeholders has the potential to implement procedures that may help foster this deeper home/school connection through personalized and invitations to school events. Additionally, I recommend that school administrators also work to put in place other quick and easy ways for parents/family to express appreciation for teachers.

One such example may be a drop box of appreciation. Additional component for the drop box are sentence starters parents may use to acknowledge teachers. An example I suggest is below.

While you were not looking _____ I noticed you _____ for my son/daughter. This made him/her _____. Therefore, thank you.

Again, every school and the needs of stakeholders within it are unique. Therefore, all stakeholders, with the lead of their school administration, would need to adjust such a system in order find a best fit for their particular needs.

Suggestions for Future Research

My suggestions for future research based upon my dissertation findings are few yet important because they begin with context of teachers (and other stakeholders), their lived experience, and bring those experiences to the attention of policy makers, researchers, and practitioners (Goodson, 1991). My first suggestion is in regard to the incongruence between the teacher evaluation system, as described in this chapter, and a response to intervention framework and active collaboration. Goldhaber, Dearmond, DeBurgomaster (2011) suggest that the research on the use of teacher evaluation systems, and the use of pay for performance, or merit pay, is incomplete. Therefore, there is a continued need to gain the perspective of classroom teachers' perceptions of merit pay when directly tied to student achievement. I agree within this point and suggest the two potential research questions below in order to address this area.

1. What perceived benefits are present from the current teacher evaluation system with the value added component of student performance for various stakeholder groups (teachers, students, parents, other school personnel)? and,
2. How can active cooperation within an RTI framework be supported within the current standards- and assessment-based setting of schools?

Also based on my dissertation research, there is little room for teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices within the confines of a typical school day, I recommend additional qualitative, descriptive studies similar to my dissertation research with the purpose of describing other groups of teachers' reading assessment practices within an RTI framework. A logical starting point would be intermediate (grades three-five) general education teachers who, by the nature of their work, may have many of the same time and formal mandated reading assessment demands as their primary (K-2) colleagues. I also suggest similar qualitative, descriptive studies with other groups of school personnel such as special education teachers, reading specialists, and even paraprofessionals. This line of research would be important because, as researchers such as Dorn (2010) and Ehren, Laster, and Watts-Taffe. (n.d.) suggest, the line between traditionally held roles of general and other educators who work within a response to intervention framework is now blurred. Therefore, I suggest the following research questions to address this area.

1. What is the lived experience of (various stakeholder's) reading assessment practices within an RTI framework?
2. In what ways do these (stakeholders) perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework?
3. How best can interventions and related reading assessment practices be incorporated into core (Tier I) curricula?
4. What are teachers (or other stakeholders') perceptions about disability identification as implemented through an RTI framework?

Lastly, I suggest research designed to address teacher need for appreciation and recognition from families. For this area, I suggest the research question; In what ways can teachers receive needed recognition from the parents/families they serve?

Final Comments

I often find myself in reflection about my small group of first grade students and our box of golden goals because those children and our work together have had a deep impact on my personal and professional personas (Miller & Richards, 2005). For us,

Goal monitoring became our way of work. I did not think it was anything overly special or out of the norm until my end of year teacher evaluation. At the meeting Aisha my principal, said, “Sarah, I don’t think you recognize how much progress you have made with your students. They understand what an IEP is and what their specific goals are. They also know when and how goals are met. What made you think of your Golden Goals?”

My response was from my heart. “Aisha, our Golden Goals are what I would want for myself. Honestly, I could think of no other way to address the specific goals on each student’s IEP. I am the only special education teacher here, and a new teacher at that! While my university training taught me how to collaboratively create and monitor quality IEP’s, I was still left wondering how I might translate my students’ IEP’s, progress monitoring, and assessment into the everyday life and work of the kids and me. You know, Aisha, our Golden Goals also met my personal teaching agenda of monitoring student progress, providing support and documentation for decision making, and implementing appropriate instructional interventions.” Aisha shook her head, smiled, and said, “Sarah, keep up the good work. Your assessment practices are not common.”

(Chapter one, p. 1)

As a former special education teacher, administrator in a research, evaluation, and assessment department, and a current teacher educator, it is important that I remember and reflect upon the day-to-day context of the classroom and what teachers and their students experience. As I thought back to my own K-12 special education teaching experiences, I recognized how I incorporated many teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices and did not necessarily feel the burden of the more formal, mandated reading assessment practices the participants experienced. However, based on these personal reflections and the current standards- and accountability based context of K-12 education, I recognize that I can do more to help prepare pre-service teachers. While I model assessment practices within the context of various courses and provide opportunity to transfer this knowledge through lesson plans or hands on experiences with children, I can do more. For example, I can include more detail about the day-to-day implementation of reading assessment practices through the voice of in-service teachers themselves. More specifically, I can provide opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers to frequently interact through activities such as invited lectures and interactive, inquiry based projects for courses that may not be directly connected to internship settings.

This dissertation stretched me as both a researcher and a person because of the intensity of thought, emotion and care put in by the participants and me. Through my researcher reflective blog, readings of relevant literature, and conversations with fellow doctoral candidates I was able to look at both myself and my research as a comprehensive whole. I was able to record and then reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and even the mundane details of the everyday work of a researcher. I, to the very best of my ability, strove to present the lived experience of these teachers' reading assessment practices from their perspective.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Standards for teacher competence in Educational Assessment of Students

1. Teachers should be skilled in choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
2. Teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
3. The teacher should be skilled in administering, scoring and interpreting the results of both externally-produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.
4. Teachers should be skilled in using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning teaching, developing curriculum, and school improvement.
5. Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures, which use pupil assessments.
6. Teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
7. Teachers should be skilled in recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

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Appendix B: In-depth Phenomenological Interviews

Interview One—Focused Life History

1. Tell me about your family. Share with me some of their background.
 - a. What are their beliefs about education?
 - b. What are their beliefs about assessment?
2. Tell me about your K-12 school experience.
 - a. Did assessment play a role?
3. How did you come to be a teacher?
 - a. Share with me other roles you have had in education prior to your current teaching position.
 - b. Create a timeline for me. Tell me about your work from the time you started teaching until now where you are in your current position.
4. Tell me about your college and teacher prep experience.
 - a. Did assessment play a role?
 - b. How were you assessed?
 - c. What did you learn about reading assessment?
5. Now, in order to get to know you a bit better, tell me about a few educational experiences that were influential on you...the ones that really stick out in your memory.
 - a. Why was/were this/these experience/s influential for you?
 - b. Did reading assessment play a part in any of these experiences?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix B (Continued)

Interview Two: Details of the Experience

1. Reconstruct a recent day you have had. I'm interested in all of it.
 - a. What do you do before you get here?
 - b. What do you do from the moment you arrive until the moment you leave?
 - c. What do you do after you leave here?
2. Tell me about a lesson you taught where you made connections between reading and the established state standards for your students.
3. What are your beliefs about reading assessment that helped shape your instruction practices?
 - a. How did these beliefs about reading assessment become part of you?
4. Tell me about a reading classroom activity and resulting assessment that you are most proud of.
5. Tell me about your reading assessment practices.
 - a. How do you assess student performance?
 - b. What forms or methods of assessment do you use? May I have an example?
 - c. What data are most important to you?
 - d. How do you decide the pass or failure of a student?
 - e. Tell me about an actual student and how you reached a pass/fail decision.
6. How do you notify stakeholders about students' reading progress?
 - a. Team
 - b. Grade level
 - c. School/Administration
 - d. Parents
 - e. Children
7. How do your students know when they are successful in reading?
 - a. What kind of decisions do you and the students make about reading?

Appendix B (Continued)

8. Talk with me about response to intervention. Has it changed your reading assessment practices?
 - a. Is it different from the past?
9. Tell me about FCAT and other outside assessments,
 - a. What the results tell you, and how you make decisions based upon those results?
10. Are there legal aspects of reading assessment that play into your daily practices?
 - a. If so, how?
11. Are there ethical aspects of reading assessment that play into your daily practices?
 - a. If so, how?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your reading assessment practices?

Interview Three: Reflection on Meaning

1. Given what you told me about your life before you were a teacher, and what you have shared with me about your work....
 - a. What is your understanding of reading assessment, instruction, and decision making?
 - b. What sense does reading assessment make to you?
2. How do you balance or blend the daily demands of reading assessment in your role?
 - a. What meaning does this have for you?
3. How does your understanding of response to intervention influence your reading assessment practices?
 - a. What meaning does this have for you?

Appendix C

Request to Solicit Participation Via Electronic Questionnaire

Please Help with My Study!

“Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers”

Title of Study: Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study (University of South Florida Institutional Review Board Pro 00009328)

My name is Sarah Bombly. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am doing a study on the reading assessment practices of elementary level general education teachers.

The purpose of my study is to describe and explain general education teachers’ assessment practices within the context of elementary schools and more specifically within the context of elementary level reading instruction in a Response to Intervention framework. The results and analysis from this study will become part of my doctoral dissertation research.

You are being asked to take part in my research study, **eIRB# 00009328 Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study**, because:

1. Teach students in grades K through 2;
2. Take part in reading instruction for at least 30 to 90 minutes of the school day;
3. Have between zero to 35 years of teaching experience;
4. Have earned teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (K-3), Elementary Education (K-6), or Elementary Education (1-6); and
5. Work at a school that has had an RTI framework in place for at least 3 academic years.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to spend approximately 3 hours in order to participate in three 45 – 60 minute face-to-face interviews in your classroom or teacher workspace.

You will receive copies of all interview questions prior to each scheduled study visit. Study visit will occur between 24 hours and one week of each previous visit.

- At the first visit, you will be asked to share your views on your life history.

Appendix C (continued)

- At the second visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous life history interview and then share your views on the details of your experience with assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention.
- At the third visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous detail of experience interview and then share your views on the meaning of your assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention. Following this interview, you will be given a hard copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review.
 - With your permission, add data from these interviews will be audio taped and stored electronically via a removable storage device. Additionally, all transcripts will also be electronically stored on the same device. This storage device will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the University of South Florida within the Department of Special Education. At the completion of the study all electronic data will be deleted from the removable storage device and the device will be reformatted.

You may not directly benefit from helping me in this research study. However, by helping you will add to the knowledge of teachers' assessment practices. Further, there is minimal risk for helping with this type of study. Additionally, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

If you are interested in Participating, Please use the link below in order to provide indicate if you meet study inclusion criteria, your name, and your phone number.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Invitation_to_participate_in_a_research_study

You may choose to leave the study at any time for any reason. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. There is not penalty or consequence for leaving the study. Only I, the principal investigator, and if needed the USF IRB and the USF Department of Health and Human Services may also review and may have access all research records and data.

Appendix C (continued)

If you have questions about my research study, please call or e-mail me, or Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill, the USF professor that is supervising me on this study. Both she and I are happy to discuss my research and the online consent form with you. Please ask us to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

I, Sarah Bombly, can be reached at 727-482-0502 or mirlenbr@mail.usf.edu. Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill can be reached at 813-974-3221 or pjkleinhamme@usf.edu. Additionally, you may contact the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 813-974-5638.

Thank you for your time and participation!

Thank you,

Sarah Bombly

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Appendix D

Request to Solicit Participation Via US Mail

Please Help With My Study

“Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers”

Title of Study: Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study (University of South Florida Institutional Review Board Pro 00009328)

My name is Sarah Bombly. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am doing a study on the reading assessment practices of elementary level general education teachers.

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2. Take part in reading instruction for at least 30 to 90 minutes of the school day;
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4. Have earned teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (K-3), Elementary Education (K-6), or Elementary Education (1-6); and
5. Work at a school that has had an RTI framework in place for at least 3 academic years.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to spend approximately 3 hours in order to participate in three 45 – 60 minute face-to-face interviews in your classroom or teacher workspace.

You will receive copies of all interview questions prior to each scheduled study visit. Study visit will occur between 24 hours and one week of each pervious visit.

- At the first visit, you will be asked to share your views on your life history.

Appendix D (continued)

- At the second visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous life history interview and then share your views on the details of your experience with assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention.
- At the third visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous detail of experience interview and then share your views on the meaning of your assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention. Following this interview, you will be given a hard copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review.
 - With your permission, add data from these interviews will be audio taped and stored electronically via a removable storage device. Additionally, all transcripts will also be electronically stored on the same device. This storage device will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the University of South Florida within the Department of Special Education. At the completion of the study all electronic data will be deleted from the removable storage device and the device will be reformatted.

Additionally, you may not directly benefit from helping me in this research study. However, by helping you will add to the knowledge of teachers' assessment practices. Further, there is minimal risk for helping with this type of study. Additionally, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

If you are interested in Participating, Please use the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope in order to send me your name and phone number. This information will only be used to contact you in order to set up interview days and times. All interview days, times, and locations will be at a day, time and location of your choice. This information, your name and phone number, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of South Florida, Department of Special Education and shredded at the completion of this study.

You may choose to leave the study at any time for any reason. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. There is not penalty or consequence for leaving the study. Only I, the principal investigator, and if needed the USF IRB and the USF Department of Health and Human Services may also review and may have access all research records and data.

If you have questions about my research study, please call or e-mail me, or Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill, the USF professor that is supervising me on this study. Both she and I are happy to discuss my research and the online consent form with you. Please ask us to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

Appendix D (continued)

I, Sarah Bombly, can be reached at 727-482-0502 or mirlenbr@mail.usf.edu. Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill can be reached at 813-974-3221 or pjkleinhamme@usf.edu. Additionally, you may contact the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 813-974-5638.

Thank you for your time and participation!

Thank you,
Sarah Bombly

Sarah Bombly, Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
College of Education
Department of Special Education
mirlenbr@mail.usf.edu
727-482-0502

Dr. P. J. Kleinhammer-Tramill, Professor
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Appendix E

Request to Solicit Participation Via Face-to-Face

Please Help With My Study Dissertation Research Study Face to Face Script

Entitled “Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary General Education Teachers”

My name is Sarah Bombly. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am doing a dissertation study on the reading assessment practices of elementary general education teachers (USF institutional review board approval Pro00009328). I have come here today to ask for your help with my study.

The purpose of my study is to describe and explain general education teachers’ reading assessment practices within the context of elementary schools and more specifically within the context of elementary level reading instruction in a Response to Intervention framework. The results and analysis from this study will become part of my doctoral dissertation research.

You are being asked to take part in my research study because you:

1. Teach students in grades K through 2;
2. Take part in reading instruction for at least 30 to 90 minutes of the school day;
3. Have between zero to 35 years of teaching experience;
4. Have earned teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (K-3), Elementary Education (K-6), or Elementary Education (1-6); and
5. Work at a school that has had an RTI framework in place for at least 3 academic years.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to spend approximately 3 hours in order to participate in three 45 – 60 minute face-to-face interviews in your classroom or teacher workspace. You will receive copies of all interview questions prior to each scheduled study visit. Study visit will occur between 24 hours and one week of each previous visit.

- At the first visit, you will be asked to share your views on your life history.
- At the second visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous life history interview and then share your views on the details of your experience with assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention.

Appendix E (continued)

- At the third visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous detail of experience interview and then share your views on the meaning of your assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention. Following this interview, you will be sent, via e-mail, the transcript of this interview for you to review
 - With your permission, add data from these interviews will be audio taped and stored electronically via a removable storage device. Additionally, all transcripts will also be electronically stored on the same device. This storage device will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the University of South Florida within the Department of Special Education. At the completion of the study all electronic data will be deleted from the removable storage device and the device will be reformatted.

You may not directly benefit from helping me in this research study. However, by helping you will add to the knowledge of teachers' assessment practices. Further, there is minimal risk for helping with this type of study. Additionally, you will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

If you are interested in Participating, Please use the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope in order to send me your name and contact information. This information will only be used to contact you in order to set up interview days and times. All interview days, times, and locations will be at a day, time and location of your choice. This information, your name and phone number, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of South Florida, Department of Special Education and shredded at the completion of this study.

You may choose to leave the study at any time for any reason. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. There is not penalty or consequence for leaving the study. Only I, the principal investigator, and if needed the USF IRB and the USF Department of Health and Human Services may also review and may have access all research records and data.

If you have questions about my research study, please call or e-mail me, or Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill, the USF professor that is supervising me on this study. Both she and I are happy to discuss my research and the online consent form with you. Please ask us to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

I, Sarah Bombly, can be reached at 727-482-0502 or mirlenbr@mail.usf.edu. Dr. Kleinhammer-Tramill can be reached at 813-974-3221 or pjkleinhamme@usf.edu. Additionally, you may contact the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 813-974-5638.

Thank you for your time and potential participation! Are there any questions?

Appendix F Informed Written Consent



Informed Consent to Participate in Research **Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study**

IRB Study # Pro 00009328

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

Reading assessment practices of elementary general education teachers: A descriptive study

The person who is in charge of this research study is Sarah Bombly. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. P.J. Kleinhammer-Tramill.

The research will be conducted at the University of South Florida through the Department of Special Education

Appendix F (continued)

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain elementary level general education teachers' assessment practices within the context of elementary level reading instruction in an RTI framework.

Should you take part in this study?

Before you decide:

- Read this form and find out what the study is about.
- You may have questions this form does not answer. You do not have to guess at things you don't understand. If you have questions ask the person in charge of the study or study staff as you go along. Ask them to explain things in a way you can understand.
- Take your time to think about it.

This form tells you about this research study. This form explains:

- Why this study is being done.
- What will happen during this study and what you will need to do.
- Whether there is any chance of benefits from being in this study.
- The risks involved in this study.
- How the information collected about you during this study will be used and with whom it may be shared.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain elementary level general education teachers' assessment practices within the context of elementary level reading instruction in an RTI framework.

Appendix F (continued)

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this study because you :

6. Teach students in grades K through 2;
7. Take part in reading instruction for at least 30 to 90 minutes of the school day;
8. Have between zero to 35 years of teaching experience;
9. Have earned teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (K-3), Elementary Education (K-6), or Elementary Education (1-6); and
10. Work at a school that has had an RTI framework in place for at least 3 academic years.

What will happen during this study?

You will be asked to spend about 3 hours in this study.

A study visit, defined as your participation in the study through an in-depth face-to-face interview. Each study visit should take between 45 minutes to 1 hour. You will receive copies of all interview questions prior to each scheduled study visit. Study visit will occur between 24 hours and one week of each pervious visit.

- At the first visit, you will be asked to share your views on your life history.
- At the second visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous life history interview and then share your views on the details of your experience with assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention.
- At the third visit, you will be asked to review the transcript from the previous detail of experience interview and then share your views on the meaning of your assessment practices in the context of reading instruction and response to intervention. Following this interview, you will be given a hard copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review
 - With your permission, add data from these interviews will be audio taped and stored electronically via a removable storage device. Additionally, all transcripts will also be electronically stored on the same device. This storage device will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the University of South Florida within the Department of Special Education. At the completion of the study all electronic data will be deleted from the removable storage device and the device will be reformatted.

Appendix F (continued)

Total Number of Participants

About 10 individuals will take part in this study.

Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study. There are no alternatives to participating in the study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Participation

You may choose to leave the study at any time for any reason. There is not penalty or consequence for leaving the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, and supervising professor.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as an agency regulating the research with permission to see study records, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

Appendix F (continued)

I may publish what we learn from this study. If published, I will not include your name, school district and school name. I will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Appendix F (continued)

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

New information about the study

During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in the study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

What happens if you decide not to take part in this study?

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study to please the researcher. If you decide not to take part in the study you will not be in trouble or lose any rights you normally have.

You can decide after signing this informed consent document that you no longer want to take part in this study for any reason at any time. If you decide you want to stop taking part in the study, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Sarah Bombly at 727-482-0502.

If you have questions about your rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Appendix F (continued)**Consent to Take Part in Research**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please read the statements below and sign the form if the statements are true I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

 Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

 Date

 Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research
Authorization**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

 Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

 Date

 Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix G

Profile of Participants

Allison

Allison brings a white, middle class upbringing and a family full of teachers into her teaching experience. As she put it, “it was in my blood” (Allison, Interview 1, p. 8, line 157). Allison balances a lot. She is a wife, the mother of a young child, a daughter, a teacher, and a lover of reading. She has been in primary (kindergarten through grade 2 teacher) for 10 years. Interestingly, Allison initially fought against teaching. She, instead, chose to major in communications and then went through a series of jobs she found were not the right fit for her. It was only after her time as a Department of Children and Families (DCF) worker when she finally went back to school for a master’s degree in Elementary Education. Once committed to teaching, and much to her surprise, Allison was not able to gain employment right away. Of all things, a test, got in the way. Allison had to take and retake the teacher certification exam. She simply does not test well. Allison chooses to look at this aspect of herself in a positive light. In her approximation, this non-testing ability affords her compassion for the children she teaches as they move through the current standards- and assessment-based accountability system.

It was easy for me to see that Allison is passionate about teaching kindergarten. I felt it the moment I walked into her classroom for our second interview. I could feel her earlier statement, from our first interview, about the promise she makes to parents literally jump out at me from the print rich classroom walls. She promises parents that their children will read by the end of kindergarten. She and her classroom appear very organized. Her desk, while covered with

Appendix G (continued)

stacks of paper, has a clearly designated workspace. While the classroom was a little disheveled (school had only been out for a few minutes and the remnants of learning were still strewn about) it still had the appearance of an orderly workplace. We sat side by side at the child kidney shaped reading group table for both the second and third interviews. Allison gave me rich data.

Crystal

Crystal brings a white, middle-class upbringing into her teaching experience. Like, Allison, she has a full plate. She is a wife, mother of two teenaged boys, a daughter, a teacher, and a lover of reading. Crystal has been a teacher on and off again, for 10 years. She taught for a few years, took a few years off to take care of her sons, and then returned to teaching. Unlike the other participants, Crystal has experience as both a special and general education teacher. Interestingly, she took a traditional path into her teaching career. She attended college right after high school and then did her best, to secure employment as a teacher. When Crystal found it difficult to find a position, she applied for and accepted work as a paraprofessional in a classroom for children who, at the time had the special education label, Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED). She enjoyed this work and found it rewarding. For her, this paraprofessional position opened her eyes to the varied life experiences, vastly different from her own, that children bring to school each day. In order to fulfill her desire to teach, Crystal later accepted the role of teacher for these same children. She later told me that this teaching experience, although not quite the right fit, helped her learn the importance of individualization and accommodation within her day to day work. Crystal transitioned into the role of a second grade teacher at the start of the next school year.

Appendix G (continued)

From my perspective, her neatly organized teacher/student work area (the small group reading area), the semi-tidy (school had just been dismissed) classroom, and welcoming student spaces (carpeted reading areas, small, intimate in appearance learning stations, overabundance of technology within student reach) welcomed me. Crystal discussed her reading assessment practices with great depth. She would often pull out a graph, chart, or spreadsheet for me to review. She would draw a conclusion between her reading assessment data and a related decision made based on those data. Crystal gave me rich data.

Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn brings a white, lower socio-economic upbringing, and the perspective of a child who experienced divorce into her teaching. Like each of the other participants, she has a lot on her already very full plate. She is a wife, a mother of a kindergartener, a daughter, a teacher, and a lover of reading. Gwendolyn has been teaching for 10 years. In fact, she and Allison work at the same school and both teach Kindergarten. She has long, curly, blonde hair, is slim, and is in her early to mid-thirties. If I were to use one word to describe Gwendolyn, it would be compassionate. Her words best clarify my initial perception of her. Hence, from my perspective and her words, the following exemplifies her compassion toward the children she teaches.

These kids that I am with now... the experiences I have just knowing their family.... You know, they are living in their car. Or, they are homeless. Or, they have their electric turned off. Or, these different personal issues that are going on that when they are in my room, you know, they are safe. And, they have a place to go. Where, they can be themselves. And, I think, just by me knowing them a little bit more, and knowing, ah, like

Appendix G (continued)

what I have been through myself. I could make that connection and be you know, compassionate. And, and you know, realize that, you know, they may not know it, but I was in their shoes. (Participant 3, interview 1, p. 36)

Interestingly, similar to Allison, Gwendolyn also took a non-traditional path into her teaching career. For her, teaching was always a passion and this passion came from her own elementary school experience that she initially described as, “a typical northern school...it was a three story school. And, city kids. I think that is where my love of teaching came from” (Gwendolyn, interview 1, p. 37, lines 16-18). Gwendolyn made the decision that she would not attend college immediately after high school. Instead, she chose to work as a nanny for a family with twin girls. After a year of her nanny work, Gwendolyn realized that a college education and an eventual teaching position called out to her. These were not easy decisions because, according to her, “that was like a first for the family, ... You know, first one to go to college” (Gwendolyn, interview 1, p. 28, lines 631-634). Five years after high school graduation and a full-time nanny position, Gwendolyn graduated with a bachelor’s degree and was ready to teach. However, in her words, “The north was closed.” There were relatively few teaching positions available in her northern home. Again, Gwendolyn decided to be the first. She stated that she was the, “First one to like, move out of state [for teaching employment]. ... so, I was doing a lot of firsts” (Gwendolyn, interview 1, p. 28, lines 631-634). I called it brave.

Gwendolyn and I held all of our chats (interviews) at the bakery/coffee shop. I did get the opportunity to see the inside of her classroom. She, however, was not in it at the time. There was a long exposed brick wall smattered with student work. The tiny, kindergarten chairs and print rich bulletin boards were bright and welcoming. The room felt kid friendly and happy. While I

Appendix G (continued)

was at her elementary school that day, we briefly caught a glimpse of each other. She made no effort to acknowledge me. I reciprocated this action and considered it our way of keeping anonymity and confidentiality.

Sadie

Sadie brings a white, lower socio-economic upbringing into her teaching experience. In her words, “[she] got the public cheese” (Sadie, Interview 1, p. 1, line 14). Similar to the other participants, Sadie also balances a lot. She is a wife, mother of two teenage sons, a daughter, a teacher, and a lover of reading. She has always taught elementary school, and the majority of her 23 years of experience were with older students (grades 3-5). For Sadie, there was only teaching. No other career choice was ever an option. Interestingly, her path to teaching was anything but ordinary. She describes her personal K-12 experience as horrible. Sadie, now years removed, laughed as she recounted how, in first grade, she was often placed in a book closet with nothing but, “a bulb and books” (Sadie, Interview 1, p. 2, line 39). Her senior year of high school brought a personal decision she felt pertinent to share because of its connection to her life and teaching career. Sadie indicated that the repercussions from this decision, time spent as a factory worker and a delay in her college education, left indelible life lessons. She learned she had stronger family love and support than she could have imagined. And, Sadie learned she belonged in a place where she could make a positive and lasting impact on youth. Hence, her desire to teach was once again, confirmed.

It was clear, from my perception, that Sadie is lighthearted, carefree, and an optimist. I felt it as soon as we began the walk toward her classroom. Once inside, she stopped to pick up a toppled chair, paused in order to shove some papers on a small round table to the side, plunked

Appendix G (continued)

herself into a blue, plastic, child-sized chair, and offered me a similar blue, plastic, child-sized chair next to hers. Our next hour together was delightful. Sadie's classroom felt like a very happy place and I felt like a very happy new member of it. I would later learn through our friendly chats (interviews), that for her, this feeling of happiness has everything to do with her teaching philosophy. Her words were powerful as she explained this philosophy to me. She shrugged her shoulders, smiled and simply blurted out,

I think that if kids are happy in the environment that they are sitting in, and working in, they are going to learn. I don't care what kid it is. If they feel comfortable (taps table) and safe, that they can ask me anything, be a dufas in front of me. [...] I just feel like, if they are in an environment where they [the students] love where they are [they will learn].

Cause, I hated every grade I was in.

Abilien

Abilien's first remark caught me off guard. She looked me in the eye and said, "You'll find a toilet in the front yard." She must have noticed that I looked a little dumfounded. I had no idea what she meant. Abilien smiled and let out a nearly inaudible laugh. Her next words brought clarity, "The help. You know, we are the help." Her remark was in reference to Stockett's (2009) book, *The help: A novel*. Hilly, the antagonist, finds an assortment of used toilets on her proper, Jackson, Mississippi front lawn. I then took the toilets from Stockett's (2009) book and Abilien's comment as a representation of discontent, a perception of dirtiness, and overall sadness for current social situations. Therefore, it was fitting that this participant chose Abilien as her research name. Abilien, the character in Stockett's (2009) book, is the help. She is a strong, determined African American woman who has a deep love for the children

Appendix G (continued)

she cares for. Yet, she has a broken heart because of the limitations placed on her and her son by current social situations. Abilieen, the dissertation participant, is a strong, determined Hispanic woman who has a deep love for the children she teaches. Yet, she feels burdened by the limitations placed on both she and her students by the current standards- and assessment-driven accountability system.

Abilieen brings an Hispanic, middle-class upbringing and private, Christian, K-12 education into her teaching experience. She is the child of immigrant parents from Cuba and her native language is Spanish. Like each of the other participants, she carries a lot on her plate. Abilieen is a wife, mother of two teenaged boys, a daughter, a teacher, and a lover of reading. She has 10 years of teaching experience, all at the primary (grades K-2) level, and all at Cabbage Palm Elementary School (CPES). Interestingly, her path into teaching was also, anything but traditional. She spent several years raising her sons, and several years as an English as a Second Language (ESOL) paraprofessional. Abilieen then went back to college, through a grant program called para-to-professional, in order to earn an elementary education bachelor's degree. She worked full-time as a paraprofessional at CPES while attending college courses in the evening. Abilieen was even able to complete her student teaching while at CPES. For her, it was this non-traditional approach to college and teaching, her personal connection to the students and faculty of CPES, her own deep maternal instincts, and her trust in God that make her the teacher she is.

I left each interview with Abilieen emotionally charged. I had the perception of sadness within her the moment I walked into her classroom. From my perspective, her room was open, colorful, print rich, and cheerful. What made the time we spent together so emotionally charged

Appendix G (continued)

was that I perceived she did not want to be sad. For me, it screamed from every pore in her body. She told me as much.

But, you know, I, um, I have come to the conclusion that stress kills. And, I have to be careful. I love this job, but I have to be careful of the impact it has on me. And, I need to be wise in the decisions I make so that I can be here for a long time . So, I am recalibrating. That's where I am right now. So, that's why this is a sign that I can share this with you. And, it's when, I have to tell you that when you came and, um, and just spoke to us, my my friends, my close friends here, um, who are no longer on my team, ah, turned around to me and said, here's your chance. Because, they know how I have been feeling. And, ah, they said, here's your chance. You can share with someone what you are feeling, and the troubles that you go through, and educators go through. And, I was like, wow. They are right, you know, this is another sign. Cause, I am looking for signs to tell me should I stay here? (Abilieen, Interview 1, pp. 22-23, lines 479-489).

There are layers to Abilieen. From my perspective, she is feisty. She is goal oriented. She is driven. She is sad. She is disappointed. She is disillusioned by teaching. She has a heart that is large and wants to love her profession but cannot because, in her words, and from her perspective, "unrealistic expectations cause resentment."

Appendix H

Table of Initial Clustered Themes

Initial Clustered Theme	Significant Statement Example	Corresponding Formulated Meaning Statement
Shift of Focus	We weren't assessed the way we are assessing our children now. Um, assessment was just. It was every once in a while, like we would have a test or something. And, your teacher would teach you something and you would take a test. And then, it was okay. (Allison, Interview 1, p. 7, lines 140-144)	High stakes tests caused stress. Low stakes classroom assessment methods were a way to show off what was learned
Working	People stay after work so long. And, they take work home. And, they are working over the weekend. And, just keep working, and working, and working, and working, and working because you have no time in your class to do anything. Or, no time during your planning time to do it. And, I think we are going to lose a lot of good teachers out there. Some we have already, you know, lost. Because, there's it's just too much. So, we will just go try and find something else we can do (Gwendolyn, Interview 3, p. 11, lines 239-244)	Teachers are overburdened by the increased workload, and many are simply leaving the profession. There is too much to get done within the confines of the contractual day.

Appendix H (continued)

Physical Demands	<p>How long is it taking you? Gwendolyn: it depends. Um, a child who is maybe lower sense of letters, sounds or anything, they may, or they can't blend words together. Or, if they don't do so well in one sub part of the test, they will drop them down. And, they actually have to do more. And, they have to see, I guess, um, what they are capable of doing. So, if they don't have a high range of learning for that test, then, they keep dropping them down. They have to do more, and more, and then, eventually, you know, those lower children, they are being tested a whole lot longer than the ones who are, like, getting it done. Doing well, and can move on. (Gwendolyn, Interview 3, pp. 5-6, lines 108-116)</p>	<p>Administration of required/ mandated measures take an exorbitant amount of time to complete.</p>
Mandated Assessment Practices Impact	<p>I use that data to drive my instruction, in that, I plan with the end in mind. So, prior to our week of planning, we will pull that test, and we will look at it. And, see what the expectations are for those students. And, if there is anything that we feel, um, will need more reinforcement, that will guide us. (Abilieen, Interview 2, p. 10, lines 212-216)</p>	<p>What is measured on the mandated measures drives the development of weekly lesson plans. (teaching to the test)?</p>
Changes Teachers Want	<p>You get those notes and it does make you feel like, okay, it is a worthwhile balance. Because, then you will get, you are so terrific. We need more people like you. You know, and you don't, you don't get those notes. You don't get those notes from people. So, when you do, you are so blessed and think to yourself. Thank God! Somebody notices what I am doing every day you know, and they are thanking you for what you do. Because, you feel like, is this worth it? (Allison, Interview 3, p. 8, lines 165-171)</p>	<p>There is a need to be appreciated for the hard work and time put into teaching the child that, for this teacher, could be expressed in a simple note from a stakeholder.</p>

Appendix H (continued)

Trust	<p>Assessment is not the end all and save all. It's being with your children and knowing them backwards and forwards. The assessment is it's not the saving grace of the world. I hate it. It makes me crazy. Because, I have to send it home to their parents. It takes me hours to grade those exams. Hours. And, I have to put it all into the computer. This is what's going on so I am not doing my job. Now, you are not reading with your child. You are not doing all the things they ask you to do. (Allison, Interview 1, p. 28, lines 583-587)</p>	<p>She values teacher professional knowledge and judgment over the mandated assessment method data because for her, it takes away valuable time from her job, teaching.</p>
Teacher Emotion	<p>its stressful. Because, you pray to God when you are testing that child. You pray to God! And, sit here and you say a little prayer as soon as you pull them up. And, you are like, please let so and so whatever, do well. Because, you feel like it's a reflection on you. You take it personally. Because, you have taught them all these things for a whole quarter or more. These babies have been with me. I hope to God!!! they have gained something and gotten an understanding for reading. And, understanding it. 'Cause, I don't want to put those interventions in place for them because, I have given them all the tools. And now, they need to use it properly. And, that is what you are praying to God when they are sitting back here. Please, make sure you do well! And, I am like, slow down! Think about what you are doing! And, I can't give them help, helpful hints or anything. I just have to tell them, mmmm, are you sure? Like. But, it's hard. Because, you want to make sure. You worry. You worry and you are like a little mama hen. You worry so bad for them. Because, you want them to do well. And, you don't, you know,</p>	<p>For this teacher, there is a deep, personal connection between her own feelings and how a child may perform with a particular reading assessment method because, in her words, you take it personal.</p>

Appendix H (continued)

Team Collaboration	<p>you don't want to have to go down that path of RTI. But, if you do, I mean, you know you have done everything you can. And, its like, you just want to see them do well. (Allison, Interview 3, pp. 10-11, 213-229)</p> <p>first of all informal. We we're always talking. We sit together at lunch. We meet together on Wednesdays, like I said, as a team. But, the formally we have those weekly TBIT meetings where we talk specifically about students that are having difficulty. And it does, its all basically focused on reading at this point. I have two students on a reading, ah, a writing PMP, which I would, you know. but, we, for first grade, its all about reading. And, we need to get those students to that point. So, um, that dominates our discussion. (Crystal, Interview 2, p. 50, lines 1057-1063)</p>	Communication between team members is the heart of the RTI framework.
School Collaboration	<p>That's student based intervention team. So, we have TBIT, which is teacher based intervention team. Which, we meet once a week to discuss our intervention groups, our interventions, our students that are in the interventions, what need s to happen to them. If there are new students. You know, all of that. Then, at some point, students that are not making progress. Or, that we feel like, okay this is just major. And, something needs to be done about this kid now, that would then go to the student based intervention team, which is a meeting. Um, once a week they have them on Tuesdays up in the office. The um, ESE, one of the, at least one of the ESE teachers sits in on that. The speech language pathologist sits in. the school nurse. The school psychologist. The school, um, social worker. The um, guidance secretary. The guidance counselor. So, it's all these professionals that sit in there and go over,</p>	Many individuals are involved in the RTI process.

Appendix H (continued)

Data Share with Students	<p>um. And usually by that time this student would be on their radar. So, they would have heard at least something. (Crystal, Interview 2, pp. 34-35, lines 713-725)</p> <p>Well, they see their data. They see their weekly test. They know if they got an E, and S, or an N. but, I mean, we are constantly. I am constantly giving out, oh! Look at you reading! Ahhhhh!!!! Here is a sticker. Go get a star student slip! Like, I am constantly, you know, we stand up and bow! And, everybody claps. Um, they, I mean, they, we are always celebrating success. (Sadie, Interview 2, p. 22, lines 457-461)</p>	<p>I make children aware of their progress by sharing the scores they earn on the weekly mandated measures and by celebrating the small moments when learning occurs.</p>
Data Share with Parents	<p>It's not like they don't know. but, its having to sit at that table and hear your child is not. Your child is not meeting. They come. They have sat with their teacher, they have sat with another teacher, they've gone to, um, maybe volunteers, who are like retired school teachers. And, different things like this. And, they are gone every place. They have come in contact with another special ed teacher and worked with them. And, they are having small group, and you know, they are doing. We are draining ourselves, realistically. And, the parents kind of just, I think they are kind of in shock sometimes. When we give all the things that we have done for their child. And then, they kind of become wholesome and say, oh. Okay. This is bigger than me. So, it is kind of a positive thing. Cause, we do it as a team. Um, with administration.</p> <p>Me: so, it is no just you.</p> <p>Allison: No. No. um, that's usually in here is when we usually start calling the parents in here before we hit here. (Allison, Interview 2, pp. 27-28, lines 583-595).</p>	<p>The teacher is exasperated, frustrated, perhaps even angry when the message she wants to get across to parents is not always heard, or action is not taken that she would like to see taken but sometimes there is a moment, when there is shock followed by a form of acceptance by parents, when they in her words say, this is bigger than me."</p>

Appendix H (continued)

Expectations Internal	<p>But, I guess I. I guess it's like, um, should I be expecting the same thing from everybody? And, in a way I do because I do expect everyone to meet the standards. And, if they are not, I am going to say they are not meeting standards. But, at the same time, the way that looks in those, um, in their independent work and. Like this, with the underlining the the words (in the weekly unit test – holds it up). I could just say, no. you have to read it or just skip it or just move on. But, I am not going to do that to a little kid who is sitting there like, I can't get past this word. I am going to read it to them and underline it. And, just say, okay, I write on the test, um, portions of test were read to student. That's another way I communicate with the parents. I just remembered that! (laughs). (Crystal, Interview 2, p. 66, lines 1403-1411).</p>	Standards must remain taught even though accommodations should be made on an individual by individual basis.
Expectations External	<p>I think they are keeping the FCAT but I am not sure. You know, we just don't know what is coming next. But we want to be prepared for whatever is coming next. And so, we want to be sure the students are prepared for what is coming next.</p> <p>Me: but, you don't know what is coming next!</p> <p>Crystal: We don't know (laughs). But we want to make sure, you know, that the students are meeting the standards. Because, whatever testing comes, its going to be about whether the students have met the standards or not. So, we want to make sure we have met the standards. And, that's what, um, these assessments are supposed to assess, is have they met the standards. (Crystal, Interview 2, p. 62, lines 1313-1321)</p>	For this teacher, there is never an easy footing because the standards and mandated state tests are always changing and they do not always know when and what those changes will be.

Appendix H (continued)

Perceived Benefit/Harm to children	<p>RTI was, like none of us really understood what it was. Where, we just, only the only things we heard was all these papers that we had to fill out. And that was the only thing. Oh no, I have to fill out a packet. Like, that is what we used to call it. Like, oh no, I have to do a packet on this kid. Um, and since then, it seems to I guess, have progressed. Where, you thought it was going to benefit the child. But now, I am not so sure. (Gwendolyn, Interview 2, p. 36, lines 807-812).</p>	<p>The response to intervention process has increased the workload and not necessarily worked or benefited children who are in the most need of help.</p>
Interventions at Work	<p>Me: I am appreciating this. When do those kids get their science/social studies instruction? Crystal: well, that's the, that's the rub there. Um, they they are out of the room for half an hour. So, this is something we are struggling with. Previous. In our previous, um, schedule, they were being pulled out during the first half hour of the day. (Crystal, Interview 2, p.11, lines 236-239)</p>	<p>For this teacher and her team, students are missing tier 1 instruction, the general education curriculum, in order to receive tier2 instruction. For her, this is a rub, or a dilemma.</p>
Matching Assessment Practices to Child	<p>assessment is, um, for a teacher that teaches kindergarten, assessment is seeing everything through a five year old's eyes. Because, the fact is, is your not just asking paper pencil questions. You're hearing them speak to you. You're hearing them, um, explain things. Um, you ask them just a question and, you know, it can take so much longer than just that. (Allison, Interview 3, p. 4, lines 77-84)</p>	<p>For this teacher, assessment is not simply a test. It is a process of trying to gain the perspective of the students she teaches</p>
Teacher Selected Authentic Reading Assessment Practices	<p>I want them to learn how to answer these comprehension questions when I ask you them. Um, and, I think that by doing even the littlest things, like singing letter songs. Or, doing little, you know, finger plays. Or, having little motions when I make this letter sound. I think that they are, like I can assess them right there. If</p>	<p>Teacher developed assessment methods used in a formative manner are effective with students.</p>

Appendix H (continued)

Accountability Repercussions	<p>they know what that letter sound by, you know, doing the hand things. So, the little tricks that I came up with. (Gwendolyn, Interview 2, p. 20, lines 451-456)</p> <p>You are responsible for these children. They are five years old. You are a big influence on their life. You know, legally you have to be careful of making sure things are being done right. Because, you can get in a lot of trouble. You have to be careful and its scary. Cause, you have to make your determinations. Did this child pass or fail kindergarten? And, legally, you have to have your documentation. That me book documents you. That's a legal thing. You know, all that paperwork that goes to district office is legal. And, it has my name on it. You know. so, you have to be careful. (Allison, Interview 2, p.44, lines 914-920)</p>	<p>For this teacher, there is always the possibility of getting in trouble for actions, or lack of action in the classroom. There is a legal obligation to document, document, document.</p>
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Appendix I

Table of Final Clustered Themes and Definitions

Final Clustered Theme and Definition

Shift of Focus

This clustered theme characterizes a jointly held perception of a philosophical shift in reading assessment practices from an unobtrusive and naturalistic application into an intrusive, formal, and pervasive one. Examples of this presented early within the interview process. Participants would make comparisons between their K-12 educational experience and their perception of how children now experience K-12 education.

Ever Changing Accountability

This clustered theme portrays how, for these participants, accountability starts with expectations and ends with potential negative repercussions. These potential negative repercussions stem from poor student performance on mandated reading assessment methods and therefore impact both the participants and their students.

Independent Efforts with Data

This clustered theme describes how although a large part of participant's work with reading assessment data is collaborative, a great deal of independent work with data collection and analysis must happen first. Further, there is an added measure of personal accountability and need for timeliness of data collection.

Collaborative Efforts with Data

This clustered theme describes the many facets of collaborative efforts associated with reading assessment practices between participant's teammates, students, other school personnel, and parents. For these participants, collaboration begins in classroom with teammates and students. Collaborative efforts then advance to school and parent levels.

Working Environment

This clustered theme, as perceived by participants, encompasses much more than the day-to-day interactions with students and other school personnel. For them, work never ends and, although there is an effort to separate one's personal and family life, teacher work will always creep in. Moreover, the physical demands that are a result of formal, mandated reading assessment practices place a toll on both them and the students they teach. Consequently, these formal, mandated reading assessment practices also impact the day-to-day instruction of the general education curricula as well as interventions administered through the RTI framework.

Appendix I (continued)

Interventions and Reading Assessment Practices in Action

Within this clustered theme, there is a direct impact on the planning and implementation of Tier 1, or the general education curricula. Limited time within the school day and the need to provide interventions and related reading assessment practices may result in some children, the most needy as determined by data and team based decisions, to miss core, tier 1 instruction in areas such as science and social studies. Further, in some instances, receive reading instruction and or interventions from paraprofessionals or other non-classroom teacher personnel.

Authenticity in Practice

This clustered theme describes how, for participants, there are two sets, or kinds, of reading assessment practices. The first are the formal, mandated practices (e.g., administration of state assessments such as FAIR and district assessments such as the required ones from the basal reading series, or specific measures used within the RTI framework). Most data from these formal, mandated practices are used in a summative, high-stakes manner by outside stakeholders and not by participants and their students. Conversely, the second type, and the focus of this clustered theme are teacher selected/developed authentic reading assessment practices. Participants take great care to match these authentic practices to the specific needs of their students. For them, most data from these low-stakes practices are used daily in a formative manner inside the classroom by participants and their students. Unfortunately, from their perspective, these formal, mandated reading assessment practices do not take away authenticity completely, just the ability, for these participants, to have more sustained, long term authentic practices. They are, instead, only short, spontaneous, or on the spot reading assessment practices.

Lack of Decision-making Power

This clustered theme depicts the concept of decision-making power. For participants, there is a perception that their decision making power, outside of their own classroom or team context, is limited. For them, there are times that this power is not their own. Participants stressed that those with the least amount of decision-making power are the students. They, from their perspective, use data to make decisions at the classroom level and their students do not. Outside of the classroom, other professionals, and not the participants, use reading these reading assessment data to make decisions.

Teacher Emotion

This clustered theme described the thoughts and related feelings participants experience about their reading assessment practices and teaching both in and outside of the classroom. It also addressed their perceived level of low trust in their professional knowledge and judgment from stakeholders.

Teacher Needs and Wants

Participants want to have the flexibility of not administering required mandated reading assessment measures and want individualized, personal recognition from the families of the children they teach.

Appendix J

Composite Narrative and Statement of Identification

Colaizzi (1978) describes the rich, thick, exhaustive description as “a statement of identification of its [the phenomenon] fundamental structure as possible” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61). It is within the context of this description where I, a qualitative researcher, further answered each of my research questions through a composite narrative of the participants. Furthermore, it is where I placed these answers in the context of the everyday, lived experience shared by the research participants. The research questions I set out to answer; What is the lived experience of these teachers’ reading assessment practices within an RTI framework? and, In what ways do these teachers perceive how they use reading assessment practices to guide reading instruction, interventions, and decision making within an RTI framework? are expressed through Elizabeth Ann’s voice. She gives readers a glimpse into teach day of her typical week. She shares both her intensity of thought and complexity of reading assessment practices through a mixture of her personal, inward reflections and the minute details of her life. Readers encounter not only what she may eat for lunch, but also her daily interactions with students around a reading table, data collection during early morning hours, and even interactions in her own, private life away from the classroom. In her own words, thoughts, and actions, Elizabeth Ann describes her perceptions of her own reading assessment practices and subsequent instruction, interventions, and decision-making processes.

Appendix J (continued)**Elizabeth Ann McMahon**

My name is Elizabeth Ann McMahon. I am a teacher, and I will be brave. I will tell you my story, well, the part about my reading instruction and my reading assessment practices in the **Appendix J (continued)** context of this RTI framework, anyway. Many other teachers would not dare share this kind of detail. My story may lead you to see why. I have been a teacher for what feels like my entire life, but it has actually only been about 12 years. All of my experience comes from elementary school, and all of it has been... well, I am getting ahead of myself a bit. First, let me tell you a bit about me. Being a teacher was always in my mind. But, surprisingly, it wasn't that easy to get here. There always seemed to be some kind of obstacle that would forcefully jut itself in front of me. Sometimes it was my family, sometimes it was the path I took to the university, and sometimes, it was just me. Nevertheless, I am here and I teach.

In order for me to share my story with you, my readers, I need to invite you into my life. You see, for me, there is a public and private world of teaching. There are things, at least for myself and teammates, that teachers just do not say aloud. There are deep, personal thoughts that sometimes, do not even occur to me, until after I take time for intense, personal reflection. Therefore, allow me to take you, my readers, through vignettes, or as I like to call them, snippets, from each day in a typical week of my life. In other words, allow me to take you on the journey of my life, the life of a teacher. My hope is that you gain an even better picture of me and my reading assessment practices as each unfold within the response to intervention framework.

Appendix J (continued)**Monday**

It's 7:15 in the morning. I take a long, deep breath before I get out of my car. I know this is most likely the only time I will really get to sit down again before 3:30 in the afternoon. Heck, I may not even get a bathroom break until then. I crunch down on the antacid tablet in my mouth and hope that it will put a damper on my sour stomach. I know of several teachers both on my team and at the school who have sour stomachs, or even undiagnosed ulcers, from stress. Slowly, I gather up my things, turn off the engine, open the door, and finally step foot on the ground in order to Go, Go, Go! Whoosh!

It's 8:00 AM. Ready or not, here they come! I take a last minute glance around my classroom before 20, yes 20, first grade students (despite the class size amendment allowing only 18 in a class) burst through the door. I shake my head at the messy reading area, the papers piled high on my desk, and the mess from the day before we simply pushed into the corner. I say to myself, a messy classroom is one where a lot of learning takes place. Right?

Next, I put a mental check next to the things on my morning to do list: Computers on, check; morning message and calendar materials up and out, check; copies made and waiting, check. There was a faculty meeting this morning so, I feel even more rushed. I know there is something I most likely did not get done. And, to add a little more to my already full plate, there is an SBIT, school based intervention team meeting, during my planning time on Tuesday. I feel as if there is just no time. As the last child, Chris, enters the room just before the morning bell, I suddenly remember the forgotten job. It is a first draft of a return e-mail to Chris's parent. Darn! I knew it was something important. He needs a Tier II intervention in this new, Response to Intervention framework. I shrug my shoulders, to no one but myself, and think about how the e-

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mail will now have to wait until 3:30. I pull myself from these thoughts as I hug Sarah, who, like the rest of my first graders, I love as dearly as my own children, Zachary and Hannah. Therefore, I lean in and take a few moments to listen to her tales from the weekend before we go, go, go into our morning routine.

Tuesday

It is 11:27 AM. Yes, that time is correct. It is not 11:30. It is not 11:35. It is 11:27 AM. We run on odd times like this in an elementary school. I just dropped my kids, my students, at specials. This means, they have their thirty-minute PE class today. And I, instead of using this time for planning and prep for the kids, stand and wait in the small hallway outside of the school's conference room. I wait for my turn at the school based intervention team (SBIT) meeting on Chris. SBIT meetings never start nor end on time. I think about how I could use time I wait in a million other ways. For me, there never is enough time.

The door opens and Jen, a teacher from the intermediate (grades 3-5) team glances at me, sighs, weakly smiles as she says, "you're up. Good luck." I walk to the only open seat in the small room, rectangular room and try to imagine what the large oak, I know is on the other side of the wall, looks like on this beautiful Spring day. There are no windows in the conference room. Wendy, the reading specialist, starts the meeting. I notice a host of others in the small, crowded room and being to wish there was a fan. Susan, the speech pathologist sits across from me. Anne, the school psychologist is next to me. I nod to the multitude of others. Kristen the second grade teacher. JoAnne, the assistant principal, Kerri the school nurse, and Nicole our special education teacher. The only one who is not here and is in some way connected to Chris, is his mom, Ms. Bosch. I don't know how I feel about parent stakeholders. It is hard to share data

Appendix J (continued)

and tell a parent their child has not progressed. Each time I have ever tried, there has been no success. I take a deep breath, in hope, that Ms. Bosh will be different.

Wendy shares the brief social history of Chris, brief because he is only in the first grade. I wait for my turn to speak. For me, it feels like “you sit down in those meetings and you show them data, and you speak. This is what I see. And, everybody who is in there says, “okay, have you tried this?” or, “maybe let’s give him a language screening.” or, some such statement. I wish I had more of a decision or say in the meeting. I feel as if my reading assessments are for them to say, “okay, what are we going to do next?” before we meet again. I sign the forms to show that I was at the meeting. We decide we will meet back again in two months, to see how the next reading intervention works. I don’t think these interventions ever stop. I don’t think children are placed in special education very often any more.

It is 12:00 noon. I abruptly excuse myself from the meeting. I am already three minutes late for picking up the kids from PE. And, I still have to make it across the campus to the PE field. It is a wonder Coach Carter even bothers to say good morning to me anymore. I don’t think I have been on time for pick up, a single time this entire school year. There is always such a rush to go get something done, or a meeting that gets out too late, or well, something. I made a mental note to myself as I rounded the corner of the building and saw my class in one large mob jumping and singing and starting to horse around. I would need to stay after school tomorrow in order to catch up on the planning time I missed today.

Appendix J (continued)**Wednesday**

It is 7:29 AM. I made it to work just in the nick of time. It has been hard for me to get here on or before 7:30 lately. There are a variety of reasons. I have two children and a husband that I must get up, dressed, and out the door in addition to myself. There are always backpacks, shoes and or lost keys we must find. However, deep down I know, at least for me, that I am late because my job is not as fun as it once used to be. I must always collect data, or give a test, work with a small intervention group, or go to a meeting, and never have planning time. It is hard to squeeze in the some of the things that first attracted me to teaching. You know, when I was a kid, when I walked into my primary grade classrooms, “we knew we were going to do fun when we walked in. It is not like that anymore. And, the fun is kind of gone from education. That is sad, but that is the way it is” (Allison, interview 1, p. 22, lines436-439).

I love however, love working on projects with the kids. Take for instance glitter. Glitter has to be the best invention humankind ever made. Every project, paper, and moment of elementary school is better with glitter. I wouldn't be surprised if I were to find a speck of it somewhere on my body when I am 90 years old! You see, I think that is why my room is always, well a work in progress. There is always something still in progress in any given corner or open desktop. So, I suppose, while I am sad that I do not have room for more of these projects, there are just so many new responsibilities with this new response to intervention framework, I do projects, posters, what I call glitter, anyway. I sneak it in. I sneak it in because, they, my students, need it. And, quite frankly, I need it too.

I must have blinked, because now it's 9:30 AM. The day always moves so quickly. Again, I think of how little time we have. We are half an hour into our 90-minute reading block.

Appendix J (continued)

We just finished our whole group reading lesson. This week we read about time, the sun, and shadows. Friday is test day. Not only do the kids have to take the weekly test from our basal reading series, they also have to finish the unit test. Its mandated and comes around every three weeks. The unit test is long. And, when I say long, I mean long. We have to take it over about three days. It is heartbreaking, just heartbreaking. You see, we can only put about one or two questions per page and with 22 questions, “do the math on that one” (Allison, interview 2, p. 13, line 286). I get mad and frustrated when I have to administer these formal, mandated methods, these big, fat tests. “These assessments hold value. But, not to the length I think sometimes we get.” (Allison, interview 2, p. 13, lines 293-294). I say, under my breath as the children transition to their reading centers and as I prepare for my first small, guided reading group, “just let them, let them be little. They are 6” (Allison, interview 2, p. 13, line 294)!

It’s 9:35 AM. I think to myself, hmmm, not too bad! It only took us just about five or so minutes to transition. At least the kids are all working nicely, today. It is hard to manage 20 children while I work with only a few. Our reading groups never actually go for the full 30 minutes. It is impossible. I have four, an above-, on-, approaching-, and below-grade level reading groups. I wish I could do it all. I wish I could meet with each group each day. There is simply not enough time, even with our required, 90-minute reading block. My above level group, I feel good about their progress. They know, they do, they understand. I meet with them about twice a week. I must admit, small group reading time is my favorite part of the day. It is where I, a teacher—a professional, get to use my knowledge, my judgment, and my own, authentic reading assessment practices. I get to be me. I smile as my below group, of course, I don’t

Appendix J (continued)

technically call each group by these names while we work together in the classroom, settles in at the small group reading table.

Chris sits directly across from me. The four others in his group fan out across the small, kidney shaped reading table. I know my children, by heart (Allison, interview 1). I know their strengths, weaknesses, quirks, and heck, even their sense of humor. It is up here (Crystal, interview 2), in my head. I guide my kids as we open the small, leveled reading book, *Shadows*. So much of my reading assessment practices, my authenticity, are through observation and oral questioning. It has to be. We take a picture walk through the pages. Each child makes a prediction about the story. I ask Chris about his prediction first. I want him to predict based on what he saw in the book and not what he hears the others say.

“What do you think the story is about, Chris?” He scrunches up his cute little nose, takes a quick glance at the ceiling, and then gleefully blurts out, “It was about a dog” (Allison, interview 3)! I take a deep breath and let it out slowly. I expected such an answer. I also gently smile at him in my hope to encourage him to push deeper. I do not, under any circumstances want to shut down his willingness to read this early in the lesson. For Chris, prediction, inferences, and comprehension are just as hard as decoding the words on each page.

“It is? I didn’t see a dog in the story” (Allison, interview 3, p. 6, lines 122-123)! I saw a sheepish look appear on Chris’s face.

“Oh yeah, a cat. I mean, it was about a cat who wants play with his shadow! I could see he was proud of his new, correct answer. All he needed was a bit of support. The rest of my little group shares their predictions and we move into decoding. We work together to figure out how

Appendix J (continued)

each small black and white mark, each letter and space, comes together in order to create meaning. I listen carefully, to the whole group and each child, as we read together. Only experience can teach this important listening skill. We stop periodically in order to check for comprehension and confirm our decoding process. There are so many different dynamics when I assess children's reading. It is a very formative, authentic process.

We carry on, "There are three words on this page. So, how many times should we say, you know, any words" (Allison, interview 3)?

"Three!" shout my little group in unison. All of the other 15 students, who were working so nicely, look up. I know that for them, this unexpected interruption will mean they will not remain focused for much longer. Oh well, I enjoy the enthusiasm of the little group in front of me instead of worry about the pending application of my behavior management skills. This excitement, this enthusiasm for learning is, after all, why I teach.

"Remember, we should say three words only on this page and not make up a whole story! Use your picture clues! Does that sound right? Does that make sense" (Allison, interview 3, p. 6, lines 115-117)? Together we wrap up the small group lesson. I sent them back to their seats with their reading journals. I will determine, assess, their understanding through writing. Each child will write a sentence or two about the main idea, three supporting details, and, which part of the story was their favorite. They know, because of the new common core standards, they must support their work with documentation from the text. I make a mental note to check with Chris about his work before I call my next group to the table. Today, I meet with my above level reading group.

Appendix J (continued)**Thursday**

It's 12:04 PM and I just ate lunch. I think about how I might need my stomach pumped. I left my lunch cooler on the kitchen counter right after we found Zachary's missing left shoe. Therefore, today, I ordered the chocolate milk, barfaroni, and side of breadstick with antacid. Yup, I ate some sort of red sauce (I think it was tomato paste) and curly noodles mixed with mystery meat. On the bright side, the chocolate milk was good. The kids always seem to return from lunch in a good mood each barfaroni day. I think taste buds must develop later in life.

Stephanie, Step as she prefers, my teammate who remembered her lunch cooler, stands at the entrance to our pod of classrooms with clipboard in hand. She uses few words and an extraordinary grace that always accompanies her slight frame and long, dishpan blond hair, as she orchestrates the switch. She, Georgina, Merete (pronounced Meretta), and I share the children on our team. The switch is when we separate our kids into intervention and enrichment groups. Georgina and I each take a small group of 3 to 5 kids for Tier II interventions. Steph and Merete take the enrichment groups. The rest of the students on our team settle into seatwork, make-up work, center work, or some other kind of independent work.

We determined how our switch would look through our collaborative data analysis last Thursday afternoon. We, Steph, Merete, Georgina and I, meet every Thursday afternoon. I can now shrug off the fact that we do not get paid for this extra time we feel we must all put in. For us, collaboration has to be the name of the game in this new, response to intervention framework. "In fact, we put it all in [on last Thursday] for [Chris] (Sadie, interview 2, p. 17, line 375). We shined our data up on wall with the LCD projector (Sadie, interview 2). We put it on the wall so

Appendix J (continued)

that we could all look at it, every number, every piece, together. (Sadie, interview 2). It was at this meeting last Thursday when we decided that Chris needed the step, the school based intervention team (SBIT) meeting. He is one of the few from our team who has not made progress. I remembered how that decision, the SBIT meeting decision was bittersweet for us. You see, once we move away from team-time, once we move out to the rest of the school, we perceive, we feel, we lose a bit of our decision making power. Chris gets the benefit of new perspectives from other school personnel such as the reading specialist, the speech pathologist, the special education teacher, and even the nurse. We feel, well we feel our voice is silenced a bit. Our data collection and analysis processes now go into the hands of others. Is this good or bad, I do not yet make this decision. This process is, after all, still new.

It is 12:08 PM. Chris makes his way back to the small group table for his third reading lesson of the day (whole group, small group, intervention group). Phillip and Abbie students from Steph's class, who each have remnants of red sauce on their face, join Chris. I pull out the scientifically-based reading intervention the SBIT team recommended in my effort to improve letter and sound comprehension for these three, darling faces. In other words, Chris, Phillip, Abbie and I work on the letters, "a," "p," and "m." I mark on my data collection sheet that the only letter Phillip knows is "P." I guess the reason for his knowledge of this single letter is because, "P" is the first letter of his name. We trace these three letters with large, fat markers. We mold them with clay, and we stretch them into other sounds in order to make small words such as p-a-n, m-a-n, and the tricky one because "a" is in the middle, c-a-n. I only work with these three children for 30 minutes, and still, I am exhausted. I notice fatigue on their three small

Appendix J (continued)

faces as well. “We work really hard every day for that half an hour” (Sadie, interview 2, p. 17, line 379). While we work, I collect data on the new, mandated form someone from the SBIT team placed in my mailbox. I record data on absences, I record accuracy of letter identification. I record, I record, I record. I take a required data point at least every 2, 4, and 6 weeks for this small, Tier II intervention group.

It is 12:34 PM. The small timer at my right elbow signals the end of our team-time. I watch how, like clockwork, Steph appears in the common area that connects our four classrooms. I smile at how well she coordinates the switchback. I also let out a small sigh of relief. It’s recess time. I love recess time. The kids line up at the door quickly, they want to get outside, into the sunshine, just as badly as I do. I watch as they struggle to remain in a line as we near the end of the sidewalk and the start of the grassy field where the playground lies. They know, once a foot hits the grass, they may run like the dickens over to the playground. I know they will get all of their wiggles and jiggles out so, when we return to the classroom, we can concentrate on Math, Science, and Social Studies. This week we study telling time, cells, and the Declaration of Independence. I love to teach about the Declaration of Independence. Each year I bring in Chris, my husband, dressed as one or another of the men who signed the lovely document. He will come in next week as John Hancock. His visit will only costs me a pot of Sunday, slow cook chili, his favorite.

I smile at this thought of chili as I watch the kids on our team play. I remember that they are only 6 years old. I am also remember how, just a year and a half ago, I did not have to make my infamous, slow cook chili. A year and a half ago, I did not get to teach social studies, or science for that matter. Nor, unfortunately, did several of my students, get social studies, or

Appendix J (continued)

science instruction. I did not teach these subjects because of response to intervention. I was at a different school last year.

The school district will often move teachers from school to school based on enrollment. There were not enough students in the grade to hold all of us teachers. Therefore, I was the lucky one who got sent to a different school. My teammates there, as they are here, are extraordinary. It was easy for me to see, even from just the first few minutes with them, that each has a strong passion and love for the children on the team. I also saw how they, like we, struggle with response to intervention and the related reading assessment practices. It is hard to find a fit. Something, a subject, a child, a teacher, is always squished. The time we, Steph, Merete, Georgina and I have for Science and Social studies is condensed because of team-time. But, we still teach all of our students these content areas. At Cabbage Palm Elementary School (CPES), things were a little different. We still shared the students on our team. Every child was everyone's responsibility. It was the interventions and data collection that looked different.

Lori, the team leader, and I would take the students who needed tiered interventions. We would work hard during that half hour of time. We instructed, assessed, recorded data, and encouraged the children. We made great progress. I still remember Brian, he was able to demonstrate over a year's worth of growth in reading. I hope he is still very proud of his achievement. What was different was where all of the other children went. While Lori and I had the children who needed interventions, Paula and Peggy split up the rest of the team and taught content. They taught all of the children Social Studies and Science. Paula and Peggy are wonderful teachers. I loved the lessons they would pull together. Brian and the few other students I worked with needed me. They learned. We grew together as we worked together.

Appendix J (continued)

But, I missed my class. I missed not teaching them, being responsible for them. I was also sad that Brian and the others did not get Social Studies and Science instruction. I often wonder what kind of implication this removal from the general education curriculum may have for Brian and his classmates. I suppose time will tell. The experience at CPES was valuable. While there, I learned a lot about myself and the response to intervention process. However, I think about how glad I am to be back. As soon as I saw the opening back here, at Bayonet Elementary School (BES), I jumped at it. Zachary and Hannah go to school here. I like to be in the same place they are.

As I wrap up these thoughts, I feel a small, sharp pain on my right ankle. A fire ant, not visible in the tall grass, bit me. As I scratch, I notice the time on my watch, 12:44 PM. Oops, the kids got an extra minute of recess! Steph, with her usual fluid grace, makes the signal and we all head into the classroom for the rest of the afternoon. I make a mental note to send a quick e-mail to my husband. I need to remind him to pick up the kids. Today is, after all, Thursday. This afternoon we, Steph, Georgina, Merete and I will review, data, plan, and more importantly, support each other. I love my team.

Friday

It's 8:57 AM. The morning bell rang, the pledge, national anthem, and announcements are over. I have the weekly test in my hand, ready. "I have to stand in front of [my kids], and read a paper. And, walk around" (Allison, interview 2, p. 15, line 314). I am in charge of these 20 little children. I must make sure that everyone is on the right page and that everyone is listening to these formal, scripted directions. I stand at the ELMO. I smile, but I know in my heart that it is not a real smile. I tell the students, "this is for fun, it is just for fun" (Allison,

Appendix J (continued)

interview 2). I see the frustration on their face as they flip, and flip, and flip through the pages. I wish we did not have to take these stilly tests. I make a mental note about how we will, after lunch today, need to finally finish the last 8 to ten questions on the unit test. There are no large, small, or intervention reading groups today. There are only formal, mandated reading assessment practices. I do not like Fridays any more. I don't think the kids do either. I need and want someone to trust my teacher professional knowledge and judgment. I want someone to trust my teacher selected or developed authentic reading assessment practices. As I continue to watch the children test, I think about how, even with the short glitter projects we do, there is no place for more sustained authentic practices. There is no place for them because, from my perspective, the time and intensity of these formal, practices push out the possibility.

Saturday

It is 6:30 AM. There is no rest for the weary. I peel myself out of bed and rub the crusty sleep from my eyes. Today is my daughter, Hannah's, birthday. I can't believe she is six today. I can't believe she is most of the way through Kindergarten. I love her with all of my heart, and then again with whatever other love I can muster up. Hannah decided that she wanted her birthday at the roller skating rink. While it was a bit more expensive, we agreed. The roller rink provides everything. All we had to do was print out the invitations and then show up the day of the party with her cake. I can't image the party any other way. As a teacher, there is just no time. Teaching seems to push in to all aspects of my life. This is why I sit at the computer, still in my PJ's with the kid's unit tests, weekly tests, respective spreadsheets, un-brushed teeth, and a cup of very strong coffee in order to enter 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0 after 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0. These 0's and 1's will later translate into data others, the reading specialist, those at the SBIT meetings, and

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who knows who else will use to poke, prod, and review what the children and I have done in the classroom over the last few weeks.

It's now 12:50 PM. We got to the roller rink fifteen minutes early. Hannah is beside herself with excitement. She could hardly sit down as she put on her skates. I think she has already done two laps in the last few minutes. I smile as I see her first little friend, Ashley, and her mother arrive. I give my husband's hand a gentle squeeze as I make myself a mental note. I tell myself, Elizabeth, remember days like this. Remember the happiness you see on the face of the children around you. That happiness is why you teach.

Sunday

I blink several times before I believe the clock. It is 7:30 AM. I slept in. I snuggle deeper into the covers and pillow for just a few more minutes. Once up, I must find my spice grinder, chop onions, and start the daylong slow cook chili. I know that at least with slow cook chili, I can get my lesson plans done. I have not forgotten how I still need to fill in plans from the week before. I smile at the fact that my family is still fast asleep. I knew roller skating would really knock the wind out of Hannah and Zachary. I take advantage of the quiet, sleepy hour to write, what else, lesson plans.

It is 10:07 AM. The family and I file into our pew a few minutes after the Church service starts. I bow my head in prayer. I thank God for the strength He gave our family over the past week. I then ask Him to help me with a need. I am almost afraid to ask Him. I think about how it may be selfish prayer. I take a long, deep breath, let it out slowly, and ask anyway. I ask Him for encouragement. I ask Him for recognition from parents. I ask Him for more room for

Appendix J (continued)

authenticity within my reading assessment practices. I ask for more of a place in the decision making power with reading assessment data. I place it in His hands, and I ask.

It is 11:05, the Church service ends. I say a little prayer filled with hope before we file out of the pew. I hope I can get to work on time tomorrow. I hope I can push this silly question, Do I really want to do this, teach, anymore? out of my mind. I tell God, I really do love the kids.

Statement of Identification

Riessman (2008) writes how “narratives don’t speak for themselves, offering a window into an ‘essential self.’ When used for research purposes, they require close interpretation (p. 3). In the case of my dissertation research and perspective through social constructivism, this close interpretation is given through the statement of identification. According to Colaizzi (1978), the statement of identification is when the qualitative researcher will “formulate the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61). In other words, the statement of identification is my reduction of these participants’, these elementary level general education teachers’, reading assessment practices in the context of an RTI framework, down to its “essential nature” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 300).

Therefore, Elizabeth Ann McMahon is a fictional composite of all 5 dissertation participants. It is not meant to be an exact representation of each participant. Instead, Elizabeth Ann McMahon tells what Richardson (1990) refers to as the collective story that “gives voice to those who are silenced or marginalized in the cultural narrative.” (p. 128). More specifically, the collective story, “displays an individual’s story by narrativizing the experiences of the social

Appendix J (continued)

category to which the individual belongs, rather than telling the particular individual's story.” (Richardson, 1990, p. 128). This is important because, as I wrote earlier Chapter One, the significance of my study lies in its potential to bring voice to the forgotten classroom (Brookhart, 2004). Further, it may help these teachers improve, refine and or reflect on reading assessment practices. More specifically, Richardson (1990) writes how such a narrative can be transformative for the individual participants because, “at the individual level, people make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them, and they attempt to fit their lives into these stories” (Richardson, 1990, p. 129). Additionally, my study is pertinent from the larger perspective of suggested change within educational legislation and policy because, such a story has the potential to emotionally bind together those with the same experiences and create the possibility of collective social action (Richardson, 1990).

Hence, the essence of this composite narrative, or collective story is a glimpse into teach day of these participants reading assessment practices. There is an intensity of thought and complexity of reading assessment practices as presented through a mixture of personal, inward reflections and the minute details of everyday life. Encounters with the mundane such as the lunch menu coupled with interactions between teacher and students around a reading table, data collection, and even instances from private life, away from the classroom, make up their reading assessment practices within an RTI framework.

Appendix K University Internal Review Board Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
11901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd. MDC055 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5630 • FAX (813) 974-5618

November 7, 2012

Sarah Bombly, M.Ed.
Edu Measurement & Research
6322 Grapewood Road
Spring Hill, FL 34609

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00009328
Title: Reading assessment practices of elementary education teachers: A descriptive study

Dear Mrs. Bombly:

On 11/6/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 11/6/2013.

Approved Items:

Protocol Document:

[Proposal protocol](#)

Consent Document:

[Informed consent.pdf](#)

Please use only the official, IRB- stamped consent document(s) found under the "Attachment Tab" in the recruitment of participants. Please note that these documents are only valid during the approval period indicated on the stamped document.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural

Appendix K (continued)

beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

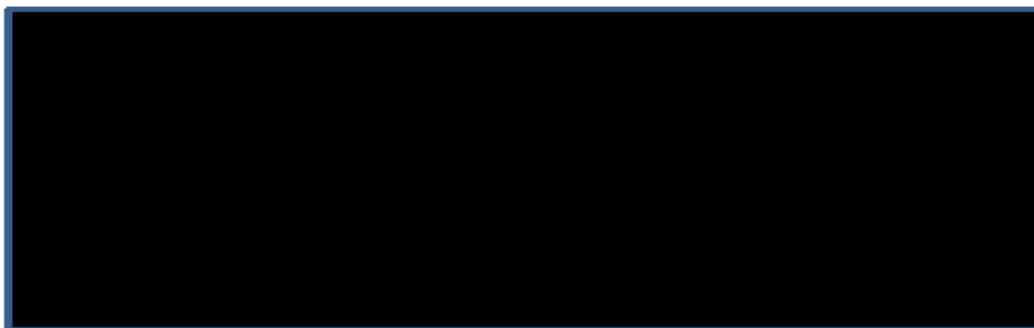


John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix L

School District Research Request Approval

Note: Name of the school district and associated personnel have been removed to ensure anonymity.



October 22, 2012

Ms. Sarah Bombyl
5863 Covewood Drive
Spring Hill, Florida 34609

Dear Ms. Bombyl:

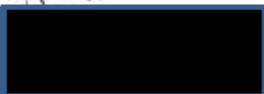
Attached you will find an approval to conduct research for your study in Pasco County, pending USF IRB approval. The study entitled "*Reading Assessment Practices of Elementary Education Teachers: A Descriptive Study.*" Participation is voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain elementary level general education teachers' assessment practices within the context of elementary level reading instruction in an RTI framework.

We are always interested in the outcome of research conducted in our school system. When your study is complete, please forward a brief summary of your findings to the Research and Evaluation Department.

Best of luck as you pursue the subject of your research.

Sincerely,



Director

/jg
Attachments

Appendix M

IRB Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

Sarah Bombly

Has Successfully Completed the Course in

CITI Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel

On

Friday, May 11, 2012

10/28/2013 11:31:12 AM