Two Ethnographic Case Studies of Response to Intervention

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kandy Curtis Smith

May 2014

Copyright © 2014 by Kandy Curtis Smith All rights reserved.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my two children Shelley and Sam. My love for both of you inspired me throughout this process.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my committee members Dick Allington, Stergios Botzakis, and Trena Paulus. I am deeply grateful for your expertise and patience with me throughout this process. To my major professor Anne McGill-Franzen: There are not enough words to express my sincere appreciation for your ability and willingness to guide me through a journey that has changed me both personally and professionally.

Thank you, Susan Benner, for being my supervisor and supporter. I have learned so many valuable truths from you.

Thank you, Pam Petty, my friend and colleague. Your confidence in my ability to do this work has accompanied and sustained me.

Thank you to my parents Tommy and Virginia Curtis. Your love and belief in me has strengthened and encouraged me.

And, finally, thank you, Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels, for welcoming me as an observer in your classrooms. All children should have the opportunity to be taught and loved at least one year of their lives by a teacher like the two of you.

Abstract

Response to Intervention (RtI) is being implemented in classrooms across the nation as a method of strengthening instruction and an option for replacing the severe discrepancy model in the identification of Learning Disability (LD). This study explores two teachers' understandings of the construct of LD and describes implementation of RtI in their classrooms. These two ethnographic case studies allow data triangulation of archival documents and pre-research events, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. The implementation of the RtI policy was interpreted by the teachers and interrupted by First to the Top, but the explanatory ethnographic case studies provide a classroom level glimpse of RtI that is missing in the literature

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION.....1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....18
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....54
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....85
CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....133
REFERENCES.....165
APPENDIX.....181
VITA.....191

List of Tables

Table 3.1 – Characteristics of Eastwood Elementary School..... 62

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Symbolic Interactionism as Organizing Framework 47
Figure 2 – Two Teachers. Compared and Contrasted 69
Figure 3 – Symbolic Interactionism. Mrs. Shelley's Classroom 88
Figure 4 – Samuels: Pre-Shift: Spring 2009-2010 through Mid-Fall 2010-2011 113
Figure 5 – Samuels: Post-Shift: Mid-Fall through End of Fall Semester 2010-2011 . 113

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and General Information

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) was a "very hot" topic in reading according to the International Reading Association's annual survey of literacy leaders when I first submitted my research proposal (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009), and it remained a "very hot" topic in that yearly list throughout the data collection period of this research study (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2010, 2011). As this research was organized and reported, Response to Intervention held its place in the "very hot" topics for 2012 and then, while still voted a hot topic by over 50 percent of the respondents, fell from the "very hot" topics group in 2013 because of "a lack of definitive research to support the various Response to Intervention models" being implemented (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2012, p. 9).

In a 2007 survey of special education state department directors, every respondent (with 86% of the 50 states responding) indicated an emphasis on RtI was either currently in place or was in a developmental stage in his state (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008). By 2009, all fifty states were "implementing some form of RtI policy" (Harr-Robbins, Shambaugh, & Parrish, 2009, p. 1). The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has undoubtedly created the widespread interest. With that legislation, a school system may employ an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for Specific Learning Disability (SLD) identification. Responsiveness (or Response) to Intervention "emerged as a concept worthy of investigation… early in the work of the LD initiative" (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007, p. 8) continued as a favored choice (Fuchs, Mock,

Morgan, & Young, 2003), and is "currently the recommended federal model" (Lindstrom & Sayeski, 2013, p. 8).

More than simply allowed to employ as an alternative, school systems are now required under state eligibility standards for determining SLD to incorporate many of the practices that are involved in the RtI process as a part of the pre-referral special education process, even if ultimately the system is going to continue using the discrepancy model to determine SLD eligibility. As of the writing of this paper, Tennessee, the state in which this research was conducted, is in the process of mandating the implementation and use of RtI as the sole means of identifying SLD (RtI^2 Initiative 2013), effective July 1, 2014. Tennessee follows the path of at least six states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and West Virginia) that have already legislated RtI as the sole means of determining SLD (Harr-Robbins, Shambaugh, & Parrish, 2009).

The implementation of an RtI approach is an involved process, and, as is the case with many educational initiatives (Cuban, 2013), the general education classroom teacher will be on the front line of the RtI endeavor. She will be the one providing the first and most important level of instruction to the child. She will be the one who constantly, through valid and well-timed assessment, compares the individual student's performance to the rigor of the grade-level curriculum standards. She will be the one using that data to make daily decisions concerning the student's next literacy experience. She will also, in most cases, serve as a key member of a team initiating any decision that involves the child's possible referral for special education services.

The Presumed Relationship.

Because of the teacher's paramount role in the child's daily literacy experiences and in the possible identification of a learning disability, the importance of understanding what

influences the teacher's work with the child in her classroom is obvious. And in a classroom where the teacher's decision-making processes are framed in the RtI approach to literacy instruction, it is important to know how the teacher's understanding of RtI affects her professional decisions and therefore the student's literacy experience. With the RtI process used for both remediation and referral, the teacher's experiences and beliefs concerning learning disability are also important to examine.

Teacher's Role in Student Literacy.

The decisions and efforts a teacher makes concerning a student's classroom literacy experiences comprise an ongoing process of the utmost importance. In *Now We Read, We See, We Speak,* Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) wrote of basing their work in the pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire concerning the relationship of the teacher and student. "Literacy attainment, he believed, is a result of a dynamic, mutual exchange between educator and students; …ultimately, one of the most primary of these objectives is personal and social transformation, toward greater power and freedom for oppressed peoples" (p. 11). Many children who struggle in literacy development in general education classrooms in the United States were born as members of one or more groups of the oppressed peoples in our society. The first of the four pillars of the No Child Left Behind Act passed by Congress in 2001 requires accountability that is intended to reflect high expectations from schools and teachers regarding the achievement of these disadvantaged students in classrooms (Four pillars of NCLB, 2004).

As a teacher welcomes students into her classroom at the beginning of each year, she accepts the responsibility for making educational decisions concerning literacy with and for these children, with perhaps the most difficult decisions needing to be made for the student who struggles, not making average progress and not reading well enough to accomplish the grade-

level curriculum. A teacher's decisions concerning a student's individual literacy program are monumental in the child's educational experience and in his life after schooling. Mehan (1992) contended that the decisions made about a student "constitute" the student and determine the educational opportunities to which he has access. Purcell-Gates & Waterman (2000) added that

> One of Freire's most essential presuppositions is that there are tremendous social, political, economic, and educational inequities in the world and that particular forms of education either perpetuate these inequities or work toward transforming them so to allow for great equity and liberation for all. (p. 11)

Teachers who have not been trained adequately to teach diverse groups at times "reject and negate the students' culture and cognitive competencies" (Burawoy et al., 1991, p. 204*).* And for some teachers, the student who does not learn at a typical rate presents a diversity for which she may not feel prepared. One of the most important issues that the teacher will confront in the life of a struggling student is whether or not she can meet the needs of the struggling student through her instruction. The teacher's beliefs about learning disability will affect her decisions concerning the child.

Learning Disability Defined

Samuel Kirk's original definition of a learning disability was

> A learning disability refers to a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subject resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors. (Kirk, 1962, p. 263)

Since this first definition, many have redefined the term, perhaps even as part of the

continuous attempt to validate the disability. The current federal guideline for identification of a specific learning disability, approved in December of 2007, and the definition of LD that I am employing for this study reads as follows:

> The term "Specific Learning Disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, and that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Such term includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities (e.g., visual processing), brain injury that is not caused by an external physical force, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific Learning Disability does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment; Mental Retardation; Emotional Disturbance; Limited English proficiency; Environmental or cultural disadvantage. (Federal Guidelines, 2007)

Identification of LD

While the definition of a learning disability has varied in the 45 years since its inception, the method of identifying a child as learning disabled has not. As early as 1938, Marion Monroe introduced the notion of discrepancy between actual achievement and expected achievement as a way of identifying students with reading disabilities, and, while Monroe and Barbara Bateman are credited for the initial definitions of learning disability that included a discrepancy between achievement and potential (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002), the research conducted on the Isle of Wight by Rutter and Yule (1975) was for years the research that seemingly justified the use of the discrepancy testing model.

Rutter and Yule (1975) and colleagues Tizard, Whitmore (1970) and Berger (1973) conducted studies involving children and reading difficulties on the Isle of Wight and in London in the late 60s and early 70s. In an article examining the value of differentiating between "reading retardation" (underachievement) and "reading backwardness" (low achievement) (p. 181) Rutter and Yule consent that "there is abundant evidence that the I.Q. is far from a pure measure of innate ability" (p. 182) and yet base their research on the discrepancy model that includes the IQ test, crediting Thorndike (1963) for "outlining" the "rationale for this approach" (p. 183) and themselves and their fellow researchers for "demonstrating…its application to the definition of specific reading retardation" (p. 184). Their work led to the discrepancy testing model's becoming the litmus test for LD identification. The classroom teacher, who in most cases has neither an understanding of the IQ test, the reading ability assessment, nor the fragility of the discrepancy model process (McCray & McHatton, 2011), was nevertheless the person who usually requested this testing as a part of the referral process for special education services.

The IDEA 2004 reauthorization now allows a school system to employ an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for LD identification. The implementation of this alternative practice, in most cases packaged in an RtI framework, affects all aspects of the school system. The school district has the responsibility to set high standards for everyone in the RtI process. This requires providing teachers and paraprofessionals with the necessary training for the use of the reading strategies needed to increase students' reading abilities (Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). At the school level, organizational issues must be addressed (Hollenbeck, 2007). Choosing which assessments and which interventions may be a decision made at school-level instead of district level. In either case, the resources and scheduling of benchmark and progress monitoring assessments and interventions must be arranged (Marston, 2005).

Cummings, Atkins, Allison, and Cole (2008) write that one of the most important elements a school must have in place is "a continuum of generally effective instructional supports" (p. 25). Fuchs, as citied in Hollenbeck (2007) described RtI implementation as requiring a "seismic shift in beliefs, attitudes, and practices" (p.142).

Statement of the Problem

Response to Intervention is a framework that is usually constructed to include this basic process:

1. Students are provided with 'generally effective' instruction by their classroom teacher;
2. Their progress is monitored;
3. Those who do not respond get something else, or something more, from their teacher or someone else;
4. Again, the progress is monitored; and
5. Those who still do not respond either qualify for special education or for special education evaluation. (Fuchs et al., 2003, p. 159)

Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, and McKnight (2006) add to this basic definition that the process begins with a universal screening that helps to identify those students that might be in need of additional instruction.

Although RtI is an often chosen framework for federal compliance with the identification of SLD (Specific Learning Disability) not involving discrepancy model testing, ambiguity in RtI implementation exists. This ambiguity is situated in the unanswered questions that school systems are being forced to attend to by themselves as they initiate the RtI framework. Jones and Ball (2012) identify these unanswered questions as "conceptual, procedural, and logistical

questions related to RtI implementation" (p. 207). Examples of these unanswered questions might include:

- What qualifies as a valid assessment in the RtI process?
- What does fidelity in the tiers of instruction involve?
- May students remain indefinitely in the second tier of intervention if the data determine the need?
- Will the research-based process that has shown to be effective in the early grades be effective in the secondary setting?

Even in a mandated RtI initiative like that of Tennessee, the state's proposed guidelines are specific enough to guide the process from a compliance level yet limited enough that school systems are left to make many critical decisions on their own.

In spite of the need for more quality research-based guidance, school systems that are implementing RtI either by choice or by force may also be moving ahead too quickly. Shapiro and Clemens (2009) shared that system experts believe that the implementation of a model of service delivery like RtI takes between three and five years to achieve. School systems are choosing to or perhaps feeling pressured to implement the framework and make decisions based on that process in a single school year. Additionally, while much of the research base for RtI is focused on early schooling intervention, school districts are being asked in some cases to implement RtI in grades kindergarten through twelve (RtI^2 Initiative 2013).

Despite the widespread interest and implementation of Response to Intervention in the reading field, practice may be charging ahead of research in that the student's experience as created by the teacher's understanding and implementation of RtI has not been examined. While the importance of the teacher and her effectiveness has been established (Englert, Fries, Martin-

Glenn, Douglas, 2007; Cuban, 2013), the research concerning RtI has been mostly focused on the response of the child or the effectiveness of the programs. This research investigation adds to the existing research on RtI by examining the role of the main instructional personnel, the general education classroom teacher, as she establishes a learning environment situated in an RtI framework.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to provide a front row classroom view of RtI with particular interest in

1.) how the teacher's understanding and implementation of the RtI framework affected her instructional choices

2.) how those instructional choices constructed and supported the learning experiences of the children in the classroom, especially the sometimes fragile learning experiences of disenfranchised students.

Research Questions

This research studied the general education teacher's implementation of Response to Intervention at the classroom-level. The major questions guiding my research were:

- How do teachers understand and define disability?
- How do teachers understand and implement RtI?
- How do teachers' understandings influence children's experience with RtI?

Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to examine how the teacher's understanding of learning disability and RtI affected the student's experience in literacy instruction delivered within the RtI framework. Qualitative research was appropriate for the research questions and, in

particular, the use of ethnographic methods to gather and interpret data and the case study as a complementary and necessary part of organizing and sharing the findings of this investigation.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant at a very basic level because it adds to existing knowledge concerning how a teacher's beliefs and actions concerning policy and disability affect student learning. Because student learning, especially learning to be literate, is one of the important events that occur in a classroom, directly affecting the student's opportunities in life, understanding the interaction that occurs between the teacher and the student is of benefit. Research that results in helping to create and define the teacher's role and responsibilities in the RtI process is a substantive contribution as well because much of the current research involving RtI examines the effectiveness of commercial intervention programs and policies.

Role of the Researcher

As I read ethnographies and prepared for this research, I studied the role of the researcher in the collection of data. Ethnography allows the researcher to be involved; it allows the researcher to view herself and her own life experiences as beneficial to the research, not as baggage that must be constantly checked to prevent any influence on the research. Strauss (1987) went so far as to describe the qualitative researcher's "experiential data" as gold to be mined (p. 246). Lareau (2000) offered an appendix, analogous to the third chapter of a dissertation, to her book *Home Advantage*; that appendix became a lifeline to me during my study, sometimes serving as the lifeline that the diver depends on to stay in touch with the surface, at other times functioning as the lifeline for which the drowning swimmer grasps as she fights to stay afloat in hopes of being rescued from the sea.

I planned to observe multiple times in both classrooms. I also planned to formally interview the two teachers at least twice. I proposed to request permission from the teachers to view their fidelity check feedback that I believed they would receive from their administrator and other supervisors as a third source of data. When these fidelity checks did not occur, I instead gathered archival data as my third data source.

Researcher Assumptions

During this research, I assumed the following premises. The literature on Response to Intervention (RtI) describes it as an effective framework for reading instruction that includes best practice research-based strategies. As a state consultant regarding RtI, I had provided the school system in which the teachers in this research taught with strategy instruction to support the implementation of the RtI framework. While there are those who doubt its worthiness in identifying a specific learning disability, there are others who feel that the RtI framework benefits both the LD identification process and student outcomes in general (Batsche, Kavale, & Kovaleski, 2006).

As this research began, because I had been a part of the planning in their school system and had knowledge of the district's RtI intentions, I moved forward with the belief that the two teachers involved in this research understood the previously provided framework (assess, instruct, assess, instruct or intervene, assess, possibly refer) to be foundational concerning RtI.

According to Vaughn and Fuchs (2003), the RtI process may be utilized for two purposes. It can serve to supplement the learning experience of the student who is struggling in the general education curriculum for whatever reason (for example, came to school with no early literacy experiences, comes from a home environment that does not appear to match with what is valued as important for learning at school, aka the "disenfranchised learner", possibly has a

learning disability, has English as a second language, etc.), or it can be the process through which teachers deliver high quality classroom instruction and periodically assess struggling students' progress in an effort to identify those who may need special education services because their learning needs cannot be met in the general education curriculum, a circumstance believed by many to be caused by a learning disability.

Another assumption on which I based this research was that regardless of a school district's written RtI policy, the teacher's interpretation of that policy is what will be observable in her classroom. As supported by the "street-level bureaucrat" theory developed through the work of Lipsky (1980), the teacher is the person who carries out the policy at the classroom level, making minute-by-minute decisions using her professional discretion and beliefs as a filter through which the policy is implemented. Cuban's (2009; 2013) work concerning teachers and policy helped clarify this assumption. Cuban terms what a teacher does in a policy implementation as "hugging the middle" (p. 11), indicating that she attempts to blend the new policy with old methods many times in an effort to protect what she believes to be in the best interest of the child.

A third fundamental assumption that guided my research is that the teacher is the most influential part of the child's reading instructional experience. Allington (2002) writes of the research conducted with first and fourth grade teachers in six states, research that supports the importance of the teacher that was later confirmed by Nye and colleagues in the reanalysis of the Tennessee class size study (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004).

A final assumption that I as the researcher brought to the conceptual framework to this study was that a child's classroom and school experiences will strongly influence his life-long societal status (Lipsky, 1980; Mehan, 1992), and thus an understanding of the components that

create this experience is imperative. Lipsky (1980) wrote that "the ways in which street-level bureaucrats deliver benefits and sanctions structure and delimit people's lives and opportunities" (p. 4). Mehan (1992) offered the Constitutive Theory which attributes student outcomes to a school's institutional decisions. Finn (1999) wrote of the school "gatekeeping" (p. 147) practices that essentially can "edit out" (p. 147) the ideas and feelings of the student and that "effectively silence many people for life" (p. 148). Believing the teacher and the school experience to be this powerful a force in the life of the child, I conducted this research with the intent of adding knowledge that will positively affect the student's experience.

Organization of the Study

These ethnographic case studies provide an in-depth view of how the teacher's understanding of instruction in the Response to Intervention framework affected the student's learning experience within that same framework. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature related to learning disabilities, Response to Intervention, the teacher's response to policy change, and ethnography as genre; I have also included the conceptual framework in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the rationale for employing ethnographic case studies as the methodology for this research. Included also in this chapter are explanations of my role, the population and setting, data collection and analysis procedures, and the methods used for verification. In Chapter 4, I share the findings of my research. Chapter 5 allows me to discuss the findings and my thoughts for future research in this area.

Operational Definitions and Acronyms

These terms may assist the reader in understanding this research study:

Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA): "The term curriculum-based assessment (CBA) means simply measurement that uses 'direct observation and recording of a student's

performance in the local curriculum as a basis for gathering information to make instructional decisions" (Witt, Elliot, Daly, Gresham, & Kramer, 1998, p. 121-122).

Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM): "…one widely known type of general outcome measure (GOM) that allows educators to quickly and efficiently assess students' growth in basic skill areas" (Cummings et al., 2008, p. 27).

Differentiated Instruction: "the use of flexible teaching approaches in order to accommodate the individual learning needs of all students" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007).

Disproportionality: "refers to the 'overrepresentation' and 'underrepresentation' of a particular demographic group in special education programs relative to the presence of this group in the overall student population" (National Education Association, 2008)

Fidelity of Implementation: "the degree to which an intervention is implemented accurately following the guidelines or restrictions of its developers" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007)

Formative Assessment: "the process by which data are used to adapt teaching to students' needs" (Cummings et al., 2008, p. 27).

High-quality Instruction/Intervention: "effective instruction based on research-validated practices" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007)

IQ Achievement Discrepancy:

> assesses whether there is a significant difference between a student's scores on a test of general intelligence (e.g., an IQ test such as the *WISC-IV*) and scores obtained on an achievement test (e.g., the *Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test*). The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the approach traditionally used to identify children with learning

> disabilities. If a student's score on the IQ test is at least two standard deviations (30 points) higher than his or her scores on an achievement test, the student is described as having a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement and, therefore, as having a learning disability. (IRIS, 2007)

Learning Disability (LD): Although Allington (2002) writes that "…there is no commonly accepted operational definition of a learning disability" (p. 266), for this research, a learning disability will be defined as the federal government defines it:

> a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, and that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Such term includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities (e.g., visual processing), brain injury that is not caused by an external physical force, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific Learning Disability does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment; Mental Retardation; Emotional Disturbance; limited English proficiency; environmental or cultural disadvantage. (Federal Guidelines, 2007)

Learning Rate: The rate at which a student makes progress in achievement documented over time and compared to his prior levels of performance and the growth rates of his peers.

Level of Performance: The student's relative achievement compared to the expected performance

Problem Solving Process: "Practitioners determine the magnitude of the problem, analyze its causes, design a goal-directed intervention, conduct it as planned, monitor student

progress, modify the intervention as needed (i.e., based on student responsiveness), and evaluate its effectiveness and plot future actions" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Progress Monitoring: "a form of assessment in which student learning is evaluated on a regular basis in order to provide useful feedback about performance to both learners and instructors" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007)

Reading Disability: "any condition in which a student's learning disability in reading is significant or unusually pronounced" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RtI): "1. Students are provided with 'generally effective' instruction by their classroom teacher; 2. Their progress is monitored; 3. Those who do not respond get something else, or something more, from their teacher or someone else; 4. Again, the progress is monitored; and 5. Those who still do not respond either qualify for special education or for special education evaluation"(Fuchs et al., 2003, p. 159)

Scientific, research-based instruction: Instruction that has been demonstrated through scientific research to produce high learning rates for most students

Standard Treatment Protocol: "A standard treatment protocol is an alternative to problem solving. Whereas the problem-solving approach differs from child to child, a standard treatment protocol does not. Implementation usually involves a trial of fixed duration (e.g., 10 to 15 weeks) delivered in small groups or individually" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 95).

Three-Tier Model of Support:

Tier 1: "…culturally responsive, quality instruction with ongoing progress monitoring within the general education classroom" (Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 113).

Tier 2: "…providing a level of intensive support that supplements the core curriculum and is based on student needs as identified by ongoing progress monitoring." (Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 114).

Tier 3: "…consists of individualized and intensive interventions and services, which might or might not be similar to traditional special education services" (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007, p. 8).

Universal Screening/Benchmark Screening: "The practice of assessing every student with a brief screening tool" (IRIS Center Online Dictionary, 2007).

Validity: executed with the proper formalities; relevant; meaningful; logically correct; appropriate to the end in view

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to examine the teacher's understanding of Response to Intervention and view the student's literacy experiences within that framework, it was important to determine the teacher' beliefs about a learning disability as a part of her understanding and implementation of Response to Intervention. A review of the research on learning disability, Response to Intervention, and teachers' responses to policy change was conducted to help me as the researcher develop an understanding of the issues that might be associated with my research.

Review of the Definition and Identification of A Learning Disability

Defining and identifying learning disabilities has been of interest to researchers, professional organizations, and governmental leaders for three decades; unfortunately in that time, there has been more disagreement than agreement, with reforms leading not to solutions but to questions concerning the construct, the procedures, and even the worth of identifying students with learning disabilities (Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004). In the meantime, the role of the teacher in initiating the identification of a learning disability has not changed; she is to know and respond to the needs of the child. But, it is difficult to discern the possibility of LD when there is so much variance among the beliefs of those who are responsible for next steps in the identification process, and there could very well be research of which she is not fully aware that would influence her role in the process of identification.

The Definition of a Learning Disability.

The research on learning disabilities (LD) began some 130 years ago. German physician Adolph Kussmaul began the discussion when he described an adult patient with whom he had

interaction as having no evident disabilities other than a severe reading disability. Kussmaul labeled it “word-blindness” (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002, p. 3). Samuel Orton, working in the United States some 50 years later, called a similar observation in his work “strephosymbolia” (p. 8). Marion Monroe, a research associate of Orton, added diagnostic testing and instruction to the process of assisting students who struggled with reading. Monroe was the first researcher to associate a learning disability with an examination of the discrepancy between the expected ability and a person’s real achievement. Her work occurred in the 1920s.

Samuel Kirk, who in 1962 initiated the term “learning disability” in a special education textbook he wrote, worked at the same residential facility as Monroe, and her work influenced his. He in turn influenced the work of Barbara Bateman who furthered the idea of a discrepancy in identifying a learning disability (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). The federal government became involved in defining a learning disability in the early 1960s. Later in that same decade, governmental officials asked Kirk to chair a committee that would ultimately publish a document addressing learning disabilities, including a definition of LD that would be suitable for government decisions.

The work of that task force on LD created by the Federal Government in the early 60’s resulted in not one but two definitions of learning disability but offered no guidance for the identification of LD. So, the government made the decision to operationalize LD in hopes that measuring and expressing quantitatively would strengthen the identification process. The “severe discrepancy” between intelligence and achievement first offered by Monroe many years prior was now sanctioned (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, Lipsey, & Roberts, 2001).

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. A part of this law recognized LD as an official category of disability (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). Martinez et al. (2006) wrote that

> Although there has been longstanding debate regarding the definition of a specific learning disability, federal language defining SLD (Specific Learning Disability) as an underlying processing deficit in understanding or using language has not changed since the category was established in federal law over 30 years ago." (p. 2)

Right or wrong, the federal government has not moved from its initial stance concerning LD.

The Identification of a Learning Disability.

The belief that a learning disability is caused by a neurological deficit may possibly have been first supported and then sustained by the research conducted by Rutter and Yule in the early 1970s on the Isle of Wight (Fletcher et al., 2001) where discrepancy testing was used to separately identify learning disabled readers from those who had general reading issues. Mellard et al (2004) wrote that up until the mid-70's, the testing of a child who was thought to be learning disabled involved an assessment to determine underlying processing deficits. After the mid-70s, perhaps in response to the Isle of Wight research and the new official recognition of LD, testing began to attempt to "examine the degree of a student's underachievement" (Mellard et al, 2004, p. 245).

McGill-Franzen (1987) argued the possibility that political and social contexts influenced this change in the determination of LD more than research and knowledge concerning the disability. She provided evidence that between 1975 and 1985, school personnel began viewing children previously served in remedial reading programs and believed to have reading difficulties

because of their socioeconomic status instead as having innate learning disabilities. In writing about the "prescient…observations" (p. 263) of McGill-Franzen, Allington (2002) offered additional incentives for the shift from viewing children as fixed instead of fixable. There were more federal dollars available for educating students with disabilities, and, at that time, the standardized test scores of children with disabilities were not included in the state's assessment of a school's ability to educate children. Classifying a child as disabled instead of disadvantaged meant more funding and less accountability for the student's progress.

The Increase of the LD Population and Dissatisfaction with the ID of LD.

And so the learning disabled category began to grow. From 1977 to 1994, as total school enrollment remained stable, the number of children identified as in need of special education services rose from 3.7 million to 5.3 million, and most of this increase involved the identification of students with the LD classification (Fuchs et al., 2001). In 2007, the National Association of School Psychologists quoted a 2006 U.S. Department of Education annual report to Congress stating that approximately 2.9 million children in the United States were receiving special education services with SLD as their primary disability category. That number represented approximately half of the entire population of students receiving special education services.

But as the number of children identified as learning disabled grew, so did discontent with the category, the definition, and assessment of LD. In the 1980s, a Regular Education Initiative (REI) led by Madeline Will began insisting that general education "take back" some of the special education students, and the learning disabled students were the group with the mildest perceived disability and therefore the obvious choice (Will, 1986). The suggestion that general education could and should meet the needs of these disabled students caused the LD construct to become even more questionable. States were determining eligibility differently, struggling

students were being labeled as LD without the required "severe discrepancy", and some believed LD was simply "an over-sophistication of the concept of low achievement" (Fuch et al., 2001, p. 5). Yesseldyke wrote in 1982 that "we think that LD can best be described as 'whatever society wants it to be, needs it to be, or will let it be' at any point in time" (Fuchs et al., 2001, p. 5).

In the 1990s, a group associated with the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD), and their leader at that time Reid Lyon, "became the most important voice expressing dissatisfaction with current LD definitions and encouraging fundamental changes in our thinking about LD" (Fuchs et al, 2001, p. 5). While the REI advocacy group had consisted mostly of special educators, the NICHD Group was comprised of mostly developmental, experimental, clinical, and neuropsychologists. The NICHD believed in the concept of LD but disagreed with the definitions and operationalizations (Fuchs et al., 2001). But while this group of developmental, experimental, clinical, and neuropsychologists argued against the discrepancy model of testing, school psychologists were and still are holding on for dear life. Offering the results of a survey of practicing school psychologists, Machek and Nelson (2007) reported that 61.9% of those surveyed supported the use of IQ-achievement discrepancy criterion for determining LD/RD (reading disability). Interestingly, over 75% of this same surveyed group supported using treatment validity/response to intervention (RtI) as a part of the RD determination as well.

And although professional groups disagree and struggle, the Federal Government continued to try to assist in rectifying the learning disabilities' issues. The USDE's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) hosted an LD Summit in 2001 (Bradley et al., 2007), at which researchers delivered nine commissioned papers considering LD identification issues. Another attempt was in the form of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special

Education final report, "A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families" (2002). A third activity was OSEP's creation of the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD) (Mellard et al., 2004).

During the data collection and writing of this research, the number of children in the United States identified as LD decreased from the previously shared number of 2.9 million in 2006 to 2.4 million in a more current report from 2010 (NCLD, 2013). Although this decrease cannot be precisely explained, a 2011 report from the National Center for Learning Disabilities offers the rise of early childhood educational opportunities, improvements in reading pedagogy, and Response-to-Intervention (RTI) as required by IDEA 2004 as possible reasons for the reduction (Cortiella, 2011).

Conclusion.

The tale of "The Emperor's New Clothes" (Andersen, 1837) may be applicable in an attempt to understand the general education teacher's understanding of a learning disability. With all of the controversy and lack of agreement concerning defining and identifying a learning disability, perhaps the regular classroom teacher, like the small child in the Hans Christian Andersen story, is the only one willing to admit her lack of ability in knowing a learning disability when she "sees it". And yet, the initial step in the referral process for LD has historically been taken by the general education teacher.

A general education teacher reading the information concerning LD gathered and offered in this section of my literature review would ultimately conclude that there is historically and currently little professional agreement concerning either the definition or the identification of a learning disability. She might realize the worth of crying out, "The Emperor has no clothes!" and perhaps begin to believe there has to be a better way to provide instructional guidance to all

struggling students. She may arguably be interested in a stronger path for identifying a student's needs and providing quality learning opportunities. She could conceivably be interested in the following orientation to Response to Intervention.

Review of the Response to Intervention Initiative

In comparison to her knowledge concerning learning disabilities, the general education teacher in today's classroom, because of perhaps a deficit in teacher preparation or a lack of ongoing professional development, may know little more about the concept of Response to Intervention. As the school system in which she teaches develops policy concerning the tiers of instruction, the monitoring of progress, and the appropriate responses to the student's response to instruction, a classroom teacher may, however, hopefully be able to follow the system's directives concerning RtI.

History of RtI.

RtI seems relatively new and "very hot" in current reading circles, but it is in fact not new because parts of what researchers and educators generally accept as the RtI process have been recognized for decades as ways to improve student achievement. In the early 70s, researchers at the Institute on Research in Learning Disabilities at the University of Minnesota were studying data-based progress monitoring. In that same decade and into the 80s, researchers conducted studies on curriculum-based measures (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). Budoff's research studied underachievement and RtI as a learning potential assessment model (Mellard et al., 2004). Deno introduced the problem-solving model for meeting students' needs in 1986, and then around 1990, RtI studies conducted by Doug and Lynn Fuchs began. Along with research came educational practice; the Heartland Area Education Agency in Iowa began using a problem-solving approach to determining eligibility in the late 80s, and the Minneapolis Public Schools

requested and were granted permission to use a problem-solving method to identify students with learning disabilities in the early 90s (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002).

Propelled into the mainstream by NCLB and IDEA 2004, Response to Intervention is now becoming a familiar phrase in many schools and school systems and is also the focus of a growing accumulation of educational research. An ERIC search of peer-reviewed journals for the term "Response to Intervention" limited to the years from 1980 and 1990 resulted in no articles found on the subject. The same search for the years 1990 to 2000 also offered no results. Searching the term "Response to Intervention" for the years 2000 through 2009, however, produced 76 results, including a *School Psychology Review* journal issue that was totally devoted to RtI. A final search for this paper of the term "Response to Intervention" that included peer-reviewed journal articles from 2009 to April of 2013 resulted in 352 results. Some question why we need a research base for RTI if the practices used in the process are already research-based. But, Hughes and Dexter (2008) write that even strategies that have proven successful when applied and researched individually need to be re-examined when used as part of a process or framework.

K-3 Research Concerning Instruction and Intervention in RtI.

Although RtI encompasses both special education and general education, the general education classroom teacher's main interest in RtI will be the effect on her classroom instruction and intervention and her ability to secure help for individual students who do not respond in a typical manner. Empirical research offers insight into both areas.

Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to qualify how much of which intervention at what developmental stage of a child's life will be most effective in supporting reading achievement. Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, and Boesche (2004) discussed Vaughn,

Linan-Thompson, and Hickman's (2003) research and that of an earlier effort by Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta (1998) in which first and second graders participated in three possible reading methods. This research showed that the type of instruction a child receives made a difference, and early instructional intervention was important to the success of the struggling student. Torgesen, et al. (2001) examined the effectiveness of two reading intervention programs used with learning disabled students, finding that intensity and explicitness were significant.

More research exists that can contribute to the teacher's knowledge concerning instruction and intervention with struggling students. Kim et al. (2006) reviewed computer-assisted practice to ascertain its effectiveness for students and manageability for both teachers and students. Researchers also studied the student's responsiveness to the extensiveness and intensity of the treatment sessions (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2009). Classroom teachers examining this research would find that more time each day provided for longer periods of time with smaller groups leads to most effective instruction and intervention.

RtI Instruction and Intervention Research for Grades 4 and Above.

Much of the research on RtI described the framework as supportive of teaching and learning to read in grades kindergarten through third (Mellard, 2004). Of interest to the general education teacher in fourth grade and up would be research that attempts to understand the needs of struggling adolescent readers; this research base is thin. Moat's (2004) early attempt to provide guidance concerning effective instruction for adolescent poor readers proved to be little more than a very positive review of the *Language!* ™ curriculum. This guidance must be situated in the fact that Moat's employer Sopris West sells *Language!* ™.

A more current empirical research study with applicability to adolescent struggling readers is that of the Vaughn et al. (2008) Tier I work involving professional development for content-area teachers. Their research addressed group size (n=5 or n=15) and compared the effects of standard protocol versus individualized interventions. As my research began, Vaughn et al. (2008) had released the details of the study concerning "the effectiveness of our instructional framework in a randomized controlled experiment" (p. 344) but had no results to publish.

Additional pertinent research involved a synthesis of the research on fluency interventions with struggling readers in grades 5-12 (Wexler, Vaughn, Edmonds, & Reutebuch, 2008). The authors believed they could derive instructional implications from their analysis and asserted that repeated reading improved reading rate but did not strengthen comprehension. The authors suggested that the pairing of a research-based comprehension strategy with the repeated reading intervention might fill the void. An additional finding demonstrated that repeated reading to improve fluency was not as effective as reading an equal amount of non-repetitive text for adolescents.

Research Concerning RtI as LD Referral.

In addition to research that addresses effective instruction and intervention implemented as part of the RtI model, researchers have also examined how the RtI framework affects the referral process. Haager, Klingner, and Vaughn (2007) described the three major initiatives that combined to present RtI as the alternative to IQ score-achievement discrepancy assessments. The work of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002), the Learning Disabilities Summit sponsored by the Office of Special Education (2002), and the National Research Council report on minority students in special education (2002) resulted in the IDEA of

2004 which supported RtI as an alternative for identifying students with learning disabilities. The reauthorization was the likely reason that most school systems are currently involved in the implementation of an RtI model.

Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman (2003) conducted a study in which researchers provided intervention to second graders for 10, 20 or 30 weeks, comparing student responses to intervention and pre-test scores in an attempt to predict which students would ultimately present as reading/learning disabled. Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant (2006) worked with first graders in an effort to determine the accuracy of predicting LD/RD. They reported that "RtI represents an attractive alternative to current IQ-discrepancy procedures for identifying children with RD" (p. 405).

As I completed the writing of this paper, I conducted a final search of the literature concerning RtI and classroom instruction. A data base search of the phrase "Response to Intervention" (in quotation marks) with "classroom instruction" and "elementary school" added as clarifiers and with "Peer Reviewed" and "Date Published 2010-2013" as limiters yielded nine results and revealed a massive empirical gap into which my research results might be situated. A search employing the same limiters with "policy implementation" in the initial search box and "Response to Intervention" and "elementary school classroom" as the clarifiers yielded no results, indicating not just a gap but a non-existent research base to which researchers and, perhaps more importantly, practitioners may refer when seeking a classroom-level view of the implementation of RtI as policy.

Conclusion.

As RtI becomes the obligatory method for LD identification in states like Tennessee, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and West Virginia, it is important that teachers

have an understanding of the research base supporting RtI for both early intervention and the identification of learning disabilities (IRIS Center Module RTI Overview, 2007). Freire (1970), Blumer (1969), Lipsky (1980), Mehan (1992), Hoy (2006), and Cuban (2013) would indubitably advise that the value of RtI in student learning would depend on the teacher's interpretation and implementation of the policy.

Review of Teachers' Response to Policy Change

The current education reform movement based in the NCLB Act of 2001 has as its focus the goal that all children will be successful in school by the year 2014 (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). In order to accomplish this goal, the educational community has made and continues to make policy changes concerning the standards movement, a movement based in assessment and accountability measures (Gonzalez, 2006). William A. Firestone, in a paper delivered at Rutgers University in October of 2001, stated that the standards movement should have the greatest influence on teachers because measuring what people do and evaluating the outcomes is a "classic way to control work" (Mintzberg, as cited by Firestone, 2001). Stecker et al. (2008) described the recent reforms in education as having "emphasized the importance of setting high standards for all learners and increasing the level of accountability expected of education professionals in meeting these high standards for student achievement" (p. 48). Slavin (2002) wrote that the movement for more answerability is really not new and has been the overriding policy concentration since the early 1980s. While Response to Intervention is not an actual standards-based reform effort, because the implementation is a part of the NCLB and IDEA requirements, it may feel very similar to those reform policies to the teacher in the classroom. In some school systems, the implementation of an RtI policy may be one of the more invasive reform efforts a teacher has encountered in her professional career.

In this age of accountability and policy change, researchers have conducted many studies on the changing role of the teacher to determine how the policy changes created by the accountability and mandates of the last two decades of reform have possibly affected the classroom teacher, her beliefs, her knowledge, and her practice. Although there was no published research as this study began specifically concerning the teacher's understanding of Response to Intervention as policy change, there is very current and valuable research concerning the teacher and policy change in general and particularly policy change in association with standards-based reform.

In the section that follows, I examined research that addresses the teacher and the changes she must make in order to provide best practice, research-based differentiated instruction, ongoing assessment of student progress, continuous changes in instruction based on data, and the overarching treatment integrity which is essential in the RtI process (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McNight, 2006). Although specific research concerning RtI and its components was sparse, examining the literature on teacher change in other policy reform situations informed this work.

Teacher's Response to Reform Concerning Instruction.

Research concerning the teacher's reaction to and implementation of reform that directly affects the daily instruction she provides in her classroom was available. In a four-year research project, Valli and Buese (2007) studied the ways in which teachers' roles changed after the implementation of NCLB, especially studying the consequences on teacher practice. Studying teachers' tasks, they used grounded theory supported by interviews, focus groups, and case studies of schools. Their research showed that teachers' work has "increased, intensified, and expanded in response to federal, state, and local policies aimed at raising student achievement"

(Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 519) . Nielsen, Barry, and Staab (2008) added to the findings of Valli & Buese (2007) by focusing on teachers' feelings of self-efficacy during a literacy reform initiative. Harmon, Gordanier, Henry & George (2007) examined the teacher and policy changes intended to strengthen classroom instruction in rural school districts in Missouri. According to this study, adopting standards-based curricula, providing long-term extensive professional development, and supporting teachers as they become accustomed to more frequent external evaluations were positive steps toward addressing challenges prevalent in rural district settings.

Additionally, Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, and Rosenthal (2002) surveyed teachers in Colorado to ask for their perceptions concerning high-stakes testing and standard-based reform. Eighty-nine percent of the participating teachers indicated that they had altered their instruction because of the emphasis on standards. In some instances, the alteration involved alignment while in others the revision was one of adding content to the curriculum previously taught.

Loeb, Knapp, and Elfers (2008) conducted research in Washington State, a state recognized as the "vanguard of the standards movement" (Hill & Lake, 2002, p. 199) because of its early 1990's state-reform initiative. In their research, teachers reported that they were more aware of student assessment, integrating it into their classroom practices and attempting to prepare students for assessments.

Teacher's Response to Reform Concerning Accountability.

Englert, Fries, Martin-Glenn, and Douglas (2007) wrote of their research involving a "series of empirical examinations of accountability" (p. 1). Comparing the beliefs of superintendents, principals, and teachers on the seven characteristics of effective educational accountability systems (p. 2), drawn from the work of Goodwin, Englert, and Cicchinelli (2003), the researchers found that the biggest difference among the three groups was in participants' use

of data. Teachers reported not using data to drive instruction as much as administrators and principals reported doing so. Although the beliefs of superintendents and principals concerning accountability were not of foremost interest in my research, an awareness of the beliefs of teachers as reported in this research was beneficial.

Teacher's Response to Reform Concerning Professionalism.

The teacher's concern for her status as a professional was identified as a theme in much of the research concerning policy change (Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Loeb, Knapp, Elfers, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). Finnigan and Gross (2007) studied the effects of accountability policies on teacher motivation. Through both qualitative (teacher interviews and focus groups) and quantitative (surveys) methods, the researchers reported that the teachers' morale decreases as outside goals are established but not met. Teachers also reported sanctions as having the least effect of the policies concerning accountability. In addition, promised outside support that did not occur had a negative effect.

In Taylor's (2007) survey of experienced teachers (minimum of 10 years) in the UK, he found that some teachers felt that reform efforts had caused their role to change from that of professional to technician. Although these teachers felt that losing autonomy meant losing discretion, there were also teachers in the same study that believed they could still be creative even within the confinement of systemic policy changes. Taylor's work examined the teacher in the context of Lipsky's theory of discretion. Valli and Buese (2007) also quoted their participants as reportedly feeling unsure of themselves as they respond to questions concerning their professionalism and decision-making capacities. Similarly, the research of Van Veen, Sleegers, & Van de Ven (2005) focused on a high school teacher's experiences involving his emotions and identity as external reforms affected his daily instructional and professional activities.

As I concluded the writing of this dissertation, I conducted a final search concerning the research on school policy as it affects teachers' classroom instruction. School policy continued to be a major topic in the existing research with more than 1,300 results if the words "school policy" alone were used as guidance for the search. Adding the same limiters and clarifiers as above yielded zero results. Since the conclusion of my research, Tennessee, the state in which my study was conducted, has implemented a required RtI policy that, effective July 1, 2014, will officially replace the discrepancy model for determining learning disabilities of students in Tennessee. I will discuss policy, especially as it concerns RtI in elementary classrooms in my implications.

Conclusion.

Cuban (2013), in his most recent work entitled *Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice: Change Without Reform in American Education*, proposes the idea of two kinds of changes that may be involved in policy: fundamental and incremental changes (p. 3) and uses the metaphor of a coral reef in discussing change versus reform. Cuban aligns with the work of Lipsky (1980) in the research-based belief that when the classroom door closes, the teacher decides how policy is or is not actualized. Having both a theoretical and research-based view of teachers and policy allowed me to understand "what was happening here" as my study unfolded.

Review of Ethnography as Literature and Methodology

As an additional step in my review of the literature and in preparation for conducting an ethnography, I did what many suggest: I read ethnographies, lingering over the rich descriptive accounts of many cultures. I began with one of the great ethnographies of Mead (1930), reading with fascination one of her "world-famous studies of adolescence and sex in a primitive society" (back cover) *Growing Up in New Guinea*. I read the work of Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000)

as they described the literacy experiences of women in El Salvador in their ethnography *Now We Read, We See, We Speak.* My "Ethnographies Read" include (but are not limited to): Erikson's (1976) *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*; *Street Corner Society* by Whyte (1943), a classic ethnography in the discipline of sociology; *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* by Ehrenreich (2001); *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* by Behar (1993); *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure* by Bosk (2003). I even read *Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture* by Emily Martin (2007), not necessarily a recommended reading during the dissertation process but certainly a great ethnography with a preface entitled "Ethnography Ways and Means" that proved valuable as the writer shared her own "break with reality" (Preface, Section 1, Paragraph 1) while writing her previous book.

In addition to the many ethnographies written to describe all aspects of culture in our society, the effective use of ethnography to study what happens in classrooms has deep roots. I read the work of Erickson and Wilson (1982) and found they provided detailed instructions for conducting ethnography in order to learn about new practices in classrooms. Mehan and colleagues (1986) began conducting their seminal school ethnography *Handicapping the Handicapped* about the special education referral process in 1975, just as Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). Florio and Walsh (1981) wrote of the role of the teacher as "native" in classroom ethnographies. Lareau shared a second edition of her own ethnography *Home Advantage* in 2000, observing in classrooms, interviewing parents and teachers, and writing of the differences in the school experience for working class and professional class children. Heath's prize-winning book *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* shared the details and knowledge

gained in her ethnography concerning the ways that three distinct groups of children acquired and used language (Heath, 1983).

Conceptual Framework

The research was proposed as a study in which I would attempt to provide insight into two teachers' understandings of LD and RtI and the effect those understandings might have on the classroom learning experiences of the students in those teachers' classrooms. My reading in preparation for the proposal and the research included the work of experts in the fields of LD identification, RtI, the effects of system policy implementation on teachers. I specifically was advised to include Hugh Mehan's *Handicapping the Handicapped* (1986) and Michael Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) in my reading.

The thinking put forward in those works rubbed against my desire for a teacher to blindly and obediently follow policy because policy was always the "right" thing, and, with only so many hours in the day, compliance saved valuable time and energy for being about the main role of educating children. In my former role as a school administrator, the helplessness of that position in middle management, of returning from the superintendent's meetings with principals to obligingly represent the decisions made from the top as right for all, inevitable to those that dared to challenge, had fit nicely into the Bible belt upbringing that shaped my thinking and the "team player" mentality I had developed over the years as an athlete and a coach.

Although these two books in particular challenged my being, I also read the philosophy of Freire, the thinking of Cuban, and ultimately moved forward to the orientation of symbolic interactionism. My initial thinking about symbolic interactionism was confined to the shortened version offered by Blumer in a 1969 work. According to Blumer: "1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) the meaning of such things

is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and, 3) the meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 6 -7).

In a Newton's law type way, my thinking about teachers and their work in the classroom was put in motion by those early readings. The motion felt very negative and very scary. I grabbed hold of what I hoped Blumer was saying as the force to stop that motion. Instead of aligning this theory with the writings of the others, I adapted Blumer's short version of symbolic interactionism into my comfort zone thinking that if I sold something well enough, I could establish the meaning and the buyer would do it. As the school consultant in the district prior to becoming the researcher in this work I had peddled LD and RtI in such a way that I felt certain I could predict the product I would see in these classrooms. I believed I had established for teachers the meaning of LD and RtI as determined for me by the influences in the state. I believed the students in these classrooms (the "things" the teachers would encounter) would obediently fall into above grade-level, at grade-level, and below grade-level groups, and the teachers would follow the policy, calling these students in groups and addressing their literacy needs.

I had ongoing experience in a different school system where this happened daily. I projected teacher compliance in that other school system's regimented and enforced RtI initiative onto my research concerning these two teachers in their school system. I had peddled the same wares; in fact, I had concocted the wares I was now soliciting in the regimented and enforced environment of that school system's RtI implementation. The formula for success there felt very appropriate to me. I believed it to be a "miracle tonic" that would cure all ailments.

When my projected outcomes did not appear in the two classrooms in this research, I began digging more deeply into the readings. As I read much more deeply, I found symbolic interactionism not to be the initial "pattern-making formula" I had interpreted from Blumer's shortened version (shortened only through my own desire for personal comfort) but instead to be the orientation from which I could most sensibly move in offering the findings of the data.

Reflexivity Statement

Being able to identify and begin to understand the experiences and theories that have guided my educational practices allows me to present them collectively as a reflexivity statement, a stance formed through the experiences of my life that gave structure to my work as an educational researcher. I reflect concerning four stages of my life: child/student, mother/teacher, administrator, and service provider/student/researcher.

As a child and student, I formed the initial piece of my theoretical framework with guidance from my parents and teachers. Raised and educated in a behaviorist environment, I was a pleaser, a good girl, a child who listened a great deal and spoke most often when given permission. I was taught to be concerned with and respond to outside controls. My inner being was not to guide my thoughts, my actions, or my desires. The daughter of a minister, I felt my life was under constant scrutiny from my parents, God, and, most importantly, the members of my father's congregation. Even though I no longer agree that learning and behaviors should be guided in this way, the intensity of that upbringing continues to influence my life and work. While neither a totally good nor totally bad thing, it is a theoretical lens of which I must constantly be aware as a researcher.

I began both roles of mother and teacher as a behaviorist. It was really all I knew. Right out of college and immediately into a high school classroom, I was only three years older than a

few of the seniors I taught. The authority that I believed at that time came from being the holder of the knowledge was a very important part of my classroom management. I needed to be the one thinking; I needed to be the one saying what knowledge was correct and what was not. I did not even consider the inner minds of my students. They provided the container, and I poured in the knowledge.

Somehow, that style of learning did not continue to feel right, especially when I began wanting students in my English classes to read and respond to great literature. I found that I really did not want them to try to match my thoughts. I wanted them to read, understand, and enjoy through their own ideas. As I taught the basics of the Spanish language to students, I wanted them not just to memorize vocabulary and verb conjugations as I had done in so many foreign language classrooms, but to think for themselves, to attempt to use the language in original situations, to apply the knowledge we learned in the classroom to their own use of the Spanish language. The behaviorist theory in which I had been educated did not align with my feelings about true teaching. I discovered a constructivist within.

As a graduate student in supervision and administration, I chose to research the use of portfolios as an assessment tool; I framed my research in an attempt to help administrators understand authentic assessment and how it differed from traditional assessment practices. At the time, I was teaching in a high school where the principal felt that the best teachers were those with the most grades in the grade book at the end of each six weeks. The quantity, not the quality, of the assessment mattered. Always the good girl, I continued to provide the appropriate amount of grades in the grade book even as I began the process of using the authentic portfolio assessment process in my classroom.

I know now that I was a social constructivist in the final years of my classroom teaching career. Difficult in a school where students spend most of their days in classrooms where they are taught to listen, write this down, do these questions, answer true/false and multiple choice questions, it was not impossible. And it is truly the way that students learn best. When students sometimes tell me that I was the best teacher they ever had, that makes me proud but sad. My classroom should have been the norm, not the exception. And the compliment I prefer is that my class was the best class that they ever took, that they learned more in my class than any other. That is really the compliment, focusing on the classroom climate and the learning, not on the teacher.

One contradiction that has always existed in my theoretical framework and may remain today is that in spite of feeling that students should be in control of their learning and should be allowed to make choices and connections on their own, I have always felt that the responsibility for the good and bad things that happened in my classroom was mine. I controlled the learning in some ways whether I wanted to or not. It may have been because the students I taught were so conditioned to that environment, or it may have been the behaviorist's theory under which I developed, but I did always feel that I should be the one working hardest, I should be the one providing the opportunities, and my knowledge and effort would ultimately provide or not provide the students with the educational opportunities which they deserved. And I still believe that today.

My parenting skills and my teaching skills developed almost simultaneously since I became a parent not long after becoming a teacher. As a mom, I parented at first as I was parented. I was the holder of the knowledge, I knew what was best, and I would provide that guidance for my children as they grew. As my children matured, however, I began to see them as

real people with minds of their own and choices they needed to make. When I became the single parent of a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old, I found that minimizing the behaviorist theory and assuming the pluralist theoretical stance served us best in many situations. In life, there is more than one kind of ultimate reality that has to be examined and possibly accepted in many situations that a family faces. I found myself teaching and modeling for my own two children that there is not always a right or wrong answer. There are sometimes many answers.

Parenting and teaching are very similar. I found many times throughout the years that I guided my classroom management and instruction by the inner question of how I would want my two children to be treated and taught in a situation. There is some learning that must just be transferred from the knowledge holder to the unknowledgeable, things like what purpose prepositions serve and the present tense third person singular form of the Spanish verb that means "to go." Those are the times in my career when briefly influencing the learner strictly from without seemed appropriate. There are so many, many other times, however, when the child as learner needs to construct her own meaning, needs to learn from her own schema, needs to fail and try again. Those are the times when social constructivism serves the learning environment best.

As a principal, my behaviorist influence and beliefs served me best in day-to-day activities. I was seen as the "enforcer of the rules." My role as leader unfortunately dealt mostly with helping the learner adapt, maybe even conform, to the classroom and school environment. In a large school setting as accountability began to loom on the horizon, it seemed most productive for the instruction to center around given and absolute knowledge. When children coming from first grade, for example, are regrouped for the second grade experience, to achieve the greatest progress, it was thought to be most productive to align the curriculum so that all

students “learned” the same curriculum. The problem I faced at times in administration was that in my own classroom, I had begun letting go of the control and structure of this kind of curriculum alignment. I had begun to let students (true, they were older students) make choices and question what was valuable learning. I had progressed to a type of instruction and curriculum that was not present in most classrooms in the building in which I was principal. It became necessary to set aside my personal theory of teaching and learning to lead the school in the way deemed necessary by the central office administration.

In addition, my theoretical belief that the teacher is primarily responsible for the success of the classroom learning sometimes did not serve me well in my role as administrator. My theoretical stance stressed and pressured most of my teachers beyond their own desires and perhaps abilities. I now realize that the conflict that I many times experienced within myself was a theoretical conflict more than anything else.

As a service provider, student, and researcher at the point in my life where this research was conducted, I was a pragmatist in most all that I did; if it was not practical, I did not usually see a reason for doing it. Not a risk taker, I was always planning and deciding long before the end what the end should be. But, my pragmatism also allowed me to see more than my own theoretical belief and to examine and allow for options and processes that might not be my own but were best in a given situation. The grant work at times seemed risky for me because I had had to just get into schools and classrooms and do whatever worked at that time, not always knowing if my efforts were aligned with the logic model of the grant because the logic model of the grant was in transition. My pragmatic theoretical stance supported my feelings that as long as teachers were learning more effective practices, the end result will be successful for the literacy efforts in their schools.

As I worked in schools, many of which were being threatened in a very behavioral framework, I worked to help teachers believe that effective teaching is possible in these situations. Punishment for poor performance was ironic in struggling schools, especially since the punishment at times resulted in a loss of services and support that were so desperately needed. As I asked teachers to be innovative and differentiate the learning experience for students, it was sometimes difficult to achieve in schools and large school systems where behaviorism prevailed.

As an educational researcher, I supported my efforts with this framework. I surrounded what I did with these past experiences and theoretical stances that had developed and were identified as part of who I was as an educator. At an NRC meeting, as I listened to Dr. P. David Pearson present his current thoughts in a session entitled, "Historical Analysis of the Impact of Educational Research on Policy and Practice: Reading as an Illustrative Case," he spoke of the importance of taking stock of the psychological processes, learning, teaching, professional development, and context theories which we use in educational research. I close by identifying my theoretical stances in the following way: I believe myself to be a constructivist in my psychological theoretical stance. In the learning theory section of my theoretical framework, I believe I most agree with the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). I believe for many people learning is a social process, not a process that occurs in isolation in the learner's head. Concerning my teaching theory, I believe that I most closely align with Bruner's Constructivist Theory. When I present professional development, I am a cognitivist, but I also believe that the reinforcement theory and the humanistic theory should be included as part of the follow-up process for the ongoing professional development that is provided. My contextual theory is that of a modernist.

The awareness of my own theoretical framework allowed me to begin these research efforts with a structure that guided but did not confine. Aware of my strong behaviorist background, I worked to ascertain that I did not allow it to negatively affect the research or research environment. My theoretical knowledge also helped to explain contradictions that arose in the research; if a teacher is a behaviorist but is attempting to implement a technique that is best situated in social constructivism, I will be able to investigate the research with an awareness of that theoretical contradiction and its effects on the data. I approached my initial research with apprehension but confidence, confidence that came from having a knowledge and understanding of my personal theoretical framework.

Theoretical Perspectives

Mehan's (1992) analysis concerning how schools constitute students (classifying them as "struggling," "successful," etc.) provided guidance in my study. As I watched the teachers in this research make decisions that shaped classroom culture and impacted the educational path of each child, I borrowed from Mehan's work and thinking as I constructed theory to support my own research. Mehan contended that the decisions about students along with other "institutional practices" that may at times include psychological assessments are "constitutive" (p. 11). All of the decisions made about a student then "constituted" the student and determined the educational opportunities to which he had access (Mehan, 1992).

At times I relied on the informed thinking of Lipsky (1980) recognizing that in addition to considering the teachers' role as a part of the institution and the influence that role has on her decision-making and culture, it was also important to view the teacher as a "street-level bureaucrat" (Lipsky, 1980, p. xi). Lipsky's work within the same citation argued "the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with

uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out" (p. xii). With school and district policy concerning RtI "written" in one way, the teachers' implementation and interpretation of that policy at the classroom level became something very different as this study evolved.

An additional and important theory that was also applicable as a lens to viewing the classroom teacher's instruction in the RtI framework was the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism proposed in the work of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Thomas (1931) and further explained by Blumer in the three premises concerning symbolic interactionism he proposed in 1969. According to Blumer,

> "1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and, 3) the meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters."(p. 6 -7)

These premises constituted a part of the theoretical framework within which I examined the teacher's understanding of RtI and how the teacher's understanding influences the student's experience.

George Mead is considered "the chief architect of symbolic interactionism" (Manis & Meltzer, 1967, p. xiii), his foundational thinking grounded in the works of John Dewey and Charles Horton Cooley. Blumer, a student and interpreter of Mead's work, is credited with coining the term "symbolic interactionism"(Lewis, 1976). Symbolic interactionism is recognized as both a methodology and a theoretical framework (Cockerham, 2003). Manis and Melzer (1978) refer to it as an orientation. The central idea of symbolic interactionism is that "human

beings do not typically respond directly to stimuli but assign meaning to the stimuli and act on the basis of those meanings" (Manis & Meltzer, 1967, p. 6). Although no doubt unheard of by most of the general population as a theory, symbolic interactionism was described by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) as situated in how people gather and create the complicated set of symbols they use to give meaning to the world. Symbolic interactionism is one of the ways society functions, a lens through which people see and function in their world.

Mead added another layer to the lens by including in his approach to symbolic interactionism the broader idea that truly understanding human behavior "requires a study of the actors' covert behavior", calling for a *verstehende* investigation. *Verstehende*, phonetic spelling fɛɐ̯ˈʃteːəənt as offered at the Forvo website (2013) where one can also hear the word pronounced by a German male, is defined by Turner (2006) as a careful construction of the participants' "meanings and values in social interaction; it requires value clarification and description" (p. 145).

Mead's addition of the idea of the *verstehende* investigation powerfully aligned with my questions. To hope to gain insight into my two teachers' understandings of LD and RtI by observing in the instructional setting, it was necessary to understand what the two concepts meant to them, what value they placed on those two concepts and the instruction and student learning involved in them. In the final interviews, I asked the teachers the three questions; I recorded their answers and \listened to them again and again. The answers are self-reported and yet also concrete. In the classroom observation field notes, however, my task as the researcher was to conduct a *verstehende* investigation through the teachers' observable and unobservable activity. Their actions, both overt and covert, would possibly speak louder than their words, according to Mead (1930).

In the preface of their edited book on symbolic interactionism, Manis and Meltzer (1978) offered these seven propositions, recognizing that some symbolic interactionists would not believe the list to be complete and others would not agree with the including of all points:

1. Distinctively human behavior and interaction are carried on through the medium of symbols and their meanings;

2. The individual becomes humanized through interaction with other persons;

3. Human society is most usefully conceived as consisting of people in interaction;

4. Human beings are active in shaping their own behavior;

5. Consciousness, or thinking, involves interaction with oneself;

6. Human beings construct their behavior in the course of its execution;

7. An understanding of human conduct requires study of the actors' covert behavior (pp. 6-8).

Symbolic Interactionism as Organizing Framework

As my study progressed, I revisited the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and broadened its place in the study to that of organizing framework. In doing so, I aligned my thinking with that of Mead, believing that there was as much to learn from the unseen as there was from the seen. Extending symbolic interactionism to an organizing framework allowed for more direction and led to discovery that provided optimal insight into the research questions. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of symbolic interactionism as the organizing framework for the study.

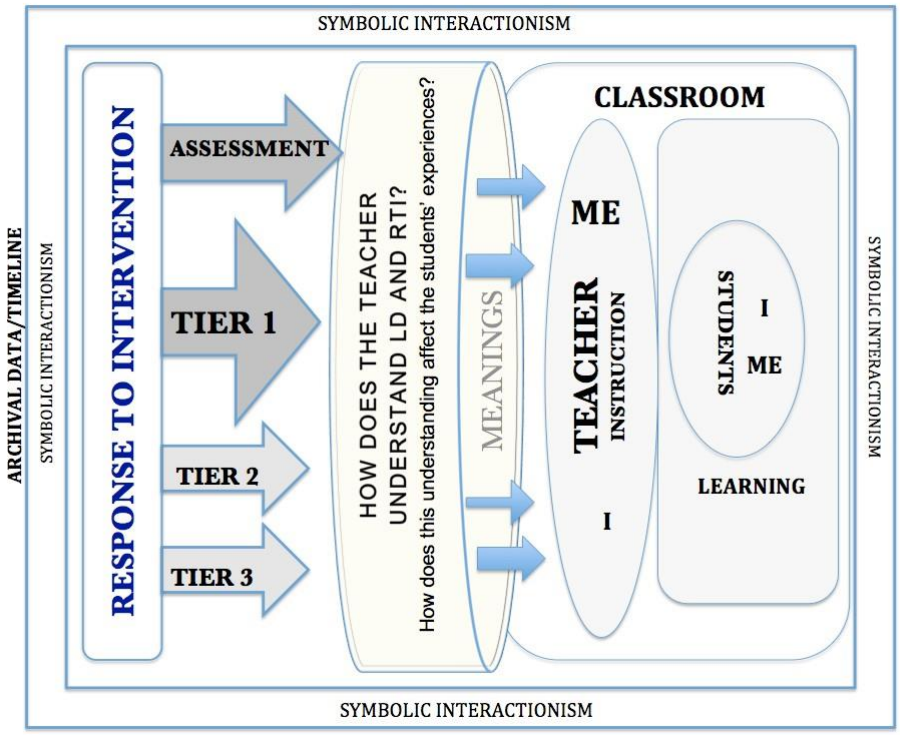

Figure 1. Symbolic Interactionism as Organizing Framework

A close look at Figure 1 reminds the reader that the archival data are provided in the study as support for how the construct of RtI and the four concepts, Assessment, Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 that are a part of the RtI framework came to be included as a part of the instruction and learning in the two teachers' classrooms. I was neither a researcher nor observer in the situations in which many of the timeline events represented by the archival data occurred and therefore will provide only moderate interpretation of those data.

Assessment and tiered instruction are a part of the definition of RtI that was provided in Chapter 1 in the initial introduction of the framework. Doug Fuchs' definition includes the idea that all students are assessed, generally effective instruction is provided (Tier 1), and students are again assessed. Those students who, according to the data, appear to need additional instruction receive it (Tier 2) and are assessed again. If additional support is deemed necessary for adequate

progress, the student may then be referred for services that might include special education (Tier 3) (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

In Chapter 3, I will integrate the observational and interview data for each teacher as a separate case study, using symbolic interactionism as the organizing framework and the two main instructional components of RtI, assessment and instruction, as themes. As a part of the symbolic interaction orientation, I will attempt to provide data that will give insight into the teacher as "me" and "I" and the students as "me" and "I" when possible. Chapter 5 may prove to be a better setting for in-depth discussion of the internal conversations that my data imply may have taken place in these classroom participants.

RtI was actively used in instructional decisions at the K-2 feeder school for Eastwood Elementary School (pseudonym for the school in which this research was conducted) before I was asked to become involved in the district's RtI plans. During his doctoral work, the principal of that K-2 school had become aware of RtI and led in the implementation in his building. The district then decided (See Appendix, June, 2008) that Eastwood Elementary School and all other schools in the district would also implement RtI with the intent of eventually replacing discrepancy model, a policy was imposed upon Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels without their input or consent.

However, the policy implementation of RtI was relatively non-invasive on a daily basis in the classrooms. The four basic components of RtI represented by arrows moving them into the classrooms of the teachers can ultimately be classified as instruction or assessment and were obviously familiar practices to the teachers. Mrs. Samuels and Mrs. Shelley had both been teaching school for several years. During the course of the year in which I observed, the teachers only referred to Tiers 2 and 3 in passing while I was present and both of those tiers took place

outside of the general education classrooms, so in actuality, only two of the RtI components, Tier 1 and Assessment, were observable as "stimuli" (Manis & Meltzer, 1978, p. 7) and assigned meaning by the teachers.

The word "stimuli" is defined in the online *New Oxford American Dictionary* as "a thing that rouses activity or energy in someone or something; a spur or incentive." In focus group research in which I was involved prior to this research, one of the areas of concern going into each session was that the focus group leaders stimulate the conversations without providing specific stimuli that might project the leaders' viewpoints or research interests onto the discussion participants and taint the qualitative data. The term "stimuli" used in situating symbolic interactionism as the organizing framework of this research is possibly the most appropriate term for thinking about how assessment and instruction are seen as either purposeful or inadvertent stimuli in the RtI process. The decision concerns whether we are implementing RtI as the future identification process of LD or as a very present instructional improvement process that results in greater learning opportunities for students.

As I mentioned previously, both the general education supervisor and the special education supervisor were present at the initial meeting and in most other activities in which RtI was the focus. It was unusual in my work to be at the virtual and/or physical table with this collaboration. I believe district personnel in this school system saw RtI as holding the potential to positively affect both contexts. I know that I presented the RtI framework as both a special education identification process and a general education edification process. I could not know as I observed in the two classrooms exactly how the two teachers understood RtI, and I did not ask directly during the yearlong observation period.

Continuing to move from left to right across Figure 1 and returning to the central idea of symbolic interactionism, the questions in this research involved understanding the meanings that human beings (in this case, teachers) assigned to influences that became a part of their environments. The teachers' actions as they interpreted and reacted to those incoming policy conditions, those "stimuli" if the contextualized term is now at least mildly palatable to the qualitative tongue, were what were observable in the classroom. Functional psychologists, those purporting an "intellectual antecedent" (Manis & Meltzer, 1978, p. 1) to symbolic interactionism, would assert that there was already activity present within the teachers, so the teachers were not moved to action by the components of RtI but instead used RtI to move their own activity along.

Lipsky (1980) and Mehan (1986) agree with the idea that the components of an outside force or policy move through personal filters before they become action that affects real people in the real world. Lipsky called the interpretation that comes out of the "meanings filter" of people like paramedics, social workers, and teachers "street-level bureaucracy" and attributed it to the fact that no policy can ever guide through every moment of the requirements of some work in our society. There will always be times when the "street-level" worker has to act in solo. When those times come, Lipsky contended that the "street-level bureaucrat" had no choice but to act according to his interpretation of the policy under which he served.

Mehan (1986) believed that the meaning school personnel gave to a policy such as the identification of a learning disability was filtered through personal understanding and that filtering allowed for the "handicapping of the handicapped." General education teachers with little or no training in the classification of LD initiate the process and, in the discrepancy model process, could almost move said process along single-handedly. Considering the bias and

inadequacy of the discrepancy model testing discussed earlier in this paper, one can understand how the fate of many students was sealed well ahead of the actual testing process.

Cuban (2009) described teachers as "hugging the middle" in situations where their own beliefs were allowed to filter a policy, calling what was produced when "teachers' pedagogical pragmatism" (p. 52) occurred "instructional hybrids anchored in practical decision making" (p. 53). Cuban added that what needed to be examined after the policy filtered through the teacher's understanding was whether the filtered resulting practice was "good teaching" or "successful teaching." Cuban qualified good teaching as meaning the content was presented well through best practice instruction. Successful teaching, on the other hand, led to student ownership.

There was a day in the fall of 2010 when I sat in my car in the parking lot of Eastwood Elementary School after conducting classroom observations and believed my dissertation research was at a standstill came back to my mind as I revisited the theory of symbolic interactionism and was encouraged by my dissertation chair to consider employing it as an organizing framework. I concur with Mead (1934) that there was as much to learn from the unseen data as there was from the seen.

A final theory, academic optimism, as proposed by Hoy and colleagues (2006), helped me situate my thinking concerning the teachers and classroom interactions in this study. The teacher's past experiences with struggling readers, whether classified as low achieving or learning disabled, may directly affect her understanding of RtI. Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1983) wrote that the general education teacher's decision to refer is the action that most affects a child's receiving an LD label. In some cases, the referral is because the teacher believes she is unable to teach the child in the regular education classroom. In contrast, when a teacher feels that

she can meet the educational needs of each of the children in her classroom, she is usually not likely to refer a student for an LD assessment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the research concerning the definition of learning disability, the RtI initiative, the teacher's response to policy change, and ethnography as literature and methodology. My intent with this review of the literature was to provide an historical basis for the research and also establish my growing knowledge of the areas of interest so that I was then able to situate my own research in the field.

The understanding of a learning disability has yet to be unanimously established. Although I was not conducting my research in an attempt to provide another formal definition to the field, my study was conducted in an effort to provide information concerning two general education teachers' understandings of LD as they interacted with struggling readers in their classrooms. And by revealing these interactions, my research intended to offer a classroom-level view of the effectiveness of RtI as an additional part of the intervention and possible identification process of LD.

This study was then intended to add to the limited research base for RtI by contributing the teacher's perspective of the process as it becomes a part of the structure of her classroom. Because the general education classroom teacher assumes the role of first responder in the implementation of RtI, her perspective concerning the process and its value toward student learning is important.

Although examining the teacher's understanding of learning disability and RtI and how that understanding affects the educational experience of the student in her classroom, I was also studying the teacher's response to policy change. I was interested in the teacher's beliefs about

her own expertise and the effectiveness of the RtI framework in her classroom as she supports her struggling readers. I observed and interviewed the teachers to try and better understand policy change at the classroom level, when and if it moves for the teacher from an outside force to an inward belief, and how that affects the learning experience of the struggling reader.

Reading ethnography was not only interesting but also helped to prepare me for the intricate work ahead. While I did not believe that I was preparing to enter a foreign land and immerse myself in a culture with which I was not familiar, during my research I was able at times to think of the writings of the ethnographers mentioned previously and draw from their experiences.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Chapter Introduction

By proposing a study wherein I investigated street-level bureaucrats, that is, teachers' (Lipsky, 1980) understandings of both a construct (Learning Disability) and the framework (RtI) within which the construct is embedded, I resolutely situated myself as a qualitative researcher. I only needed to determine the specific type of qualitative research methodology as I began to design this study. Choosing the most appropriate methodology then involved examining empirical studies with similar characteristics to my proposed study and charting methodologies, results, and other details presented in the published accounts. That reflective process led to my selecting ethnographic methods as most appropriate. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) wrote that "ethnography emphasizes discovery… (it) does not assume answers" (p. 33). Because I was positioning myself to assume no answers but instead to study the classrooms in which these constructs were created and that effect on student learning, ethnography seemed the most complementary and promising methodology.

Case studies fit well within the framework of ethnographic methods. Both ethnographic methods and case study designs offered the guidance and support that I believed my research would require. As my study progressed I battled schedules (my own and the teachers' and school's) in attempting to be present in the research setting. In addition, the two teachers' implementation of RtI became more individualistic. These events prompted me to rethink my initial proposal to simply conduct an ethnography of RtI implementation. Presenting my findings as case studies based on ethnographic methods began to seem to be the most appropriate way of sharing both the individual and collective findings. Although ethnography and case study are

more alike than different (Willis, 2007), I identified and incorporated specific case study design into my methodology. I include case study as well as ethnography reporting techniques in this paper. The validity, reliability, and objectivity associated with a case study (White, Drew & Hay, 2008) proved reassuring to me as a post positivist researcher wandering in an ethnographic field.

At the point in this research where "what was happening" caused me to shift from believing myself to be conducting an ethnography to the belief that I also needed to include case study techniques, I encountered an interesting paper shared by researchers attempting to position themselves and their research in much the same way (White, Drew, & Hay, 2008). In the most helpful section of the paper for me, the researchers directed the reader to Guba and Lincoln's (2011) work on paradigm positions. Seeing ethnography and case study not as two distinct qualitative research techniques but instead, as Guba and Lincoln describe them, situated on a continuum of qualitative research was insightful as I struggled with the means of effectively conducting and sharing this research study.

The purpose of this study was to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18): the "contemporary phenomenon" was Response to Intervention and its "real-life context" was the literacy instruction experienced by students in two elementary teachers' classrooms. In the course of this investigative study, I collected multiple sources of evidence in the form of archival, observational, and interview data. I conducted analyses of these data, initially using a priori frameworks informed by the extant literature and archival documents on RtI, and in a later phase, by using inductive procedures to develop my understandings of how teachers were interpreting and enacting RtI. Through successive analyses I identified first a timeline of relevant external policy events on RtI; next, I identified and charted telling (i.e., relevant to teachers' understandings) instructional events, instructional language, and

student responses from my classroom observations, and finally, I identified language signifying teachers' beliefs and intentions, perhaps even identities, in my interviews. I organized these observation and interview notes into categories, and ultimately, into themes to address my research questions.

Methodological Approach

The purpose of this research study was to examine how the teacher's understanding of learning disability and RtI affected the student's experience in literacy instruction delivered within the RtI framework. The research questions addressed in this study were:

- How do teachers understand and define disability?
- How do teachers understand and implement RtI?
- How do teachers' understandings influence children's experiences with RtI?

Qualitative research was appropriate for these types of questions and, in particular, ethnography initially presented as the most effective methodology for this study with case study then being included as a complementary and necessary part of this investigation and the presentation of my findings. I discuss each methodology (ethnography and case study) separately and then discuss the ethnographic case study.

Situated as an Ethnography.

As defined by Lecompte and Schensul (1999), an ethnography promised to appropriately aid in the discovery of insight into the questions of interest. They wrote:

> Ethnography is an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings that is scientific, is investigative, uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection, uses rigorous research methods and data collection techniques to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data, emphasizes and builds on the

> perspectives of the people in the research setting, and is inductive, building theories for testing and adapting them for use both locally and elsewhere. (p. 1)

While conducting this research, I continuously addressed the questions of interest involving teachers, their understandings of disability and RtI, and their influence on their students' experiences with RtI, positioning myself to engage in the research techniques as described within an ethnographic paradigm. It was my intent to gain insight into the social and cultural life of the classroom, use rigor in my observations, and attempt to frame the perspectives of the people in the research through sustained interaction. I developed explanatory theories that proved to be very informative and pertinent as the study progressed. Most importantly, because an ethnography is focused on the experiences and perspectives of the people involved, in this case the teachers and students in the classroom teaching and learning within the RtI framework, the experiences of those involved were captured as best they could be, helping to possibly shed light on the questions of interest.

Ethnographic research was appropriate for the questions of interest because I entered the research setting with the intention of investigating the attributes of a specific social phenomenon (Flick, 2006). In this research, the specific social phenomenon involved the interactions of the teacher and struggling student in an elementary school classroom with literacy instruction provided within the Response to Intervention framework. A main reason for employing ethnographic methodologies was that one ethnographic feature is an "analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most" (Flick, 2006, p. 228).

Wolcott's (in Zou & Trueba, 2002) list of critical attributes that apply to ethnography included that ethnographies are "holistic, comparative, based on first-hand experience, basically descriptive, are specific or particular to the group studied, flexible and adaptive, idiosyncratic and individualistic, and corroborative" (p. 33). Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) added that the data created from codified ethnographic research methods are well-grounded and authentic because of the rigor applied to the methodology. Along with the rigor, ethnography is also a forgiving methodology. Even in a researcher's first attempt at ethnographic research, there is value in the mistakes that she might make (Heider, 1988, p. 74).

The data collection in ethnography is extensive. Although the main data gathering is accomplished through participant observation, interviews are also an important part of the research, with the opportunities for interviews many times occurring as a natural event, not having to be scheduled (Flick, 2006). Spradley (1979) described ethnographic interviews as "friendly conversation into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (p. 166). Introducing new ideas into the conversation too quickly will make interviews become like a formal interrogation, with the possibility that the informal tone will evaporate and research participants may stop participating in such a beneficial manner (Spradley, 1979). For the questions of interest, adding interviews and informal conversations to the observations conducted by me aided in the creation of a more complete response in attempting to discover teacher understandings and the teacher's influence on the students' RtI experience.

Goetz & LeCompte (1984) and Spradley & McCurdy (1972) defined the goal of an ethnography as describing the culture in which the research takes place. However, ethnographers represent their own cultures and have to realize that they access the culture of the research setting

through their own cultural beliefs and attitudes (Heider, 1988). In the reporting of an ethnography, the researcher must include in the writing a detailed description of herself that includes her value systems, biases, personal attributes (Heider, 1988), and details "particularly in regards to areas that would affect their theoretical lens, their motivations, their collection of data, and their interpretations" (Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000, p. xii).

Captured and Bounded as Case Study.

As the second semester of observing commenced with the two teachers that had graciously allowed me into their classrooms, their approaches to RtI began to change. As the change become apparent to me, it still felt right to continue to watch and record as best as I could "what was happening here", but it also made sense to me to look at the two teachers as individual case studies. I depended more than ever on my established theoretical framework to guide my data collection and analysis as I adjusted to this change. Yin (2009) quotes Sutton and Staw (1995) as having called theory, "a hypothetical story about why acts, events, structures, and thoughts occur (p. 378)." With Lareau's (2000) appendix as my lifeline, my established theory served as an anchor through the high winds that seemed to be blowing the proposed research off course.

A second reason that case study methodology became of much interest to me was that, in this shift, I felt that my role as the researcher also had to change. Even though the emic perspective and the ethnographer's role I had established with these teachers would most likely have allowed me to casually wrestle the study back onto "the course", as I began to note the changes in the teachers' approaches to RtI, I took a metaphorical step back and resolutely refused to interfere in what I was seeing. My relationship with the two teachers remained intact and as comfortable as ever as I interpreted the data that I was collecting, but I had to redesign my

thinking about my role in the study in some ways. Yin (2009) described this newly-added "difficult methodology" with an "absence of routine procedures" (p. 66) as case study. Although some wrote that case study research involved "putting yourself in the environment that is being studied" (Willis, 2007, p. 241), Yin wrote that case study researcher "has little control over events" (p. 2). As I watched this second semester unfold, it was important to exclude myself as the voice of authority consulting with this school system concerning RtI.

In some ways this work was a single case study; the real life context of the study was in the same school, the teachers were responding or not responding to the same directive, and both teachers veered off of the RtI path that I had prepared myself to study. In other ways, this was a multiple-case study as the two teachers took two paths on the same initiative in two separate classrooms, contexts that became more distinct as the study continued.

Yin (2009) stated that the case study researcher must "feel comfortable in addressing procedural uncertainties, have the ability to ask good questions, listen, be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied and know how to avoid bias" (p. 66). He added "only a more experienced investigator will be able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities rather than being trapped by them" (p. 68). I include these thoughts here and will elaborate on them in Chapter 4.

Rescued and Released as Ethnographic Case Study.

Case study is different from and yet so similar to ethnography that some researchers use the two terms interchangeably. I read *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* by Whyte (1943) to better understand conducting an ethnography and found many that classified the work as an ethnography, including the publisher the University of Chicago Press. Yin (2009), however, highly regarded by many as a leading voice in case study theory and

research, described *Street Corner Society* as "a classic example of a descriptive case study" (p. 7). Having two very knowledgeable entities describe the same work as both ethnography and case study illustrated the point that the methodologies were very similar. Settling on presenting this research as case studies with ethnographic methods was not a difficult decision.

Ethnographic case study, then, involved all of the investigative procedures mentioned in this chapter thus far. For a distinctive definition of ethnographic case, I depended on this one from Willis (2007) quoting Merriam (1988): "This type of case study emphasizes socio-cultural issues. 'Concern with the cultural context is what sets this type of study apart from other qualitative research" (p. 23). The context in which the two teachers taught and their students learned was ultimately my focus. I proceeded to gather data to submit as this doctoral research with context as the focus and ethnographic case study as the method for collecting and interpreting the findings.

Research Setting

Prior to the beginning of data collection, I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the Office of Research at the University of Tennessee. As promised in the IRB, I have given and will continue to give the schools, teachers, and students pseudonyms in all presentations of the research study to ensure confidentiality. I conducted this ethnography in two classrooms, one third grade, one fourth grade, in a rural school setting in a school system in a Southeastern state. I provide the school profile of Eastwood Elementary School where I conducted the fieldwork in Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Characteristics of Eastwood Elementary School

Information	Classroom C
Grades in school	2-5
Number of students in school	531
Percent Minority	11%
Economically Disadvantaged	64%
Years of RtI implementation (2009)	1st year

Narrative of the Timeline

As I described in introductory remarks in Chapter1 and in my review of the literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Response to Intervention was not a new concept in education when I proposed this research. The ESEA legislation of the 1960s established compensatory education as a way to offset the debilitating effects of poverty on children's learning and introduced the idea (and the institution) of specially trained teachers to offer remedial instruction to struggling readers. During Jack Pikulski's tenure as IRA president in 1997-98, he introduced the concept and name, Response to Intervention, in a white paper to the Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities. An initial RtI framework that would replace the discrepancy formula for LD identification had been a part of discussions in the educational communities in several states, beginning as early as 1999 in Connecticut (Lohman, 2007) and including Iowa by 2003 (RtI Network, 2012), Pennsylvania by 2005 (Kovalseki, 2012), and Colorado by 2006 (RtI Network, 2012). The language of the 2004 IDEA reauthorization as discussed earlier in this paper is the

reason many believe the popularity of the RtI framework grew, appealing to those looking for an alternative assessment of a learning disability while also beckoning others to see RtI as a valuable approach to education for all, not only those students that struggle.

Some also began envisioning the supportive infrastructure of RtI as a viable avenue to more positive student behaviors. A 2006 newsletter from the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools that encouraged "new directions for student support" (p. 2) began with the adage, "No more prizes for predicting rain; awards will be given only for building arks" (p. 1), a richly metaphoric description of valiantly dislodging LD identification from the tried and not-so-true discrepancy model to the perhaps more difficult and yet more redemptive possibilities offered both academically and behaviorally in RtI.

Other Areas Garner Attention in Tennessee.

In 2004, as IDEA included language that moved the identification of LD in a more preventative direction and the knowledge and implementation of the RtI framework was increasing in several states, Tennessee was one of only two states in the nation to receive an "F" for "Truth in Advertising About Student Proficiency" in a United States Chamber of Commerce report (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2007). The grade, based on the huge discrepancies between Tennessee's standardized testing results and results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) taken by a representative sampling of Tennessee fourth and eighth graders, netted the attention of many influential people, Senator Bill Frist perhaps as much as any other. Senator Frist left his post in Washington D.C. in 2006 after serving two terms, and, believing in the direct correlation of health and educational outcomes, he returned to his home state of Tennessee and organized the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) in 2009.

Before the organization of SCORE, Senator Frist was a state leader in the American Diploma Project, an initiative that resulted in the adoption of more rigorous state standards in Tennessee and other states. Begun in 2006, the activity of this project concluded in 2009, resulting not only in more rigorous state standards but also in more rigorous state assessments that would both evaluate student learning of those standards and also establish higher benchmarks for being considered proficient in the learning of those standards. In August and September of 2010, then Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen and Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) officials "toured the state…to get the word out (to parents) on expected dismal test results from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)" (Benton, 2010, p. 1).

RtI Task Force Formed in Tennessee.

In what eventually proved to be an almost parallel universe from that in which the Tennessee Diploma Project and the SCORE group's activities were generated, special education directors in school systems across Tennessee received a memo in September of 2006 announcing the formation of a task force to develop RtI guidelines and recommendations for districts (See Appendix, September, 2006). A little more than a year later, the TDOE released a working draft of the "Template for RtI Guidelines" for Tennessee (See Appendix, November, 2007). In mid-December of the same year, Joe Fisher, Assistant Commissioner, Tennessee Division of Special Education, issued a memo informing special education directors and assessment specialists in districts across the state that they were charged from that day forward with including the RtI framework as a part of the LD identification process (See Appendix, December, 2007).

In May of 2008, TN school districts with a state-approved RtI plan (developing and submitting an RtI plan remained optional) received permission to identify LD solely through the student data outcomes of their RtI process. By December of 2010, 21 of the 136 school districts in Tennessee had submitted and received approval of their RtI plans. Twelve additional systems had submitted plans and were awaiting state department approval. With 33 of 136 districts (24%) at least initially involved in the implementation of the RtI framework, the State Department of Special Education, in partnership with the Tennessee SPDG, was making slow but steady progress toward a paradigm shift in the identification of learning disabilities.

The Two Paths Intersect.

As represented by the divided but parallel universes described in an earlier section (See Appendix), the SIG/SPDG project and a very small segment of the State Department of Education made steady progress toward the state-wide implementation and, yet, did so while remaining almost unnoticed by other reformers from 2005 until basically the summer of 2010. At that time, school systems began to have to cancel services with the SPDG in order to meet all of the required meetings and trainings from First to the Top. Without an RtI consultant and with much pressure for achieving those items required by FttT, some school systems, especially those in early implementation stages (two years or less) lost their focus.

State Culture of RtI.

In the state of Tennessee, as documented in the timeline of events (See Appendix), I was an integral part of the only state-department-approved group spreading the research and practice of RtI throughout the state. In my SIG role, I reviewed and unofficially approved the RtI plans as systems submitted them and consulted directly in districts. The most common way in which I consulted with schools involved sitting down with a small group and referencing the

state's 7-page RtI template to discuss what they were currently doing. In some cases, they were still using the discrepancy model to identify LD and were looking for initial professional development and support in their decision-making concerning classroom instruction (Tier I) interventions (Tiers 2 and beyond), scheduling, personnel, timelines, data and data team meetings. For the systems that began early in the process to ask for SPDG support, my consulting services were as frequent and on-site as they desired.

In addition to providing RtI professional development to every possible group of stakeholders in the system, a very effective SPDG practice was sharing the information (with permission) of initial and ongoing implementation from a school system that was, for example, half a year into the process with a system that was just beginning, sharing the experiences of a third grade teacher (again, with her permission) in a system in full-implementation with a third grade teacher that was only beginning to create centers and provide small group literacy instruction based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

At state conferences, I was recognized as one of the most informative and practical voices concerning RtI, presenting in usually very well attended sessions most every year at most every conference. When the state's RtI^2 plan was released at the 2013 State Special Education Conference, I was immediately sought out at the conference by multiple school system representatives that wanted me to give them my professional opinion of the state-created and soon to be legally required document and plan. In spite of the fact that the SPDG with its long history of RtI support across the state had not been consulted about the new TDOE RtI document and was relegated to second-team, sideline status, I was able to offer truthful positive comments and assure the systems that the framework we had designed together and what they were doing was, in fact, "what really mattered in RtI" and would be sustainable and effective under these

new guidelines. As the above description of my immersion in the state RtI culture makes clear, it was difficult for me to set aside my own beliefs in order to understand those of my participant teachers as I went into the research.

Local Culture of RtI.

In the local system in which my research was conducted, I began working as a SPDG consultant in 2007, working almost exclusively initially with the high school's freshman academy faculty (the school was on the High Priority list and had restructured to create the freshman academy). A faculty member in the academy recognized reading as an integral part of the success of students and invited SPDG consultation. In June of 2008, I received an email from the Special Education Director, inquiring about the possibility of SPDG services to assist in RtI implementation in the system. I responded with an offer to consult and sent the RtI template that would help the district organize its thinking about RtI.

As the system worked on completing that template, I was asked, prior to a scheduled planning meeting with central office staff, to present the opening day professional development session in late July to all teachers in the school system, introducing RtI and the system's tentative but purposeful future intentions to implement the framework. An August meeting in the district involved representatives from both the special education department and the general education department of this school system. This was the first time in my SPDG work that both "sides" were at the table for an initial meeting; it gave me much hope for the district's RtI implementation. We discussed the template and the school district began scheduling times for me to be available to be in the system's schools.

As the SPDG consultant and lead advisor concerning RtI for the school system, I was in the school (referred to in this paper as Eastwood Elementary School) in which my study

participants taught on numerous occasions: in formal professional development sessions where I presented research-based information concerning RtI, faculty meetings for short informal question and answer sessions, short informal classroom observations after which I provided the teachers (volunteers for observations only) with a written statement detailing the positive ways in which they were moving toward the RtI framework in their classrooms, and small group meetings that allowed teachers to ask additional questions and express concerns (See Appendix, July, 2008). As I began my research in January of 2010, the consultation I was providing to the school system lessened, but there was no direct causality between the two. In fact, the cause of the loss of system focus on RtI was instead directly related to the First to the Top initiative that will be explained later in this chapter.

Research Participants.

The two teachers in this research were chosen for several reasons. As I mentioned previously, I had been in this school system as a consultant many times. In some of those visits, I was at this school. One visit in particular, the Supervisor of Instruction, Supervisor of Special Education, and I met with teachers in small groups as they had planning time scheduled. I met these two teachers then and perceived them even in those short small group meetings as appearing to be thoughtful and caring teachers. As I began planning my research, the two teachers in this research came to my mind even though I didn't really even know their names. I described them to the supervisor and she immediately knew which teachers I was describing and identified them as excellent teachers.

The two teachers had similarities and differences. Figure 2 serves as a visual to provide information about the two teachers. The teachers' individual characteristics will be described in the separate sections about each of them that follow this section; information concerning Mrs.

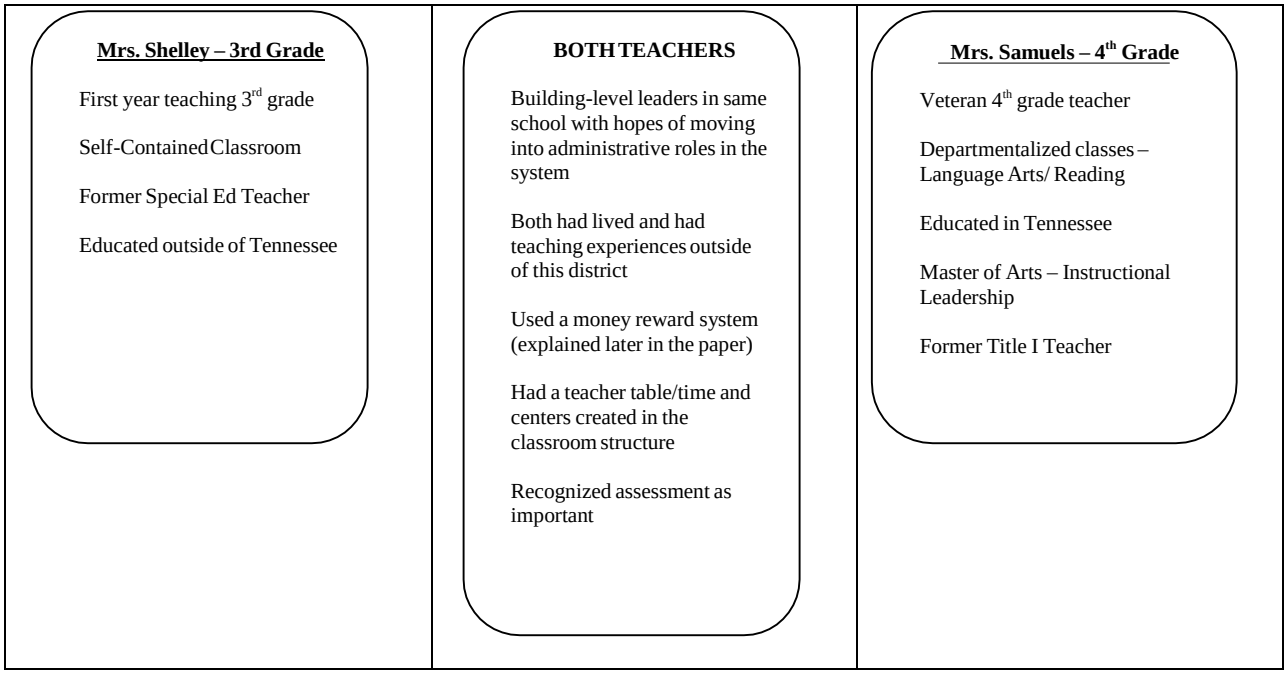

Figure 2. Two Teachers. Compared and Contrasted

Samuels' spring semester compared to her fall semester will be provided. To briefly highlight a couple of important similarities between Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels, both teachers had aspirations of soon becoming administrators in the school system. I will discuss later in the paper how I believe this mindset affected their classroom instruction. Both teachers had lived and taught in other school systems. They were "from there" in so far as they lived in the community in which the school was located at the time of this research, but they were not "from there" in the sense that, unlike many of the school's and district's faculty members, they had not 1.) Gone to school in the school system in which they were teaching, 2.) Graduated from the local high school and left home briefly or sometimes commuted to one of the two local universities with teacher education programs, and then upon graduating from college 3.) Returned there to teach in the same school system. The two teachers were friends with similar

teaching styles and professional interests, and yet they were also individuals with different personal and professional interests.

Mrs. Shelley Described.

Mrs. Shelley was the less "from there" of the two teachers in this research, having been raised and educated and even having taught in states different from the one in which this study was conducted. Her husband was in a profession that positioned their family's life very differently from most of the locals. A successful professional musician, he traveled and worked in places and circles of which many of the local people could not even conceive. I write here again with knowledge both as the researcher and as a member of a similar community and culture. Mrs. Shelley had photos around her classroom that indicated that she was a part of her husband's professional life. Her worldview was more extensive and panoramic than that of a "home-grown" citizen in the community. Although I did not know this about Mrs. Shelley when I initially asked her to participate in this study, I believe and will attempt to share later in this writing that Mrs. Shelley's ability to know herself as a teacher and person with a more varied past and present positively affected her classroom instruction, her students' learning experiences, and this research.

Mrs. Shelley had been teaching school for 19 years, 11 of which were in the special education classroom, seven as a fourth-grade general education teacher and, at the time she allowed me into her classroom to observe, she was in her second semester as a first-year third-grade teacher. Mrs. Shelley received her undergraduate degree in Vermont and had taught in Maine and Missouri before teaching in Tennessee. In addition to her undergraduate degree in both elementary and special education, Mrs. Shelley had a masters in Early Childhood special education and her Educational Specialist (Ed.S) degree in administration and supervision. The

third-grade classroom in which she was teaching during this research was self-contained. Her fourth-grade classrooms were self-contained as well, although she had experienced some brief trials of switching students and departmentalization in those fourth grade instructional years.

When I asked Mrs. Shelley why she became a teacher, she said it was what she always wanted to do. She said when she was very young, the teachers at her school would give her the tiny pieces of chalk that they were no longer going to use in the classroom. There was a blackboard in the horses' barn on her family's farm. She would use that chalk and chalkboard to play school whenever she could, adding that she probably had the "smartest horse in the state of Maine" because he would stick his head over the stall and listen as she "taught." Mrs. Shelley specifically recalled her kindergarten teacher Mrs. Brooks, saying that she was very much influenced by her. During high school, Mrs. Shelley went back to Mrs. Brooks' classroom (now teaching second grade) and did what would be considered a practicum although it was unofficial.

I asked Mrs. Shelley why she had moved from special education to general education seven years ago. She replied, "I love teaching special education, but it got to the point where I was ready for a change, to do something different, and I wanted to make that change before I got to the point where I just absolutely would refuse to go back into that (Special Education). But I love my years of teaching special education…I just was ready for a change." I will communicate more concerning Mrs. Shelley's personality and characteristics as a teacher in the discussion of the data.

Over the yearlong research period that began in January 2010 and officially concluded in January of 2011, I obviously observed two different groups of students in Mrs. Shelley's classroom. She had her assigned students for the 2009-2010 school year when my research began. I was allowed to observe those students in their spring semester of third grade. Mrs.

Shelley then had a different group of students that I observed in the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. Both groups were observed during literacy instruction in what some consider an optimal learning time of 7:45 to 9:30.

It was exciting to initially observe second-semester third graders (almost fourth graders as Mrs. Shelley many times reminded them) and then to observe third graders that were in truth no more than second graders being allowed to sit and swing their feet in third grade desks for those first weeks of school. Although not a direct focus of my research, I was fascinated to look on as the behavior management system Mrs. Shelley had solidified in her 2009-2010 students by January when I came to observe failed her from time to time in the 2010-2011 group under her care. Mrs. Shelley's system seemed unvarying from spring to fall, and, although she was very patient, she did not appear to always share my fascination with the group's deviation from her norm. I will later discuss how her perceived inability to get the second group's behavior under control may have affected her willingness to call a small group for "Teacher Time" (Mrs. Shelley's term for it) while sending the other students into centers where self-directed learning and self-control were valued and necessary.

Mrs. Samuels Described.

Mrs. Samuels was the fourth grade teacher that graciously participated in this research in spite of a serious family health issue that caused her to ask me to excuse her from the research a few weeks before I was scheduled to begin observing. Fortunately, later, actually days before I was to begin the classroom observations, I received an email from Mrs. Samuels telling me that circumstances were better and she would like to participate if I still wanted her. I certainly did.

More a native of the county in which the school was located than Mrs. Shelley, Mrs. Samuels was probably more comfortably situated as a member of the community but had also

experienced some outside-of-this-system professional opportunities that provided a lens giving her more than the single-culture view shared by many of her colleagues in the school. Again, as a person who once taught at a mid-sized high school where I was one of only two teachers that were not alumni of that school, I felt that I understood what "fresh blood" brings to a small rural school and its students. I will discuss this later in subsequent sections.

Mrs. Samuels was educated in the district in which she was teaching. She received her B.A. from one of the local universities mentioned previously. She then attended the other local university for her masters of arts and her Ed.S. Mrs. Samuels' father was a superintendent of schools. Additionally, Mrs. Samuels' grandmother and great-grandmother were educators. She had, however, ventured out of this town and school system and had taught for three years in an adjoining system and one year in one of the largest school systems in the state. The remainder of her teaching experience was in the present system.

As I was inquiring into the willingness of these two teachers to participate in my research and we were approaching an agreement concerning their involvement in my proposed work, Mrs. Shelley sent me an email asking questions for the both of them. They wanted to know how many visits I might make, when the interviews would be, and when we would be beginning. A last question was, "Why us?" One of them wrote, "I know I'm not setting the world on fire with my teaching methods. I work really hard and I love it, but I know that there are other great teachers out there. Perhaps I am really bad?? I'm not really sure. Is it the demographics of our school?" I responded in an email to the both of them that they were chosen because I remembered them as positive outliers in the small group discussions and, having briefly visited in their classrooms (at their requests the previous school year), I felt that watching their instruction and the students' responses to their instruction would be both interesting and

informative for my research interests. My answers were evidently sufficient and amenable to the two teachers, and we moved forward to engage in the research.

In this paper, the majority of what I share from Mrs. Samuels' classroom observations is from her second period class in the spring semester and her third period class in the fall semester. The class grouping I observed in Mrs. Samuels' fourth grade in the spring was purposefully heterogeneous while the class grouping in the fall was originally described to me as a "medium-low group created through goal-directed ability grouping" by the school's administrator.

Data Collection Methods

Reading accounts of the research of ethnographers such as Annette Lareau, Hugh Mehan, and Victoria Purcell-Gates assisted me in designing the data collection procedures for this research. In these ethnographies and in the instructional texts concerning ethnographies written by anthropologists and educational researchers such as LeCompte and Schensul (1999), observation, interview, and content analysis of documents related to the setting were the three main data collection methods in conducting an ethnography.

In my research, classroom observations supported my inquiry in seeking to gain insight into the teachers' understandings of disability. Those same classroom observations allowed me to learn something about how the teachers understood and implemented the Response to Intervention instructional framework. Follow-up interviews supported these classroom observations. Classroom observations were necessary for me to collect information concerning how the teachers' understandings of disability and RtI influence the classroom experiences of the struggling readers involved in the research. Eisenhart (2001) wrote that "Standard ethnographic methods include participant observation, face-to-face interviewing, researcher reflection/journaling, and analysis of archival records" (p. 18).

I conducted observations and took field notes in the two classrooms during the spring semester of the 2009-2010 school year and then in the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. I observed the reading block as frequently as possible during this time. I conducted follow-up interviews as needed after each observation. In addition to the classroom observations and interviews, I had hoped to have the documentation of fidelity checks from other observers as a part of my research. Those fidelity checks did not occur. With a lack of documents contributing to the process itself, I cycled back to the documentation and events that occurred at the national, state, and district level, created a timeline, and studied that timeline as a means of situating the district's understanding of RtI that led to the creation of the local policy and the teachers' understandings of the policy as it was required in their classrooms.

One of the main criteria concerning ethnography is the length of the stay in the field. In most situations, the research is conducted for no less than a full calendar year. In this research, I began the work in January of 2010 and completed the data collection early in the spring semester of 2011. And in my study, I felt like I was living in an RtI community at all times. In my role as a school consultant for a federal grant, I was traveling from county to county in the state, supporting school systems wherever they were in the RtI implementation process. When I wasn't in my research setting, I was mentally and even sometimes literally processing every day's activities in other locations within the two research classrooms: Did it look like that in Mrs. Shelley's room? Was Mrs. Samuels doing that? Each time that I was in a classroom other than the classrooms of these two teachers, I was comparing my observations. Even though my IRB and focus was on these two classrooms, I was immersed in Response to Intervention settings throughout the duration of this study.

Classroom Observations.

I followed the prescribed IRB protocol as the entry process that resulted in my being allowed to observe in these two teachers' classrooms at this elementary school. There were challenges, the biggest of which was the scheduling, but there were also moments of great, great excitement for me as the researcher as I observed instruction and learning over the course of a calendar year.

Scheduling Difficulties.

As I began making appointments with Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels, it was quickly obvious to all of us that scheduling the observations was going to be difficult. During that first semester (January through May of 2010), I was unable to be in the classrooms and observe instruction and learning on a regular schedule because of my own professional obligations, snow, family and personal sickness for the two teachers, death, spring flooding that resulted in school's being dismissed for a week, school-related holidays like Spring Break, TCAP prep and testing, ThinkLink testing, and other school-related events like field trips and assemblies.

Barriers aside, I did manage to observe in both classrooms and strove to capture to the best of my ability the instruction and learning that was happening during each visit. I found that my training for conducting teacher observations for evaluations as an administrator in a K-6 school proved very helpful. That training was for learning how to "script" during observations. In the follow-up meeting with the teacher when I was a principal, she and I would both have a copy of her "script" as recorded by me. This gave us what was considered to be "objective" data for our discussion and future growth plan. The teacher's words were the focus. I attempted in my observations to capture and record as much verbatim teacher and student interaction as possible.

Additionally, as a SIG/SPDG consultant, I had continued to use this observational technique in the hundreds of classrooms in which I observed, usually providing a written copy of my notes to the teacher and/or administrator afterward. Many teachers told me that seeing their own words in those notes was powerful and also motivating for them. In the early days of RtI in one system in particular, most of the teachers requested my presence in their classrooms and seemed eager to receive copies of the observational notes. The observations for my research in these two classrooms were similar to earlier observations I had conducted with the "What's happening here?" question prefacing the visit. A novice researcher, I nonetheless entered to collect data with much experience for the task of observing in a classroom; I had never, however, had so much riding on those observer notes.

I formally observed in Mrs. Shelley's classroom for more than 900 minutes (about 15.5 hours) and in Mrs. Samuels' classroom for around 1,860 minutes (31 hours). In Mrs. Samuels' classroom, I observed in a mutually selected class period (of around one hour) and routinely stayed and observed that same lesson plan with the next group that came in, not taking formal notes but occasionally adding a clarifying detail I missed in the first observed session.

I usually entered the classroom with little or no interruption. I found a space to situate myself and tried to blend in with what was happening. At times, I stepped from observer to participant observer. Most of the time, however, I watched and listened quietly and took my fieldwork notes.

I took notes in a variety of ways. I created a note page with columns for the time, what I saw and heard, and my immediate or later thinking concerning that information. I sometimes used my computer as I took notes; most of the time I wrote my notes by hand while in the classrooms. I videotaped twice in each classroom. I audiotaped on two occasions in Mrs.

Shelley's classroom and on three occasions in Mrs. Samuels' classroom. As I began to write the final draft of this paper, I eventually classified my notations concerning the classroom observation data into a chart for each teacher containing column headings that included my three areas of focus: 1.) How the teacher understood learning disability 2.) How the teacher understood Response to Intervention and 3.) How the teacher's understanding of RtI affected the students' experiences in literacy instruction.

After each observation, I did as I was taught to do: I took time to reflect concerning the observation while the time and activities were still in my mind. Sometimes I went to a local fast food place. Sometimes I sat in the school parking lot. If time was limited, I used an audio recorder and recorded my thoughts as I drove home. Most of the time, I spent more time with my notes that same evening, usually retyping the notes into a format and putting them in a notebook that I originally organized by months of the year.

I did at times talk briefly with the teachers if they initiated the conversation. Mrs. Shelley's students left the room at the end of her block to go to a specialty area (physical education, music, etc.), and so we sometimes took time to talk. Mrs. Samuels also at times, while students were working individually, for example, came over to where I was in the room for quick conversations. We usually talked about family or weather or local affairs. We did not usually discuss my notes or what I was thinking about their classrooms.

I took some kind of treat in to the teachers almost every time I went. I knew their drink preferences and went by the local fast food place many days to bring a fresh drink in as I came. I brought stickers and papers for a sticker story center. I brought gift cards from a retail store that was located in their small town. I purchased videos for the teachers to use as rewards in their

classroom management system. I tried in some way to express my appreciation as often as possible for the teachers' allowing me to conduct my research in their classrooms.

Interview Data

I conducted two formal interviews with each teacher during this research, one at the beginning of the first semester and one several months after I concluded my observations. In the first interview with each teacher, I asked her about her educational experiences that prepared her to teach and also about her teaching experiences. I asked her when she decided she wanted to teach school. I also gave her the opportunity to tell me anything else she wanted me to know as I observed in her classroom. In addition to these two formal interviews that I audiotaped, I also wrote brief and informal interview-type information in my classroom observation notes at times, but I purposefully stayed away from questions that would lead the teacher to believe that I was questioning something because I disapproved or did not understand the teacher's thinking behind an instructional decision.

Although an ethnographic interview allows for conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, an initial reading of the transcripts of the two final interviews in this research suggests that I as the researcher not only participated in the conversation but also led the participants to answers, especially their answers concerning RtI procedures in their classrooms. I had been extremely cautious in maintaining my status as "outsider" during the classroom observations, and I certainly did not enter these interviews intending to be the "insider," the "scholar" as Cuban (2009, p. 3) described it.

I understood that my interview data was to be a vital part of the triangulation of my research. With concern at the time of the interviews in the research value of my classroom observation notes, I believed I had much riding on these interviews. I prepared carefully and did

have notes. I also had print copies of my three research questions and the five-step RtI procedure/cycle that Doug Fuchs and others (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003) proposed as the basic framework for reference by the teacher and me.

I had earlier research experience in preparing for and conducting focus group discussions and was well aware of the danger of leading participants in oral responses. I had no intentions of leading the teachers in this process. In fact, because of my concerns at the time of the interviews that the framework for RtI had been almost non-existent in the classrooms when I observed there, I took the text in to remind the teachers of the initial definition of RtI that I had presented to the district years prior in that initial professional development with the entire school system and in site-based professional development and meetings after that but prior to my research. I also knew that both teachers were now in new and demanding administrative positions, I was interviewing them in their offices during a school day, and much time had passed since I had observed in their classrooms. They had been away from RtI and the classrooms we were discussing for quite sometime; I took the text in only as a conversation starter, neither as a nose ring nor a script.

Ironically, I believed as I started prompting with the RtI framework presented on the printed guide I provided for each teacher and myself, the teachers would not agree that what I was describing was what happened. I was surprised in the first interview when Mrs. Shelley agreed. I was surprised again later that same day when Mrs. Samuels agreed, perhaps more so because of her fall-semester change to the Daily Five framework. I fully expected both teachers to tell me that the process we were reading together from our text was not what happened and to then tell me in their own words what did happen.

I regretfully acknowledge that just as each teacher seemed to have identified as "Teacher: Holder of the Knowledge" in her classroom, I present in vital sections of both interviews as deeming myself to be "Researcher: Holder of the Knowledge," or, worse yet in a research study, "Researcher: Creator of the Knowledge." As I situate the teachers' interview responses in the observation data and in additional knowledge that I gained as the researcher in the field, I believe it will become obvious that the teachers' responses to my interview questions and statements were, in fact, not as contrived as they appear to be in the transcripts. We were using the same labels to describe very different concepts.

Data Analysis Procedures.

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) wrote that "what is exciting about ethnographic data analysis is that the process is recursive or iterative; that is, interpretation begins with the first steps into the field…it continues until a fully developed and well-supported interpretation emerges, ready to be communicated to others" (p. 147). In this research, as field notes and video-taped classroom observations were gathered, I analyzed, transcribed, organized, and coded the data, keeping the research questions as the guide to my research at all times. As the analysis progressed, I was attempting to locate and present in a case study format the data that would help to conceptualize the effect of the teacher's understanding concerning learning disability and Response to Intervention on a child's experiences in the literacy learning.

I followed the three-stage "process of cultural theory building" (p. 150) described by LeCompte and Schensul (1999) which includes analyzing the data to identify particular items, then looking for patterns in those items, and finally determining the relationships in those patterns. Themes were developed through both an inductive approach and an a priori approach (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In Chapter 5, I will discuss how the external influence portrayed by the

timeline, the classroom observation and interview data viewed through the lens of symbolic interactionism, and the resulting themes from my analyses complement and contradict each other even as they provide insight into the questions of interest for this research.

Methods for Validation.

I conducted this research while guided by the strategies described by Creswell and Miller (2000) and frequently employed by qualitative researchers. I stayed in these two classrooms for a prolonged period of time, taking careful field notes and discussing with the teachers their interpretation of what I observed. As mentioned in the data collection procedures section, this research includes multiple sources of data. As I observed, I created hypotheses and then reworked those hypotheses until the collected data made sense. At the same time I identified data that did not make sense and attempted to explain the lack of fit with the codes I chose. In the introduction of the written ethnographic account, I have fully disclosed my biases as the researcher.

After I attempted to identify particular items concerning classroom instruction, then categories of those instructional incidents, and then patterns and themes across those categories, I then took a section of the initial rough draft of my work to the teachers involved in this research and asked them to member check my findings. My descriptions of the settings and participants are "thick" (Creswell, 2007) to allow the readers of the research to transfer the findings for their own use as appropriate. The committee overseeing this dissertation research functioned as the external auditor, serving "to examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209).

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. Inevitably, not everything in the research setting, a constantly "moving target", was captured. As Walcott (2002) wrote about the process of classroom observations and other qualitative methods of data collecting, "I must attend to something, I can't describe everything," but "wherever I turn my attention, everything else is unattended" (p. 36). And as Lareau (2000) wrote, using qualitative research methods means that the researcher must learn "to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and confusion, sometimes for weeks at a time" (p. 198). The methodology itself created limitations.

Additional limitations involved the amount of time that I was able to participate in the research setting. When attempting, to focus on "the identification of regular patterns of action and talk that characterize a group of people" (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 18), time limitations for data collection affected data analysis. Although I attempted to be in the two classrooms that were the settings for this research weekly, sometimes more than one day per week, I agree with Wolcott (1987) that "twelve months in a setting as complex as a contemporary school, even if one's focus is narrowed to a single student, teacher, or administrator, might still result in what has become known appropriately in educational research as "Blitzkrieg ethnography" (Rist, 1980). Although I believe the research I conducted to be very revealing, there just was not enough time. Add to that the thinking that "teaching is like dry ice evaporating at room temperature" (Cuban, 2013, p. 11) and it becomes obvious that time was perhaps not my friend in doing this research.

Delimitations

I had to limit the participating teachers in this research to those whose characteristics matched my study (teachers in a school system implementing RtI) and who were willing to participate. I limited the student interactions that are discussed in the findings to those students

whose parents consented for them to participate. I chose the school district because of the working relationship I had with supervisors in and the director of the system. School principals also act as gatekeepers for the teachers in their buildings, and so I had to work in a school in which the principal agreed to have me observe. I also chose to limit the teachers and classrooms I observed to two so that I was able to observe in those classrooms and talk with those participants as frequently as possible over the course of the school year.

Summary of Chapter

I evolved into the selection of ethnographic case studies as a way to examine the teacher's definition and understanding of a learning disability and her definition and understanding of RtI. I believed this research design was a way to examine how the teacher's understandings of the disability construct within an RtI approach affected the student's classroom experience and learning. Data sources included a timeline of the national, state and local activity referenced archived documents that initiated the policy that the teachers were asked to implement (Appendix), a chart of classroom observations and field notes with guiding explanations concerning the teachers and their classrooms including diagrams of the classroom arrangements and interview transcripts. These data sources are referenced in Chapter 4 as I share the findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

I observed in the classrooms and interviewed the two teachers with these questions guiding my research:

- How do teachers understand and define disability?
- How do teachers understand and implement RtI?
- How do teachers' understandings influence children's experience with RtI?

Transition into the Findings

Assessment and instruction are major parts of RtI, both as conceptualized in policy and as interpreted by the teachers. I reference both assessment and instruction as components in the schematic of symbolic interactionism and as themes in the teachers' understandings of RtI. Although both teachers enacted assessments and instruction differently from the policy intentions of "building arks" by supporting struggling children with targeted instruction derived from formative assessment, they did take up the parallel goal (perhaps conflicting goal) of using assessment to document low-achievement as a way to identify LD. However, both teachers expressed understandings of LD that were more nuanced than that of RtI, that is, simply low-achievement on standardized measures over time, and, to a greater extent than RtI, identified themselves as responsible for teaching all students and enacted instruction that was consistent with that belief. The teachers' instruction looked somewhat different from each other as well, depending on the structure and composition of their classes, but they expressed similar understandings of RtI and LD in their interviews.

At the beginning of the spring semester of the 2009-2010 school year as I entered the two classrooms at Eastwood Elementary School to observe, the premier of the new and much more rigorous state test that aligned to "new curriculum standards…more reflective of national and international student performance in the 21st Century" (TDOE website) was weeks away. While I took notes with a vested interest in capturing classroom instruction that revealed the teacher's understanding of RtI and LD, Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels taught with a vested interest in providing standards-based classroom instruction that supported student learning soon to be represented by ThinkLink, TCAP, and school and system report cards that publicly shared academic and achievement scores.

The two initiatives, more rigorous standards assessed by more rigorous testing and RtI, that Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels were being asked to implement could have been complementary for student learning, but the data indicate the initiatives were seen instead as contradictory or at least unrelated. Cuban (2013) wrote that "accountability and testing have fortified, not altered, teacher-centered instruction" (p. 149). The teachers at Eastwood Elementary School had both more rigorous standards for which to be accountable and more rigorous testing to examine resulting student learning. RtI is about less teacher-centered instruction and more student-directed instruction that results in differentiation. Although Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels, teacher leaders and hopeful administrators in their district, both initially altered their teacher-centered instruction to implement the RtI policy, Cuban (2013) described what the case studies will present as having possibly occurred as teachers designing "hybrids of old and new practices" (p. 159).

Unless otherwise noted, the direct quotations from the two teachers throughout the two case studies are from the transcripts of the two interviews. Other direct quotes are taken from

personal communication (email and written) or from the researcher's classroom observation field notes. Direct quotations taken from field notes were either transcribed from audio or video recordings or were captured and scripted by the researcher in the field notes during the observation. Explanatory citations will be provided where the narrative does not make the context of the quote from the teacher clear.

Case study: Mrs. Shelley: Third grade.

With much explanation already provided concerning the use of symbolic interactionism as the organizing framework for this research, I present Figure 3, analogous to Figure 1 but altered to now attempt a representation of Mrs. Shelley's classroom exclusively. Meant in no way as negative, only explanatory, Figure 3 visually represents much of what was observed and documented in Mrs. Shelley's classroom as explained through the symbolic interaction organizing structure. Moving from left to right in the visual, the data show that RtI was minimized to the point of almost elimination (especially in the fall semester of the research study) while formal, standards-based assessment and standards-based grade-level Tier I instruction consumed almost all of the classroom minutes in which I observed. Mrs. Shelley's understandings of LD and RtI were not readily apparent to me as an observer in her classroom, possibly obscured by more prominent "Me" traits involving assessment and instruction. The manifestations of those understandings of assessment and instruction are represented on the right-hand side of the "meanings" filter, and I will now discuss the two separately, examining them more thoroughly here and eventually situating them in the context of Mead's beliefs as expressed in "The Fusion of the 'I' and the 'Me' in Social Activities" (Morris, 1934) in Chapter 5.

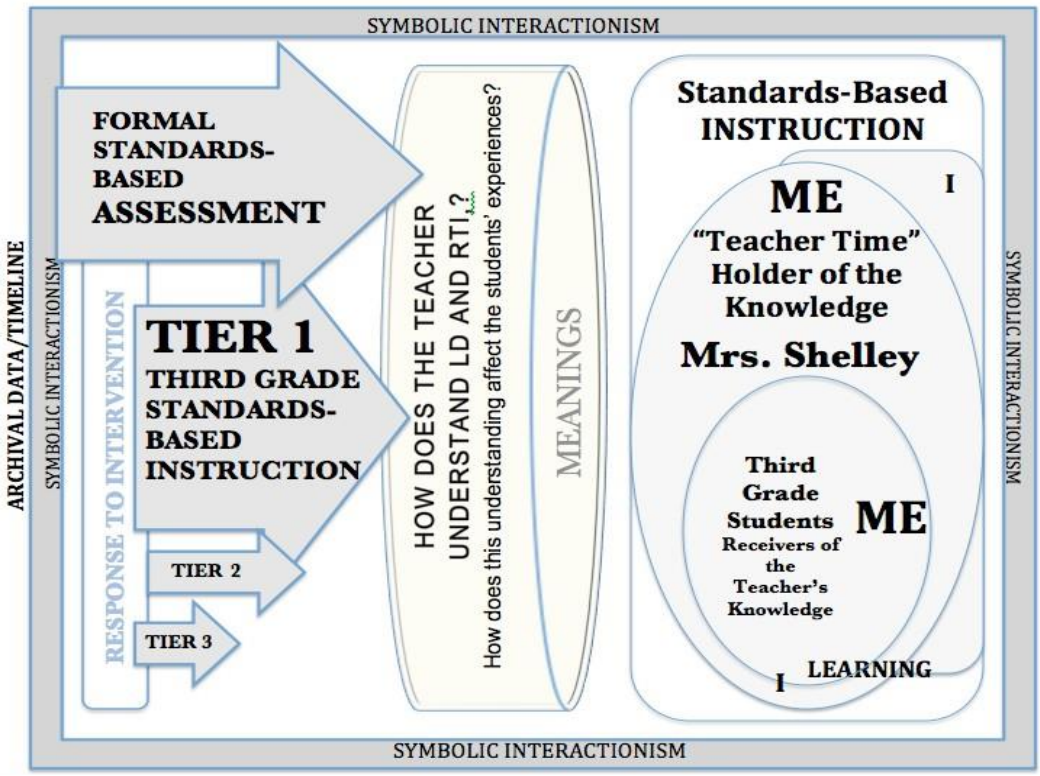

Figure 3. Symbolic Interactionism. Mrs. Shelley's Classroom

Assessment: As Product, Not Process.

Formal summative assessment was a revered part of the literacy instructional routine in Mrs. Shelley's classroom. The Friday reading test served as the anchor assessment, the culmination of a week of reading instruction, and was allowed to consume almost the entire reading block when administered. Instruction was focused on the test. The basal story was listened to and/or read in Round Robin Reading (RRR) style by the students in large group on Monday or Tuesday of each week and listened to by students at least one more time in the listening center during the RtI rotation. Most of the instructional activities in the other centers

focused on the basal story and the standards-based elements it housed as well. Story vocabulary was especially emphasized.

In my own development concerning reading, I remember distinctly the first time that I heard Dr. McGill-Franzen say, "Focus on what the student can do, not on what he can't do, and teach him from there." I also remember the first time I heard her say, "Many times we can tell more about a student's reading development from his writing than from his oral reading." Both statements served to alter my perception of assessment in a powerful way. Like Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels, there was a time when I was a very traditional assessor of student learning, believing quizzes and tests were administered to find out who did not know what, assign a grade to that (lack of) knowledge, and move on. I point out the missed opportunities for formative assessment in the following sections not as faults but to indicate a possible lack of the teacher's being equipped to understand student response to instructional opportunities as ways of knowing students and then using that knowledge to provide stronger and more differentiated instruction.

On those occasions when students read from the basal story or any other text in RRR style in Mrs. Shelley's classroom, there were, not surprisingly, multiple miscues. During one RRR session, I informally noted the miscues students were making by keeping a running list, an itemization that in my role as researcher and guest I had no intention of providing to Mrs. Shelley. I did record in my formal observation notes that Mrs. Shelley was not documenting the miscues and was missing an opportunity for informal and yet formative assessment. I had no reason for keeping the list of miscues as a part of my research but did it as a way of staying sane and focused during the RRR of a basal story. I noted these miscues and Mrs. Shelley's lack of documentation not as a judgment but wondering instead how general education teachers are

supposed to know the intricacies of reading instruction if they have not had access to that knowledge.

As I noted the miscues and challenged myself to think about skills that the miscuing student might lack and instruction from which he or she might benefit, I also noted that the normed response to a miscue in the classroom was for Mrs. Shelley or a helpful classmate to tell the hindering word to the student who was reading aloud. Dr. Allington once described this practice in a doctoral class lecture as the way to create a "Frogger" reader, a kid that learns to immediately take his eyes from the text and look to the right and left when a word is not instantly recognized, searching for the teacher as a resources as he attempts to hop safely across text. In Mrs. Shelley's classroom, I appreciated that the student reading aloud did not have to spend agonizing minutes for himself and the rest of us trying to "sound it out" or to apply any one of several spelling generalizations to the word in order to rectify the slip. I did observe, however, that because the miscues were not being regarded as assessment, they then served only to make the "reading" of the story at times unbearable, not to mention incomprehensible. As formative assessment opportunities passed unheeded, harmful habits perhaps formed.

I will discuss in the next section that Mrs. Shelley's instruction focused on grade-level standards. She had no need for data gained from listening to a student's miscues if she was not going to use those data to drive her instruction in small groups and in one-to-one sessions with students. The RtI plan established by this system and this school neither included nor seemed to value teacher-collected data. What I as the researcher studying toward a degree in literacy noted and regarded as formative assessment data, data that could have in a small way perhaps redeemed this large group RRR, Mrs. Shelley evidently saw as having no instructional value, and so she did not record it. Had Mrs. Shelley asked me about the miscues, I might have given her

the list I had made and talked with her about the possibilities of helping students in these areas. She did not ask, most likely not even aware of the list, and so I kept it to myself, again reminding myself that prior to my doctoral classes in reading, I did not have this ability to formatively assess students while reading aloud.

In research concerning RRR, Ash, Kuhn, and Walpole (2009) found that participating teachers reported the continued use of RRR, claiming they used it for, among other things, obtaining formative assessment of fluency and of students' literacy development. The research indicated that many of those same teachers did not always have the skill set needed to assess individual student reading. Writing about the continued use of RRR in spite of the research indicating it to be ineffective, Ash, Kuhn, and Walpole (2009) quoted Moje (1996) as saying, " [i]t may be that inconsistencies lie not between what teachers believe and what they practice but between what researchers believe and what teachers practice'' (p. 90). Ash, Kuhn, and Walpole (2009) formally referenced the bad habits that the use of RRR may allow to develop, quoting Allington in a more formal way than I did earlier in this section but referring to the same enabling reader practice.

As the researcher in Mrs. Shelley's room, I can report without hesitation that I did not believe then nor do I believe now that Mrs. Shelley used RRR to consume time for which she had no instructional plan; my observation notes indicated that Mrs. Shelley valued and planned for every minute of instructional time in the classroom. I did have reason to believe that Mrs. Shelley implemented RRR for content coverage and classroom behavior management, both "teacher-given reasons for using RRR" (p. 87) in the research survey. I observed and documented more RRR in the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year with Mrs. Shelley's second group of students.

On more than one occasion in Mrs. Shelley's classroom, I watched and at times assisted students working with manipulatives called Versatiles. When using the Versatiles, a student chose the best response to a standards-based question or statement on an accompanying paper guide and then placed that corresponding answer "tile" in a flat plastic case that served as a holder. When all questions were answered, the student closed the holder, flipped it (which meant the tiles were flipped), and then opened the holder to reveal the underside of the tiles he had placed. If the pattern in the student's holder matched the pattern in the answer book, he knew that he had answered all of the questions correctly.

I did not see any teacher documentation of student activity that presented from the work with Versatiles at the teacher's table or in centers. The immediate feedback students received provided a self-assessment that served to make them happy with the results or disappointed in the results. I did not observe at any time that students went back and tried again on the questions the incorrect tile pattern indicated that they had missed. I also did not observe Mrs. Shelley directing students to go back and think again about the questions that were missed, but, many times, students finished their first attempt as time was running out, so time may have been the deterrent in those situations. The student use of the Versatiles could have offered more than an affective response yet appeared to be a missed opportunity for formative assessment data within the RtI rotation.

I conclude this section on assessment in Mrs. Shelley's classroom by noting that in the final interview with Mrs. Shelley, as we discussed her understanding of RtI, especially progress monitoring as a part of the RtI framework, Mrs. Shelley shared that she gathered assessment data about her students, especially her students in Tier 2, through her own observations, student work, and assessments that she administered to the students indicating that she did not have anything

like DIBELS data on her students but knew when a kid was "getting it" and when he wasn't, Mrs. Shelley's interview data concerning progress monitoring was more focused on instruction than assessment and will be discussed later in the instruction section.

Assessment From Without. As a Part of RtI.

As we were talking briefly on the first day I was in the room as a researcher, Mrs. Shelley told me that one of her students went out of the room for a computer-based reading program used for Tier 2 intervention because "he needs data points" (Field notes). I did not ask for clarification but knew from the district's proposed RtI plan that data points were deemed necessary for both new referrals to special education and for re-evaluations for special education.

"He needs data points" could be interpreted to indicate that Mrs. Shelley saw the RtI process as about assessment only. Otherwise, the statement might have been, "He needs intervention," or "He needs help with reading." Mrs. Shelley's statement would appear that she understood Response to Intervention as the collecting of data points in order to refer or reevaluate a student. However, I did not ask more at that time because I did not want to lead her in any way, and so the statement is there for interpretation. I can add that Mrs. Shelley did not seem anxious to send students to special education, so the "He needs data points" statement almost stood as a contradiction to other assessment statements or statements concerning RtI both in the classroom and in the interview.

In our interview conversation, Mrs. Shelley shared her thinking about RtI and LD. As I confessed earlier, I tried to determine Mrs. Shelley's understanding concerning RtI by making direct statements that I believed she would contradict. In spite of my questionable interview techniques, as Mrs. Shelley shared her own thinking about the RtI progress monitoring, she did not say more about these data points that students evidently collected because they were needed,

but additional information about her view of assessment from within surfaced and was included in that previous section.

Mrs. Shelley seemed to accept the ThinkLink assessment that the school was using as the benchmark assessment for RtI without question or complaint. She kept a data notebook. On the day that she shared it with me, it included only ThinkLink data concerning her students. During the fall semester, one day in the classroom, she told me that the students' ThinkLink scores were back. Those would have been the beginning of year assessment results. I didn't record her exact evaluation of the scores, but I did record that she concluded by saying, "That's okay. We've got room to grow." The answer indicated that the scores were low. Mrs. Shelley also mentioned that there was lots of diversity in the students' answers.

The ThinkLink results provided a record of exactly how many children in the classroom and in the grade-level answered each multiple-choice question correctly. It also provided a document that showed the individual student's answer to each question. Mrs. Shelley may have been referring to both of these documents in her comments about student results. In spite of Mrs. Shelley's diligence to collect and organize student ThinkLink scores in a data notebook, I did not at any time in my observations in the classroom see Mrs. Shelley using the ThinkLink results to guide instruction for her students as individuals or as members of small groups. I was not in the classroom at all times; it is possible that she did, in fact, use the data at times. It is also possible that she understood ThinkLink to be standards-based and, believing herself to be providing standards-based instruction, did not see the individual student data as providing more instructional direction for individual students in the classroom.

As intelligent and capable as Mrs. Shelley was, she did seem very willing to allow others to tell her what her students knew. I offer a possible reason for that yielding stance and situate it

as a part of Mrs. Shelley's "Me," the internalized role (Smit & Fritz, 2008) she had assumed over time concerning student assessment. Mrs. Shelley was at one time a special education teacher. Her work with students was mainly dependent at that time on the IQ/Discrepancy model testing that was administered and interpreted by the school psychologist. Mrs. Shelley indicated in the interview that she was more comfortable with the IQ/Discrepancy model testing remaining as a part of the LD identification process, even with the RtI framework in place. Her willingness to allow her students to be assessed from without may have even hindered her ability to see assessment opportunities from within. I share another assessment from without example in the following vignette.

A Touching and Telling Student Vignette.

In the fall of 2010, during my first observation for this school year in Mrs. Shelley's classroom, she indicated that this year's students were not as academically able as the students in her class from the previous year, a statement eventually supported by the ThinkLink scores mentioned above. Mrs. Shelley told me as she talked that one student in particular was "probably going to need to be referred." When I asked questions as we talked about the new group of students, Mrs. Shelley indicated that she did not know much about their reading levels. I knew from consulting with the school system concerning RtI that students that came from the K-2 feeder school to this classroom should have had documentation that showed how they did in the K-2 RtI program. I do not know if those data were passed on to Eastwood Elementary, but Mrs. Shelley evidently did not have the data she felt she needed in order to know her students as readers.

In our conversations in the spring semester, as much as I had attempted to present myself to these two teachers as the researcher and not the SIG RtI school consultant for the district, I

may have been viewed as both. Cuban (2009) described himself as both an insider and an outsider as he conducted research; he shared that he wore both the hat of a reformer and the hat of a scholar. I believed I situated myself in those two roles as well. Early on, Mrs. Shelley and I had discussed the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) and my belief that it provided a very real and thorough picture of the student as a reader for little cost and time. In the fall, as Mrs. Shelley told me about this group of students, I reminded her that we had discussed the QRI and asked her if she wanted me to administer the group assessment to her class. She quickly said that she did, and I agreed to bring the testing materials the following week and do that. She expressed concerns about Sam (pseudonym) and her desire to see what was going on with him in particular. I told her that it might be possible to include the assessment results as one data point in the RtI process of determining LD. I was not sure what data were qualifying as valid in the RtI process in this school at that point.

I went into the classroom and administered a third grade QRI passage during the reading block the next week. During the administration of the group assessment, each student was asked to silently read a narrative passage, then indicate to me as the administrator that he was finished reading. At that time, I took the passage from the student and gave the student a paper copy of the eight comprehension questions (four explicit and four implicit). The student was then asked to answer the questions as best he could without the text. When he finished doing that, he indicated to me that he was ready, and I quickly scored his answers, highlighting the responses that were not answered completely correct according to the test creators' research. Then, I returned the student's answers to him along with a copy of the text that he had read earlier; he still had his copy of the questions. The student was supposed to look back in the text at this point

and do his best to provide stronger answers for those answers I had highlighted as not completely accurate.

For most of the students in the room, the assessment process went fine. There was an English Language Learner in the room that had not been in the class, system, or country (evidently) for very long. She was encouraged by Mrs. Shelley to simply do her best. Knowing that Mrs. Shelley already had concerns about Sam, I administered the assessment while keeping as close an eye on Sam as possible. Mrs. Shelley watched the process but did not attempt to interfere in any way.

Sam took a copy of the text from me when I handed those out. There were concept questions that were administered as a part of the assessment as we began (before the passage was read). I did not notice Sam's work with those questions. During the time of the assessment where students were supposed to read the text silently to themselves, I purposefully watched Sam and took notice that Sam had some trouble staying on task. He was in his desk looking for something. He was dropping things. He was not focusing on the reading task alone.

Sam decided at a given point to indicate to me that he had finished the reading and was now ready for me to present him with a written copy of the questions. Although I did not believe he had actually read the text, I complied and took the text, giving him the comprehension questions. With many of the same behaviors as before repeated, Sam had answered one or two questions on paper when everyone else in the room had completely finished the assessment.

I made a professional choice at that time and, as Mrs. Shelley began instructing the students in the classroom as to next steps in the reading block, I chose with a nod from her that I took as permission to pull Sam to the side and take the opportunity to ask him the questions orally, hoping that by talking with him I could at least gain some insight into his participation in

the assessment. I did not actually believe that voicing the questions and allowing him to answer orally would provide any semblance of the true results of the QRI assessment for Sam on this day, but, as we began to talk, I found that I was mistaken.

Sam verbalized the answers to all eight questions, both explicit and implicit, correctly. He was even in our one-to-one meeting looking around, looking over my shoulder, twisting in his seat, but he had obviously read the passage at some point in his seeming lack of attentiveness to the task, and, more importantly, he had comprehended what he had read. I indicated to Sam that he had done really well and sent him back to his seat.

As the students left to go to their additional activity for that day at the end of the reading block, I shared with Mrs. Shelley that Sam had scored at independent level on the assessment with the modification in the assessment process that I had provided. What I believed I knew from the QRI testing and what I told her was that Sam's issue evidently did not involve visual perception or fluency. I shared with Mrs. Shelley that I could not even begin to calculate how many words per minute Sam must have been able to read, basing what I was thinking about his WPM rate on what I had observed; his eyes were almost not on the text.

I went on to explain to Mrs. Shelley that when I saw at the end of the testing session how few responses Sam had written down on his answer paper, I veered from the testing procedures and, as she had no doubt noticed, I took Sam aside in the classroom and asked him the questions orally, allowing him to answer in that same format. I told her that according to that assessment at that moment in time, Sam was not only reading (qualifying reading as comprehending) on grade-level but according to his responses was actually reading at probably higher than grade level although this assessment does not provide specific leveling. I did state the obvious: it appeared that Sam had trouble staying focused on the task. I added what Mrs. Shelley and I both knew

about why that might be happening: Sam was a seven or eight-year-old boy. Some of that inattentive behavior could have qualified as typical in the developmental process although some of it might have qualified as excessive. I also conceded that by bypassing the writing of the answers, I had forfeited the benefit of examining Sam's written responses for clues to a possible issue concerning written expression. And so although I was concluding from the assessment that there was no indication that Sam had the characteristics of a struggling reader, there were other factors for which some support might prove to be worth pursuing.

Mrs. Shelley's response was interesting. She listened carefully to what I recounted to her concerning Sam. She thanked me for the assessment and indicated that she saw its worth and would look forward to seeing the other children's results after I scored their papers. And, from that day forward, I never heard her make any reference to referring Sam for testing again. In fact, Sam became Mrs. Shelley's husband's sidekick (taking students' pizza orders when Mr. Shelley was going out to bring pizza back to students, doing the math to decide what pizzas Mr. Shelley should get, etc.), it seemed, when he was in the room. As far as I could tell in my observations during the remainder of that semester, Mrs. Shelley's suspicions about Sam and a possible learning disability were derailed that day. She was satisfied with my explanation of the results from Sam's testing, and she moved forward in the belief that Sam needed firm guidance to help him focus and perhaps some needed favorable attention from her husband but not special education services. In discussing the results of an early October ThinkLink assessment, Mrs. Shelley told me that Sam had "three greens and was considered proficient-moving-to-advanced."

In one of my final visits into the classroom, Mrs. Shelley told me that she had a new student and did not know much about her reading level. She said that ThinkLink testing "doesn't work at mid-term like this." I offered to administer the QRI to the student. Mrs. Shelley wanted

that, so I conducted the assessment and provided Mrs. Shelley with the student's reading level according to that one assessment on that one day. Mrs. Shelley appeared glad for the positive news about the student as a reader. In my observations, I never saw Mrs. Shelley use the QRI data to drive instruction or even instructional groupings of students. I do not believe she had received the necessary training for this kind of specialized reading instruction.

On my last official visit into the classroom, Mrs. Shelley told me that the test scores were released the day before from the state department. I knew that she meant the TCAP testing from the previous semester, Spring 2010, the first administration of the more rigorous test assessing the more rigorous standards. The bad news according to Mrs. Shelley was that the state had decided that scores would be averaged in with the previous year's data for a 2-year average instead of the usual 3-year average. Mrs. Shelley indicated to me that this was not good news for the school system and her school in particular. In talking about this situation, she did not narrow the concern to herself or her own students but to the school. Her belief about this assessment was that it would affect the public's opinion of the school system. She did not indicate whether or not she believed the assessment to be valid nor did she complain to me about the rigor. Her concern seemed to be only for the public's reception of the system's and school's scores.

The scores for the school were public record and provided as a part of the district's report card. The school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as determined by the state department in the 2008-09 school year, the 2009-10 school year or in the 2010-2011 school year as Mrs. Shelley feared. As I visited the school the next semester after formal observations were completed, Mrs. Shelley told me that the letter had been sent home telling parents of students at Eastwood Elementary School that the school had not achieved AYP for three years, and therefore the parents of Eastwood students had the right to apply for transfer to designated

schools within the district. She found out about the letter from someone at Wal-Mart the night before and had a copy of it in her desk that she immediately got out to show me when I came in. She was very upset by both the letter and by finding out in the way that she did.

Concluding Thoughts: Assessment Situated in the "Me."

Mrs. Shelley's conceptualization of assessment as identified from the observation and interview data collected in this research led her to rigidly implement summative assessments and routinely overlook formative assessment opportunities within her classroom while complacently accepting policy driven assessments of her students' learning from without. In spite of her almost disinterested stance toward assessment as documented in the data, Mrs. Shelley appeared willing to wear the school's TCAP assessment scores like a Scarlet AYP, very ashamed of the public's having been informed of the school's apparent indiscretion concerning student learning.

Assessment and talk about assessment consumed a rather large part of the interaction I had with Mrs. Shelley in the observations and the interview, and I therefore have addressed it as one of two prevalent themes. The other theme, instruction, was the more observable and occupied the bulk of my field notes recorded in Mrs. Shelley's classroom. We discussed instruction in our interview conversation as well.

Instruction: Differentiated Support to Finish the Same Work

Mrs. Shelley's instruction was usually whole group. She did, however, in the RtI reading block rotation call small groups of children to the round table for "Teacher Time," her name for the activity at that location. When focusing on the table, I observed and video recorded scaffolding of students to complete the work, but all students did the same work at the small group table as they rotated in to see Mrs. Shelley. The differentiated instruction at the small

group table was based in teacher support for students' learning of grade-level standards rather than individualized student need concerning literacy development.

A Vignette of a Small Group Session With Struggling Students.

In large group during one particular visit, the students started an English language arts workbook page concerning tense (present, past, future). They did the top section together, answering aloud when called on. Then the teacher gave directions for Part B and asked three students from Think Tank 3 (what she called her groupings of students and desks) to meet her at the small group table. The three children went to the table with workbook pages in hand and took their seats. The teacher joined them. As she sat down, she said, "They've thrown one in to try to trick you!" The students at the table with her immediately began asking her, "Which one?" She told them to wait and see if they could find it.

The conversation at the small group table went like this:

Mrs. Shelley: "*Student's name*, tell me about number one. What would I choose?"

The student (from the Think Tank of struggling students) very hesitantly read number one aloud but did not offer a correct answer after reading the statement.

Mrs. Shelley: "So, you would do what?"

When the student didn't answer after wait time, Mrs. Shelley offered step-by-step modeling, perhaps better known as the Think Aloud strategy to show the students how one would decide. Although this was a language arts paper, there was some reading comprehension instruction in this work. Students had to use context clues to decide which verb tense was indicated. They continued around the table with a student reading the statement, then discussing together how they would choose the correct tense of the verb(s) in the sentence.

The remaining students, including a student whose desk was included in the desk grouping that created Think Tank 3 in the classroom, completed the work on their own. On several occasions I witnessed similar small group instruction. As the researcher I noted opportunities during small group interaction for Mrs. Shelley to see what a student did or did not understand, what he could or could not do. I did not see Mrs. Shelley document any of those interactions with students, but I did see her react to the student's immediate ability or inability by modeling, having the group do some together before releasing students to independent work, etc. In one observation, a small group came to the table and Mrs. Shelley left them there to accomplish assigned work while she went to help a group of struggling students in a center. There was an invisible but strong pull toward struggling students to which Mrs. Shelley seemed to respond, regardless of where those students were in the RtI physical setup in her classroom.

As we discussed Mrs. Shelley's understanding of RtI and LD in our interview, Mrs. Shelley said that she always felt that she could meet the needs of struggling students in her classroom. She referred to the students as her "babies," not in a derogatory way but in a caring way. We discussed her reluctance to send her students to Tier 2 intervention at 2:15 in the afternoon, preferring instead to keep them and work with them herself because she felt that she could better assess their needs and work on "something that they weren't getting."

Perhaps one of the reasons Mrs. Shelley kept her students in large group the majority of the time was that she was always at a minimum good, sometimes even amazing, as she instructed students in that instructional venue. Here are the notes from one of those large group discussions that I captured while in the classroom during the fall semester:

Mrs. Shelley: "We're going to talk about something for a few minutes. Close your reading books and give me your full attention."

The students do that.

Mrs. Shelley: "In our story, the author had a line that said, 'come see the world through my eyes."

As she says that sentence, Mrs. Shelley writes the words on the white board.

Mrs. Shelley: "That is an example of an idiom. How many of you know what an idiom is?"

One student raises his hand but then says, "no" when the teacher gives him the opportunity to share his thinking.

Mrs. Shelley: "An idiom. 'Come see the world through my eyes.' I love idioms. These are so much fun. An idiom is a phrase that has a special meaning that is different than the words that make it up. Can you really go and get inside someone else and see the world through their eyes?"

Students: "No!!!"

Mrs. Shelley: "Here's another one. Let me see if you've heard of this."
And then she says, "Shake a leg." Students laugh as one student stands and shakes his leg!

A student answers (what the idiom "shake a leg" means): "Good luck," and then, correcting himself, says, "No, that's *break* a leg."

A Hispanic student in the room knows what "Shake a leg" means and shares her answer. I add the word "wow" to my notes as I record that. I am impressed that an ELL has that knowledge considering the difficulty some ELLs have with idioms in the English language.

Mrs. Shelley: (after affirming the Hispanic student's answer) "How many of you have heard that before?" Students respond.

Mrs. Shelley says another idiom: “He lost his cool.” She allows students to enjoy that idiom and then says, “Get out of my hair.” As children laugh and act out the idioms Mrs. Shelley provides as examples, one little girl, believing herself to understand the usage, tries it herself, “And you’re driving me up the wall!” Her effort at sharing an idiom is greeted with enthusiastic approval from Mrs. Shelley and fellow students.

I write in my notes: “What a great discussion. The energy level in this room is amazing when they have these discussions.”

Throughout the two semesters of observing the instruction in Mrs. Shelley’s room, I perceived a respect for students and a love for teaching from Mrs. Shelley every time I came into the classroom. I recognize that sometimes people act differently when an observer is around. I also know what students look like and say sometimes when they are treated differently because an observer is in the room. I never once experienced that in Mrs. Shelley’s classroom either semester.

In those days that I described earlier in this paper when I was attempting to identify themes in my observation data, themes created by locating and categorizing incidents that occurred repeatedly, I found the work of Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) concerning academic optimism of schools. As I read about the construct of academic optimism at the school level and wondered if it were applicable at the teacher level, Beard, Hoy, and Hoy (2010), published the journal article “Academic Optimism of Individual Teachers: Confirming a New Construct.” I went back through my notes and coded incidents like the following.

One morning in late spring, I was in the classroom as the reading block started. It was about 8:05 according to my notes. There were teacher-written notes on the board about school fundraiser reward events that would be taking place during the school day: trips in a limo for

lunch at the local Pizza Hut for the top sellers, assemblies for others, etc. I documented in my notes:

> Right in the middle of going over the morning board work, a little guy, without raising his hand, asks, "What are we doing in the gym?" (Referring to one of the reward events, evidently one for which he had qualified). Mrs. Shelley paused, acknowledged his question, and answered quietly and respectfully, "We'll talk about that a little later." I wrote, "Nice! Respectful and realizing he's a kid! Wow!" Here was this excited eight-year-old boy staring at a white board that contained the morning work they were discussing but had some very, very exciting events written on it as well. He was distracted. He did what came naturally. Without even seeking permission to speak, he asked a very off-topic question about which he had much interest. I have been an observer in many classrooms where his question would have been received and answered in a way that minimized him as a learner and person. Mrs. Shelley appeared to understand the reason for his comment and treated him with respect.

Another time when I was in the classroom, I saw and recorded this interaction between Mrs. Shelley and a student who was lagging behind in being ready and involved in instruction that was already happening. Noticing the problem, Mrs. Shelley very quietly walked over and leaned down to the student and kindly said in a "for his ears only" voice, "Here's your personal invitation to open up your morning work." In those same notes, I recorded that Mrs. Shelley said, "Samuel (pseudonym), my turn, Honey. You're interrupting," when a student talked while she was talking. That same day, Mrs. Shelley pointed out to me one of her students that had scored "Advanced" in every category of the ThinkLink. She shared, "He's about two steps ahead on everything we're doing. I'm trying to figure out a way to channel that." The student had been

off-task a couple of times during my observation that day. Mrs. Shelley appeared to be taking responsibility for challenging the student, apparently believing that his behavior would be better if he were better engaged.

Although these incidents may seem to be more about classroom management than direct instruction, Beard, Hoy, and Hoy (2010) write that the teacher's belief that she can teach effectively and that students can learn are two of the major components that contribute to academic optimism. Each of the incidents from the classroom offered the possibility to me that Mrs. Shelley believed herself capable of teaching all students and knew she needed their attention and needed to get and keep that attention by treating each student respectfully at all times. I believe she also saw each student as a learner and was willing to consistently treat students with respect so that they would also see themselves as valued learners in her room.

Transition from Shelley to Samuels.

Initial thinking concerning the organization of the data for formal presentation in this paper involved planning to share the findings from the observation and interview of both teachers as one ethnographic case study. For the majority of the two semesters in which I observed in their classrooms, the two teachers presented as very similar educators, although the settings were slightly different. Mrs. Shelley's third grade classroom was self-contained while Mrs. Samuels taught English Language Arts and reading as part of a fourth grade departmentalized team. That meant that Mrs. Shelley interacted with 15 to 18 students each day (her enrollment varied) while Mrs. Samuels interacted with more like 75 to 100 students each day. Mrs. Samuels' numbers varied because, in the spring semester, she taught three different groups of students, and in the fall she taught four.

Mrs. Samuels taught on a different wing in the same school building as Mrs. Shelley. Leaving Mrs. Shelley's classroom, walking the two minutes and entering Mrs. Samuels' classroom was like "super-sizing" the same instructional setting most days. As I will discuss in specifics in the next section, although the desks were bigger, the students were bigger, and Mrs. Samuels was taller than Mrs. Shelley, the transition from Mrs. Shelley's classroom to Mrs. Samuels' classroom as I visited seemed otherwise almost seamless. Mrs. Samuels brought the same academic optimism to the classroom. Her behavior management system was exactly the same as Mrs. Shelley's. Like the observation notes and vignettes from Mrs. Shelley's classroom, notes from the observations in Mrs. Samuels' classroom capture humor, enthusiasm, and expertise in both content area and pedagogy.

Midway through the fall semester in this research, both teachers expressed an interest in transitioning to a reading framework that would be different for them, their students, and me as the researcher. Mrs. Samuels shared in her interview that as she and Mrs. Shelley discussed this framework in some initial conversations, she expressed a concern for whether I, as the researcher, might "like it" or not. Eventually, Mrs. Samuels moved forward with the transition, and Mrs. Shelley did not. Both had excellent reasons for their choices. When this happened, the two teachers' stories were no longer quite as similar, and I made the methodological choice to present the data as two case studies instead of one. Having already presented Mrs. Shelley's case study, I will now share findings from Mrs. Samuels' classroom and interview data.

Case study: Mrs. Samuels: Fourth Grade.

Mrs. Samuels' understanding of what it meant to teach fourth graders was filtered through meanings originated from the family culture into which she was born. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, and father were educators, so school and teaching were a part of her

DNA. She grew up with more than a spectator's view of the activities involved while seated at the teacher's desk. I never met Mrs. Samuels' father, grandmother, or great-grandmother, but someone, perhaps even everyone, in that group must have deeply loved the role of educator and embodied that love to Mrs. Samuels. Like Mrs. Shelley, Mrs. Samuels was always positive. I use the word "always" here without hesitation and will share data that support the thesis.

As stated earlier, Mrs. Samuels' experiences at most of the student and teacher desks in her life took place in the school system of which Eastwood Elementary School was a part. This also obviously affected her meanings filter. But, like the climate in Mrs. Shelley's classroom, the climate in Mrs. Samuels' room was refreshingly different, that difference extended to a comparison with classrooms of many rural educators that teach in schools and are "from there." Mrs. Samuels and her students were able to breathe deeply and maintain an attitude of respect and forging ahead without coughing or choking on the limiting vision sometimes guiding the learning in a classroom in a small rural school. During the single informal classroom conversation with me in which Mrs. Samuels almost allowed herself to make a negative comment, she instead voiced a line that will live in my mind and heart forever.

The Meanings Filter Explained.

To reestablish the context of what I have referred to and will continue to refer to as the "meanings filter" as I discuss Mrs. Samuels in this case study, I stop here to provide a brief but important reminder of a premise in the theory of symbolic interactionism. In an article entitled, "The Missing Tins of Chicken: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Culture Change," Bruner (1973), an anthropologist living among the Toba Batak ethnic group, shares a very interesting and at times bizarre story concerning, as the title implies, the theft of several tins of chicken belonging to his wife and him and how the investigation into that robbery plays out. Bruner first

shares the story and then asks the reader to continue with him as he "present(s) a somewhat different interpretation of these events based upon symbolic interaction theory…" (p. 225). As Bruner sculpts this second interpretation, he writes that "The encapsulation of a single mind, does, of course, have meaning, but not as a factual record. We carry within us not the reality but the myth, based upon distortions, selections, compressions, and recombinations of the past, so as to serve contemporary needs" (p. 225). I have earlier in this paper described that myth as the "Me," referring to Mead's theory that each of us has a "Me" and "I" as a part of our being, and the "Me" is the "organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Morris, 1934, location 3059 of 7532 on Kindle).

As I refer to the "meanings filter" through which Mrs. Samuels processes the policy of RtI, focusing on two of the four stimuli that make up the RtI framework, those being assessment and instruction, I am suggesting that Mrs. Samuels' past - her upbringing, her educational experiences both inside of and outside of the school district in which she teaches, both as a student and teacher – serves as a filter that I sought to understand as I observed her teach fourth graders for two semesters in her life. That filter, as Bruner (1973) writes, was not necessarily reflective of reality, but it was hers, and she was able to use it to give meaning to the stimuli that presented themselves to that current situation.

I will discuss eventually in the case study of Mrs. Samuels that there came a time when she evidently had a conversation within herself, a conversation between her "Me" and her "I." During that conversation that took place both within and outside of her head according to the interview, Mrs. Samuels apparently as least partially acknowledged first within herself that she found herself in a situation where there was a problem to be solved and the familiar set of means that she had taken on as her "Me," what I am calling her "meanings filter," was not adequate for

solving the problem, for arriving at the known end. Mrs. Samuels then "devise(d) behavior as a creative solution to the changing position in which (s)he [found herself]" (p. 226). Bruner (1973) calls what happened because of Mrs. Samuels' "devised behavior" a "simple but creative act" that is the "basic stuff of culture change and the process by which it occurs" (p. 226). I am calling the act itself the meanings shift and situating my observation data from Mrs. Samuels as either Pre-Shift or Post-Shift in the case study.

I will discuss in Chapter 5 my concerns that the meanings filter through which a teacher understands her role in the classroom must be carefully examined, altered and perhaps even replaced as a part of the pre-service experience so that children are given opportunity to learn under the care of teachers like Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels. Whether or not the altering of the teacher's meanings filter during a teacher education program is possible has been a topic of much research in the past. I will add to this pool of empirical knowledge what I believe I observed and heard from Mrs. Samuels as she altered her own meanings filter, recognizing the limitations of a case study for generalizing while also asking that the value of capturing and sharing the experience from such a close vantage point be empirically acknowledged and valued.

Not surprisingly to me as the researcher, Mrs. Samuels' colleague Mrs. Shelley, the third grade teacher already featured in this paper, voiced in her interview in a very subtle but perhaps very telling way some alterations to her meanings filter. Those alterations were not observable in the classroom, at least not to this researcher, but were evidently a part of Mrs. Shelley's "I" that she felt allowed to contribute in her new social situation as an administrator. I will share Mrs. Shelley's interview musings in Chapter 5 in a way that I believe serves to strengthen the implications of my research study.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 represent Mrs. Samuels' classroom instruction in the spring semester through mid-fall semester (referred to from this point forward as the Pre-Shift) and then the timeframe beginning mid-fall semester through the end of the fall semester (referred to from this point forward as the Post-Shift) of this research respectively. The relatively small but potentially powerful alterations on both sides of the midline of understandings in the visuals will be discussed moving forward. In presenting Mrs. Shelley's case study, I believed it was best to organize and discuss the two themes, assessment and instruction, in separate sections. I will address those same two themes in Mrs. Samuels' case study but feel it will be better to address them jointly in the two time frames of "Pre-Shift" and "Post-Shift" so that the reader may better realize the transformation of assessment and instruction in Mrs. Samuels' fourth grade classroom.

Transitioning Assessment and Instruction: Pre-Shift

Like Mrs. Shelley, Mrs. Samuels allowed the basal reading series to guide much of her classroom instruction and assessment. There were times, however, that students were reading from trade books in the classroom and were involved in non-basal learning and assessment activities associated with those texts. I saw both and share those field notes now.

On the day of my first visit into Mrs. Samuels' classroom, students were taking a basal reading test. Mrs. Samuels told me that her group was "high," (alluding to the group's overall academic performance) and she seemed excited about that. Her group, as she called them, was her homeroom, not the group that I chose to officially observe when I was in the building. As I reflected over my notes that evening after the observation, I wondered if Mrs. Samuels felt more pressure for her group of homeroom students to do well than the other groups because of data

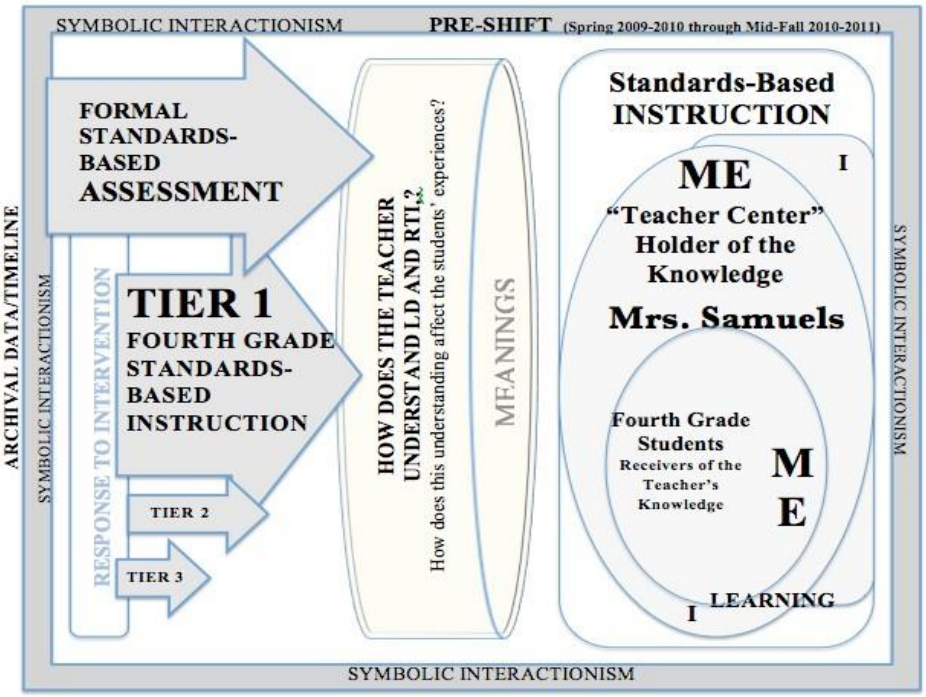

Figure 4: Samuels: Pre-Shift: Spring 2009-2010 through Mid-Fall 2010-2011

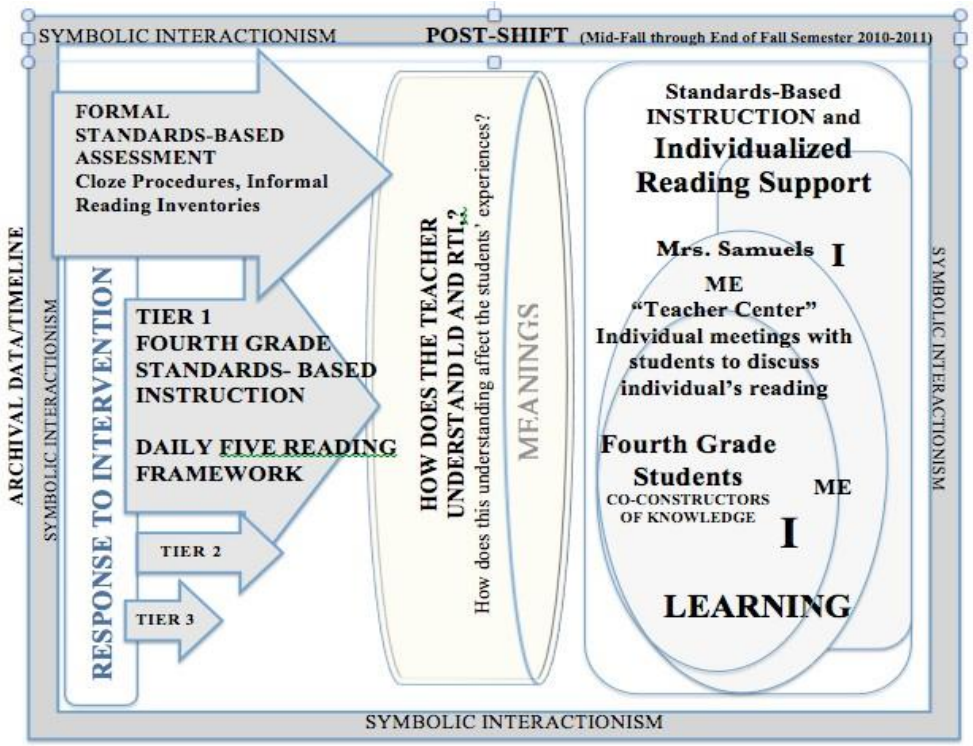

Figure 5: Samuels: Post-Shift: Mid-Fall through End of Fall Semester 2010-2011

associated with student learning or if she was just glad to get to spend the majority of her day with "high" kids.

In addition to summative assessments, there were also formative assessment practices that ultimately led to the basal summative assessment in the fourth grade classroom. Students were given a bendy stick and the teacher said, "I'm going to give you a definition and you please place your bendy stick underneath the word…Please place your bendy stick under the word that means 'events that occur, surround a situation. Sometimes things happen.' It's a 'c' word [it begins with the letter c]. Mr._____?" Student answered, "Circumstances." Teacher responded, "You are correct." As she read the definitions, the teacher walked throughout the room observing student word choices, although I did not observe her making a written record of those correct or incorrect choices. I did later recognize (not for these words but for vocabulary words from another basal story in this classroom) that this formative practice involved the exact words and definitions that were included on the Friday reading test. Vocabulary assessment seemed to occur after students copied and memorized word-for-word definitions as provided by the teacher and the basal. Vocabulary assessments on these basal tests were in a multiple-choice format.

As the observer, I found Mrs. Samuels' actions and words about assessment to send mixed messages. At times like those mentioned previously, her words and actions seemed to indicate that she saw assessment as a task for which she had responsibility. Students seemed almost left out of the process except to provide the teacher-directed answers at the correct time in the correct way, aka with no stray marks. At other times, I saw Mrs. Samuels provide engaging instruction that seemed to value student learning above even her opportunity to collect formative data about student learning and understanding.

An additional vignette I captured presented an opportunity for formative assessment, although I did not see Mrs. Samuels make any written notes. The following interaction took place in the teacher's center (her name for the time students spent with her during the rotation) one day in late February and illustrates a lost opportunity to note, at least in writing, students' understanding of "genre":

> Teacher: "Can you get those back out? Take all of these bags and place them all around these desks. Just lay them flat. These are genre bags."
>
> Student puts them out. He reads the labels on the bags to himself as he puts them out. The students in this small group all move to look at the bags.
>
> Teacher: "I'm going to give you an example of each genre." As she hands out books, she continues, "You this, you this, you get two. Look at your piece of literature that you have. You might want to open it, if you have a sheet, read the first three lines of it." Students examine the books.
>
> Teacher: "Okay, so what have we got here? (She directs a student.) Show them the cover of that. Does that look like fiction to you guys? See a gun…see men…see somebody shooting. Do you think that there is a bag that it might better fit in? Oh, there's only one per bag. I'll tell you that."
>
> The students work together to try to put the right text in the right bag.
>
> Teacher: "If you open that up and read the first couple of lines…can't judge a book by its cover, but…where do you think that belongs, what bag?"
>
> One student says, "Historic Fiction."

Teacher: “Do you think that happened in olden times? Folk Tales – is this a story passed down by word of mouth? Poem – usually in lines. Is that in lines? It’s not historical fiction, not a play, not a poem.”

Teacher has a student take a book.

Teacher: “Open it. What do you see? A list of characters. So, where does it go? Never judge a book by its cover. (Calls female student’s name), when you get married, I hope you’ll get to know that man, don’t just look at him and say, ‘Yep, we’re going to get married.” Students laugh.

Teacher: “We’ve got some bags that are empty right now and ones that have something in them already. We need to find the genres we still need in our books (basal reading books). I’ll give you a hint. We’ve already read a story that is historical fiction. There was a character named Sarah.” Students find it.

Teacher: “Have y’all found a fairy tale? Guess what? You’re not going to find one. We don’t have a fairy tale in our book. How does that start?”

Students: “Once upon a time…”

Teacher: “And at the end, they say what?”

Students: “And they lived happily ever after.”

Timer sounds.

Teacher to all students: “Okay, clean up what you have.”

There were assessment opportunities in this interaction. The teacher may have been able during the small group instructional time to make mental notes as she asked questions about who did and did not appear to know genre. Again, the teacher made no written notes, but the assessment opportunities were present.

The instruction in the teacher center included a hands-on approach to learning, but Mrs. Samuels took a promising group activity and led it in such a way that it almost became a fill-in-the-blank worksheet. She defined the genre, and although her hints were helpful, they were mostly hints for explicit answers, some even for the answer "yes" or "no" alone. If the students had been allowed to first place the texts in the bags with Mrs. Samuels as observer only, then as they explained their matched texts to bags, Mrs. Samuels could have perhaps at the end of the explanations placed a cut out of a star or a colored plastic cup by the matches that were correct, allowing the students to try again on the ones that were mismatched. The usual container of the knowledge (the teacher) could have watched and perhaps documented student learning as the usual receivers of the knowledge (students) instead created and shared knowledge among themselves.

There were contradictory moments in Mrs. Shelley's room during the instruction in this pre-shift period. In one of my first official visits in the classroom, I watched and documented as a student finished his spelling bubble test, handed Mrs. Shelley a slip of paper which I believe was "money" earned in the behavior system that Mrs. Shelley used. The boy then picked up a timer and his chair and, placing his chair in an area of the room somewhat away from the group, sat down and began to read by himself. Another student during this same time grabbed a cushion from an area and settled himself on the cushion on the floor to read silently. The ease with which these two students independently found their places and began reading seemed very self-directed for a classroom that appeared to be so teacher-centered. I came to recognize this self-directed learning as the exception rather than the rule during this pre-shift period.

In a January visit, I listened and watched as Mrs. Samuels introduced the ELA-reading student centers in this way:

"Let me explain centers to you. I have moved the reading center back to where the heat vent is. I'm hoping you may be able to hear better back there. The books are in the basket. The instructions are taped on the basket. The writing journals are in the reading center, also. Because we are used to writing summaries, I want you to write a summary of what your groups reads each day in *The Magic Finger.* This is the only center you'll need a pencil in when you come here this week. Take a book out of the basket and sit in the floor back there. Again, I'm hoping it will be a quieter space for you.

The Thesaurus search. You will need a thesaurus. Write each vocabulary word in a box. Then take your thesaurus. Our first word is script. So I'm going to the s's. Uh-oh. It's not in the white part, so I'm going to look down at the yellow part. Synonyms. So in my box I'm going to write 'handwritten book' with my marker, okay? Then, if you happen to finish early, these are our leveled readers for this week. You can also take (Accelerated Reader) tests on those. Next center. You know we're going to be talking a lot about wolves. Going to look at every genre that fourth graders need to know. We're going to make an accordion book. You put a picture of a wolf on the front. There is a picture of a wolf in this basket for each of you. There is also a picture of a wolf on the screen that shows the actual fur coloring of a wolf. Color your wolf with authentic wolf colors. There are authentic wolf colors in this box. No purple or pink because wolves are not purple or pink. Color the wolf picture and cut it out. Glue it on to one of these construction papers. Place it on the counter to dry. I have scissors, glue. When you're finished with that, and you may finish, here is another text with a passage about a wolf in it. It's from a magazine I found on the Internet called *Wild Kids.*

Then, of course, if you come back with me in the teacher's center, I'll explain what you need when you get there."

Mrs. Samuels was following the district's directive to implement a reading block that included small group instruction in Tier 1 of the RtI framework. She had created a teacher center and activities that in most cases kept the students that were not in the teacher center out of trouble. Although some were more literacy based than others, the activities were mostly low-level in nature. In the reading center, the reading of *The Magic Finger* was RRR and without teacher supervision. In the center where the wolf book would be created, all wolves were to be created equal(ly) and eventually all book contents would be the same. Manufactured might have been a better verb than created. As I told teachers in professional development many times, centers should be designed to allow students time to practice previously taught skills as determined through formative assessment. It did sound as though the writing of a summary was practice of a previously developed skill. Other than that, the activities seemed to be undifferentiated busy work.

Mrs. Samuels' meaning filter seemed to have been shut off while she created these areas in which students would go to work independently as she met with a small group in the teacher center. But, in actuality, the activities that Mrs. Samuels had created and explained to the students while I was observing may have very much been representations of the meaning they had for Mrs. Samuels. In a teacher-centered, Teacher as Container of the Knowledge classroom, any time away from the teacher was lost time. Mrs. Samuels took care to make the centers relatively fun. She introduced them so that students were well-prepared as they moved in to them. The students even seemed excited as they moved in to them. But, Mrs. Samuels meaning

filter may have caused her to believe that with no teacher present, no transfer of knowledge could occur. So, the centers reflected that learning level.

Pre-Shift: Assessment From Without.

Mrs. Samuels asked me a question about ThinkLink on the first day I was in her classroom. In a brief conversation, she shared that, "ThinkLink changes the number of questions you [the student as test-taker] have to get right to be level one, level two, but three and four seem to be the same. Why would they change that?" In spite of her obvious lack of true understanding of the assessment and perhaps with apprehension about its validity as well, in that same conversation, Mrs. Samuels told me that her students had "done more writing than ever, maybe," and then added that according to ThinkLink, "The area where I might not have done the best job is with punctuation." She appeared willing to accept feedback and assessment of her instructional performance from a multiple-choice timed test about which she also had questions. Her statement also indicated that she accepted the students' scores on the ThinkLink as an indication of her instruction, not of their learning. I will discuss the theme of instruction in a subsequent section.

Practice for the two main assessments from without, ThinkLink and TCAP, occurred in both classrooms, but particularly in the fourth grade classroom. Weekly tests were timed, and spelling tests were given in TCAP format (four choices of word provided; student circled the correctly spelled version of the word). I captured in my field notes a quick exchange between Mrs. Samuels and a student on the first day that I observed. The student asked the teacher about a procedure on the weekly basal reading test. Mrs. Samuels repeated the student's question to him and then responded, "Which can you cross out on? Just bubble, no crossing out." The idea of "no stray pencil marks allowed" on TCAP was attached to that answer.

Also during the first classroom visit, Mrs. Samuels directed students in the classroom into centers for self-directed activities and then accompanied students one by one right out side her door into the hallway to have each student plot his/her own score on a large poster that included other student scores in relation to the benchmarks that indicated progress on the ThinkLink assessments. My first visits were in January, so these were mid-year benchmark assessment scores the teacher and students were discussing and plotting. ThinkLink was the universal screening and benchmark assessment chosen by the school as a part of the RtI process. No student-identifying data were attached to the displayed scores.

The purpose of the posters, according to Mrs. Samuels, was to allow the student to see his own score in relation to those anonymous scores of classmates and also see his own score in relation to the ThinkLink scores indicating students' levels of achievement: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. In the hallway on a poster, the score would hopefully constantly remind the student of his present performance on the assessment and challenge him to work hard to increase that score on the next ThinkLink testing opportunity.

In early March, I was present one day when Mrs. Samuels talked with the students directly about the benchmark assessment they had just completed, the third and final benchmark of the year. "Yesterday, while you were taking ThinkLink, I saw you with a question on rhyme, repetition, and alliteration. I had a lot of kids raising their hands and asking, 'What's this word?' while pointing to the word 'repetition.' I taught it as repeating."

I would be remiss not to stop here, refer back to the final comment in Mrs. Samuels' discourse above, and point out the word choice that I believe situates Mrs. Samuels in the "Teacher: Container of the Knowledge" stance from which she instructed during the pre-shift period. Although it would have been just as fair and appropriate for her to have said, "You

learned it as ‘repeating,” I believe Mrs. Samuels was indicating to the students that it was her fault that she taught the poetry element as “repeating.” They had no choice because she put it in their heads as “repeating,” and, therefore, when it was presented to them on the ThinkLink assessment as “repetition,” they were neither expected to nor being held responsible for not making the very short and obvious jump from “repeating” to “repetition.”

Before I leave this incident, I will relate it back to the practice of memorized definitions of vocabulary words for the basal reading story and its summative assessment each week. I described the practice earlier of the students’ using Wiki sticks to show Mrs. Samuels as she looked over their shoulders that the correct vocabulary information had been imputed. Practices such as that create students that do not have the ability to see “repetition” and “repeating” as meaning the same thing. Docile receptacles of knowledge do not infer well. They receive information and are only able to return it on an assessment in the exact same form, unblemished or untransformed in any way.

Returning now to the discussion that started around the words “repeating” and “repetition,” I watched as Mrs. Samuels then took the discussion of this term on the assessment into a literary event involving text. “I’m going to read you a poem. It’s a very short poem. Your sub last week? She gave me this book. She used to teach fourth grade. When I’m finished, raise your hand if you can give me an example of repetition or rhyme.” Mrs. Samuels read the poem and then said, “Raise your hand if you heard repetition.” Students raised their hands and, when called on, gave examples of repetition they identified and remembered from the poem. Mrs. Samuels said, “Wouldn’t it be cool if an author did repetition, rhyme, and alliteration all in the same poem? That would be a really good author.” She finished this short part of the lesson by

saying, “On TCAP, it may say repetition, it may say repeating. Either way, that’s okay with you. You know they mean the same thing.”

I would be remiss at this point if I did not stop and allow the reader time to admire the instruction captured in the preceding paragraph. Embedding an element of poetry in a real poem (from a real book given to the teacher by a real person) and asking students to listen (as a wonderfully fluent reader reads it) and then identify examples of the element, although still a practice situated at the lowest level of Bloom’s taxonomy, is a far cry instructionally from teaching students to hold words that the basal reader presents as vocabulary words and definitions in short term memory and match those, after practicing under the supervision of the teacher all week, successfully on a test on Friday.

Meaning Shift: Pre to Post

In the interview with Mrs. Samuels, the pre-shift period was not discussed very much at all. As soon as I began to discuss the disappearance of small groups and centers in the fall, Mrs. Samuels began to explain her meaning shift. I will include her words verbatim, allowing her to explain her meaning shift in her own words. After the interview data, I will share more post-shift data concerning assessment and instruction. .

Mrs. Shelley: “The reason that I decided to change from just doing centers and me working with a small group is because I noticed that, that group of students (her 2010-2011 students) had more difficulty with reading – they could not read - and I needed something not just for, needed something for whole group, for whole group – not just a handful of kids. I had two whole classes that struggled with reading, and so it put a whole new light on there.”

Researcher: “But you still tried to keep them at grade-level, or at least it looked like to me that you did.”

Mrs. Shelley: "I did try to keep them at grade-level, tried to have them do things expected of fourth graders."

Researcher: "You had some help…"

Mrs. Shelley: "Yes."

Researcher: "And you used it wisely."

Mrs. Samuels: "Yes, the help was good."

Researcher: "But still we talked about, we immediately talked about whether that was a good set-up, whether or not RtI would work."

Mrs. Samuels seemed to be remembering now.

Mrs. Samuels: "The inclusion group which was not really inclusion at all. It was an entire low-level group, with everybody in there including the IEPs. I struggled with letting them be in a center by themselves. They just had a difficult time being able to do it behavior-wise, and so I just, with the Daily Five, I still did centers but they weren't in…they were paired together which seemed to be a better fit for them just to be with one other person rather than three other students. They had a bag of stuff that was geared for their reading level, and then it had also items in it that they had chosen. With that lower level group it just seemed to fit. It started with my inclusion class first, that lower group, and it didn't start until October, because I was out…"

We discussed that, no, she wasn't out until the spring semester of that year. The principal of the school where Mrs. Samuels is now assistant principal came in and we talked for a moment.

As he leaves, Mrs. Samuels and I discussed the assistant principal's job she is in currently. With the new evaluation model brought in as a part of First to the Top, we discussed

how many hours it takes to observe and then score those. Mrs. Samuels said there are several areas in each evaluation but added that it is thorough. She was and still is always the optimist.

We returned to the discussion we were having before the principal came in.

Mrs. Samuels: "So, why I switched to the Daily Five…"

I told her that the main reason I was there is that I want to make sure that what I think I saw is what I saw. While she continues to think, I said a little again about RtI having been bumped by FttT, and that Mrs. Shelley had said that she felt that happened, too. I said, "Certainly you felt asked and expected to do RtI, but there was not much emphasis on it in that fall semester that I was in your classrooms. She said, "Uh-uh. No. And you can only spin so many plates."

I asked her what I had asked Mrs. Shelley about fidelity checks. I briefly described what I mean and then asked, "Do you remember anything like that?"

Mrs. Samuels: "No, I don't ever think there were any. I mean, you came and did an inservice during the summer before that 2009 school year, but really there were never any plans in place for what people were to do for RtI. We were told to kind of document. We had RtI meetings there. But as far as centers and small groups, I think we just took from your inservice. You came and did a sign up sheet. Then I know [curriculum supervisor's name] got us some resources, but it was not a thing of 'This is what you're going to do.' It was kind of a choice."

Researcher: "Do you realize that possibly you and [Mrs. Shelley] were a minority in the building, as far as going through with it? She told me that she negotiated it to three days a week and that they sort of agreed to that, leaving Monday and Friday to…"

Mrs. Samuels: "What's interesting about that, what is so interesting…Daily Five kind of mirrors what we were doing; it was very similar. Very similar. Now,

now school-wide they *have* to do Daily Five."

Researcher: “I know, and it’s a lot of work.”

She whispered as though she’s tired of people saying that, “No, it’s not!”

She continued, “And then we’ve added a 7th grade class doing it here. The supervisor of instruction wants us to kind of encourage and talk with the sixth grade here about next year because what we’re finding is it’s really hard for these teachers to reach anything that’s on the rubric for a five on this rubric (indicates the new evaluation model we discussed earlier) because the instructional piece is so project-based. And with Daily Five, working in the centers and working with small groups, you can accomplish that.”

I responded, “Wow, that’s great.”

I returned to the discussion of the fall semester at Eastwood Elementary School the year I observed in her classroom. I said, “Well, what I think I saw was the non-emphasis on RtI, but also it was a new school year, and I didn’t see a lot of small groups and centers which was totally expected, but then nobody was really pushing RtI. And of course in your situation, did kids ever go out of your room to go to intervention?” She answered, “Yes, uh-hum, yes, they sure did.” I went on describing what I think happened, that is, in their situation, because the RtI framework wasn’t there as much, “You all still knew that you had to differentiate in order to reach kids.” As I talked, Mrs. Samuels was indicating that she agrees, saying, “Yes, yes.”

Researcher: “So you looked around and knew this person who did the Daily Five and then you began to look at it. I remember the first time I saw the book…” She picked up the thought and said, “Well, I was thinking about doing it, and I said, ‘Look, I’m thinking about doing this”.

Researcher: “And you had all those sticky notes all through it and I said, ‘Let me get you the book. And, yeah, and you started it.”

Mrs. Samuels took us back to when I had asked why she switched to the Daily Five. “I don’t know. I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh, these kids can’t read, these kids can’t read, what am I going to do, what am I going to do?’ I almost went into panic mode because I thought what *am* I going to do? My TCAP scores are going to be… (indicates with her thumb down, and makes a negative noise to go along with that).”

And then we both smiled because I already know. They weren’t; her scores were really good, as were Mrs. Shelley’s. But the school’s overall scores were not. We discussed that for a moment, and then Mrs. Samuels said, “And I was like, “Shoot, I wish I could have continued on. I was glad to kind of go out like that, but…and who knows what factored into that. Who knows if it was Daily Five.” I agreed with her that the good scores could have been attributed to many things, but then I said, “But it probably was Daily Five. It was amazing to watch those kids as they interacted with each other. I mean I have audio and notes of some of those discussions where I just had to step back and go ‘Wow’ when kids would say stuff.”

Mrs. Samuels said with a smile, “Yeah.” I continued, “Kids would say, ‘Remember that other book that we did that,’…I mean, I was just looking back at my notes…”

Mrs. Samuels: “They were once again excited about reading.”

Researcher: “Well, they got it!”

Mrs. Samuels: “They were making connections…”

Mrs. Samuels: “You should see our seventh grade teacher, and it’s seventh grade inclusion.”

Researcher: “Who is giving her guidance?”

Mrs. Samuels: "She's doing a lot on her own. [Two district supervisors] have bought her some materials to use. Instead of doing the charts, you know how I would bring them to the chart, she's doing PowerPoint."

Researcher: "Oh, that's nice."

Mrs. Samuels: "Yeah, you know 7th graders sitting on the floor in front of a chart is not cool."

Researcher: "Well, it was hard even in your room, some of those classes that were large….hard to get everybody back there."

Post-Shift Period

Later in the interview, I asked Mrs. Samuels about her understanding of RtI. As I explained earlier, we both had a sheet with the basic elements of RtI listed. I walked her through those. We established that Mrs. Samuels provided adequate instruction in Tier 1.

Researcher: "And then you were monitoring their progress,"

Mrs. Samuels: "Uh-hum."

Researcher: "More so do you think with the Daily Five than any other time? You knew each kid…"

Mrs. Samuels: "Yes, yes, because I kept, you know I had the data notebook, and I kept notes on every child that I saw."

Researcher: "Yes."

Mrs. Samuels: "I made a point to see lower achieving students at *least* every day. I tried. And I kept notes on that." She pauses, and then goes on, "That's one reason that I could SEE it being worth it because if you're keeping notes on their progress,"

Researcher: "Right…"

Mrs. Samuels: "And I even did that with small groups, so…"

Researcher: "And then do you remember those days when I was in there, I don't remember how many times I was there, but I know you did it a lot. When you took what they did on the ThinkLink, and you just zeroed in on the standards? You had…"

Mrs. Samuels: "…small groups…"

Researcher: "…like little kits, yes, and you had things ready for us, and we did the small group." I paused for just a minute to give her time to think and then continued, "Did you keep some data on that? You knew when kids, you sort of monitored the progress to see when they got it."

Mrs. Samuels says, "Yes, ThinkLink scores, you mean, like how did I assess after I worked with them in a small group if they improved? Their next ThinkLink. "

I allowed the interview transcript to stop on those final words of Mrs. Samuels because I wanted to point out that as much as she had shifted her thinking concerning student data and meeting with students about their personal reading, Mrs. Samuels continued to see ThinkLink as an assessment from without. There were banks of grade-level questions from ThinkLink available for teachers to use between benchmark assessments. I was in systems where school personnel spent much time and effort to make 10-question progress monitoring type assessments by drawing from those question banks. These were used to formatively assess student progress on the standards after intervention was provided to address documented standards-based learning needs. It surprised me in the interview when Mrs. Samuels said she waited for the next ThinkLink benchmark assessment to see if the very purposeful work she had prepared and we had helped her use in those small groupings had been enough or if students needed more.

I did think about those small groupings and know that at least in that ThinkLink re-teaching work Mrs. Samuels' allowed all adults in the room to act as the teachers of a small group; I was even trusted as the researcher to lead a small instructional group at least once, maybe twice while I was in the classroom. I gladly accepted when asked and was able to gain first-hand understanding of the incredible small group instruction Mrs. Samuels had prepared. Earlier, in the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year but pre-shift, Mrs. Samuels, in a brief discussion that she had instigated with me about the lack of small groups and centers because of the behavioral issues with her very lowest performing group of students, indicated to me as she appeared to be thinking aloud that she could allow the other two adults (special education teacher and ELL assistant) to lead a reading group while she led one. That would give those students small group time. And then she said, "But, how would I keep the groups together?"

I conclude Mrs. Samuels' case study by sharing the situation and exact statement that I believe served as the catalyst for Mrs. Samuels' meanings filter transformation. In the spring semester of the 2009-2010 school year, during one of my final visits to the classroom for that semester, Mrs. Samuels told me that the principal there at Eastwood was strongly leaning toward having the fourth grade students grouped in ability groupings for the 2010-2011 school year. I remained in the researcher role and purposefully guarded both my face and my words so that I did not express approval or disapproval of that decision. Having been a school-level administrator for ten years in a school similar to Eastwood, I knew that sometimes decisions such as that one were based in very difficult situations that only insiders could know and understand. I also knew that Mrs. Samuels had a deep respect for the principal. I did, too. Every time I came in and out of the school office for observations, she made me feel welcome in so many ways.

In the fall, on my first visit to Eastwood, Mrs. Samuels and I were discussing her schedule to set my observation parameters and get IRB forms into the hands of the right group(s) of kids, and Mrs. Samuels told me that her classes were, in fact, ability grouped, scheduled so that she would see them "low to high" each day. Mrs. Samuels did not appear to be bothered by the groupings, but that may have been because she was so excited that she was "just teaching reading this year." Mrs. Samuels described one of the classes of class struggling students as very, very low and then immediately said,

"But that's okay. I'm going to row the boat until it sinks."

That is the phrase that I believe was the catalyst for Mrs. Samuels' meanings filter shift. As I heard Mrs. Samuels say those words that day, I believed based on my first semester of observations in her classroom that the emphasis in her words was not on the sinking of the boat. As I observed for a second semester in her classroom, eventually interviewed her, and was able to remain aware of her success as she became an administrator in the district, I did not ever believe Mrs. Samuels intended to row furiously while allowing anything of which she was a part to sink. I have empirical data that give me reason to believe she was probably referring not to student learning but to her own instruction as the boat that could sink. And, continuing in that thinking, I believe that Mrs. Samuels simultaneously rowed and bailed out water from the very first moment she took the instructional stage in her classroom with those new groupings of students.

Conclusion

I observed in the classrooms of these two teachers for two semesters and completed our formal work together by conducting an ethnographic interview with each of them. I have studied

and analyzed the data from these observations and interviews and written a descriptive case study of each teacher included here in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Mrs. Shelley, the third grade teacher with the background in special education, negotiated the district's RtI policy down to a three-days-a-week schedule that fit nicely into the basal reading series instructional routine she trusted. When FttT came along and all eyes in the district office shifted to it, Mrs. Shelley eliminated the structure of Tier 1 RtI in her classroom but maintained practices that she believed addressed struggling students.

Mrs. Samuels, the fourth grade teacher with a background in Title I instruction, did much the same as Mrs. Shelley in the spring semester in which I first observed. As the fall semester began and she realized that even her large whole class instruction was not going to be effective with the lowest performing groups of students she taught each day, she abandoned ship and inserted the Daily Five into her classroom routines. In doing so, Mrs. Samuels reported that she was more aware of her students as readers and, in my interpretation of her instruction, she became somewhat less focused on the standards-based assessments that she had at one time seemed so determined to teach through whole class instruction.

In chapter 5, I share my closing thoughts that will include providing what I believe to be the answers to my research questions concerning each teacher and her students, further interpretations of the themes in this research, and finally make recommendations for further research and practice based on the knowledge I have gained through this research study and dissertation process.

CHAPTER 5

Interpretations and Implications

Introduction

In this chapter, I offer interpretations and suggest implications based on the findings shared in Chapter 4. I first situate my study within the context of prior research on the topics introduced in the review of the literature in Chapter 2, including the history and identification of Learning Disability and the theory and practice of both Response to Intervention and policy implementation in education. Yin (2009) contended that case studies "like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 15). Agreeing, I offer interpretations and implications from the findings of my case studies with no pretense of generalizing this research to populations or universes. I do submit that the detailed descriptive data of the teachers' points of view allow me to generalize the findings of these two case studies to theoretical propositions and will do so in the implications.

I accept the above limitation of case study methodology. Nonetheless, I submit that my findings derive from research that approaches if not meets the "five general characteristics of an exemplary case study" and therefore "help [my] case study to be a lasting contribution to research" (Yin, 2009, p. 185). These general characteristics state that the case study must 1.) be significant 2.) be "complete" (p. 186) 3.) consider alternative perspectives 4.) display sufficient evidence, and 5.) must be composed in an engaging manner. I conclude the interpretations section of this chapter by referring the reader back to specifics that address each of these characteristics in an effort to validate the rigor of this research and its findings.

Interpretations

The questions in this research were anchored in the prevailing question in all qualitative research, "What is happening here?" As described in Chapter 4, the ELA and literacy experiences of students were "the happening" with the "here" being a third grade teacher's and a fourth grade teacher's classroom instruction framed in RtI. Having hopefully "sensitized" (Knafl and Howard, 1984, p. 21) the reader to the perspectives of these two teachers through the detailed descriptions provided in Chapter 4, I undertake in this final chapter to interpret the findings in my study with the intent of proposing the missing element of the prevailing question, the "what."

My Journey Into the Data

After struggling through a long and challenging process of categorization and theme identification in the data set containing my classroom observations, which I describe below, I found the archival documents and the teacher interview transcripts to be less problematic. I initially coded my observation field notes based upon a self-conceived and misguided belief that I first needed to prove the teachers' effectiveness (and the validity of my participant choices) with specific instances from the research and guiding principles of relevant professional organizations. In my earnest efforts to validate my research, I focused on validating my choice of participants instead. I labeled the classroom observation texts with a variety of three, four, and five digit codes that I had created from the characteristics of excellent reading teachers as described by the Tennessee Reading Policy and the position statement of the International Reading Association.

Using a combination of scrutiny and repetition techniques as described by Ryan & Bernard (2003) for coding that is supposed to lead to the discovery of themes, I analyzed the text

of my field notes, identifying and labeling with these codes phrases I had written during the observations and sometimes teacher or student dialogue I had captured verbatim. I was discriminately almost word counting, but only counting and collecting the words that fit into my categories and not concerned with the many, many words that did not. I had no plan for explaining the items that didn't fit into a category. I had collected many pages of data and felt compelled to work with them, right or wrong.

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, my excuse for temporarily all but abandoning what I had learned in my doctoral literacy and research classes is that I believe I experienced a very slight and temporary case of Stockholm syndrome. The RtI culture that I describe later in this chapter eventually reduced my understanding of Response to Intervention to a formulaic process that was solely about identifying LD. Although in my professional development trainings I believed and said many times, "If Tier I is not strong, the other tiers won't matter," I watched system after system skip right past the hard work of establishing strong Tier I instruction and focus instead on which assessment would be cheapest, take the least time, upset teachers the least; I heard time and time again that DIBELS data were sending students to special education; and Doug Fuchs, a professor of special education at Vanderbilt, and not Richard Allington, a UT teacher education professor with expertise in literacy, was lauded at the state level and invited as the keynote speaker for large state conferences. As First to the Top took precedence and the RtI train (such as it had become) was derailed, I became more isolated from the perspectives of RtI as an ark (including struggling students in responsive literacy instruction) and fixated instead on RtI as the predictor of rain (identification of struggling students as handicapped).

My two teachers did not focus on RtI for LD identification, and, in my condition at that time, I could not discern in their instruction any understandings of LD and RtI as the state had formulated it—a way to refer students for special education. I sat in my vehicle in their school parking lot one early fall day after classroom observations with both teachers, put my head down on my steering wheel, and said out loud to myself, "I am going to have to call Dr. McGill-Franzen and tell her I have to start over. There's nothing here to see."

I had the intelligence not to call Dr. McGill-Franzen with that news, but I know now that a clarifying conversation with her at that point would have most likely served to pull me back. She did, in fact, in more than one conversation remind me that RtI was not only about the identification of LD. Neither seeking nor recounting her guidance, I continued with the research as planned, smiling and keeping all apprehensions to myself as I continued to observe in the classrooms. I concluded official classroom visits and began living with a binder of field notes that haunted me as much as any tell-tale heart that Poe ever imagined. Based on my numerous codings, I believed I could prove that both of the teacher participants exhibited moments of excellent reading instruction, but that was not the focus of my research.

I attended the Literacy Research Association Conference in December of 2010 as my official classroom visits were concluding and received a very recently published pamphlet entitled "Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators from the International Reading Association" (2010) by attending an early morning study group where one of those responsible for editing the principles was invited to speak. Not surprisingly, very soon after arriving home with pamphlet in hand I developed codes and coded the pages of my field notes once again. With these codes, I began to recognize practices that were in fact RtI in the two

classrooms, but, still overwhelmed by the data and at a very busy time professionally, I remained relatively unsuccessful in organizing my findings at that time.

In the summer of 2010, when the First to the Top (FttT) express collided with the RtI train and derailed it, I see in hindsight that there was actually benefit to my work as both a SPDG consultant and as a researcher. School systems lost the time and effort they had formerly given to RtI with the help of the SPDG consultants and instead were compelled to schedule trainings and focus on the elements of the FttT initiative. FttT compliance was directly correlated to federal funding channeled through the state department, and the Director of Schools in every Tennessee school district had signed a letter of intent to participate that was included in the FttT proposal; districts' choice to let all things not associated with FttT fall to the wayside was a matter of survival.

As many districts cancelled themselves off of my calendar, I found myself working almost exclusively with school system personnel that understood that if they continued to encourage teachers to provide effective, differentiated instruction based on assessment data that showed what the student knew and needed next in his learning, a stance embodied in Response to Intervention, FttT and all of its components would be addressed.

In the end, long after I completed data collection, I discovered that those schools and school systems that had embraced RtI as an instructional method rather than as only an LD identification process were prepared for the new state teacher evaluation model and other changes associated with FttT. The period, from 2010 to 2012, was a time of much transition and anxiety, but outside evaluators of the SPDG collected data demonstrating that school districts that had accepted and followed the direction of the SPDG consultants concerning RtI actually all achieved higher TCAP scores than other Tennessee systems (Tennessee SPDG, 2013).

I was finally able to categorize my classroom observation data and share my findings in this chapter when my dissertation chairperson required me to show her examples of my coded field notes and directed me to reorganize my observation data in the chart described earlier. With that guidance, I began making progress toward understanding what I had seen and how it did in fact provide insight into the teachers' understanding of LD and RtI and the students' resulting experiences. My dissertation chairperson eventually and with much effort stopped me from evaluating and judging what I had seen and documented and from trying to establish the motive in every piece of observational data. I believed both participants to be incredible teachers, and I was determined to defend them to the reader of this dissertation. The teachers and I were connected when I physically ventured into their world for one year and then continued to re-live that year as I agonized over the data that they had so graciously allowed me to collect. The irony was that I finally saw through my coding that the teachers in my research needed no defense. I could relax and share their stories.

My chair led me to document only what I saw, not my opinion of what I saw. I was then able to code the data in a less-biased way, grouping concepts as I continually read and asked myself the question, "What is this expression an example of?" rather than if it was "best practice," "strong," or "effective instruction," a few of my favorite phrases. Ryan and Bernard (2003) write, "You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, 'What is this expression an example of?' Themes can be described as the conceptual linking of expressions" (p. 87-88). Expressions are not limited to text; they can also be found in "images, sounds, and objects" (p. 87). The question concerning themes reminded me of the basic question of qualitative research that I had heard often in my research courses with Dr. Trena Paulus:

"What is happening here?' I had no trouble discovering themes once I was grounded back in what I had originally proposed to do.

Archival Documents.

Although I was not able to fully capture the "culture" of the two classrooms in my study for reasons communicated later in this paper, I began and conducted this research as a native in a culture that included Response to Intervention as it corresponded and collided with other educational paradigms nationally, at the state level, and in the school district in which a portion of this research occurred. In fact, according to what some consider to be the first definition of "culture" by Edward Tylor, (1871, as cited in Buyandelger, 2012), I was a native. Tylor's definition of culture states that "Culture…is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871, as cited in Buyandelger, 2012, p. 1). My work as a consultant with the state project authorized to lead in the dissemination of RtI information to and consultation concerning RtI with school systems across Tennessee allowed me to evolve as a member of the RtI culture nationally, at the state level, and in local school systems.

National Culture of RtI.

I was presented with multiple opportunities to listen to and interact with renowned researchers and leading voices in reading, reading disability, and working with low-achieving children as the nationwide RtI culture developed. Anne McGill-Franzen, the chairperson of my dissertation committee and one of my instructors at the University of Tennessee, was well respected in the reading and disability professional community and well published in the leading research journals in those fields. I was fortunate to sit under her teaching concerning early literacy where we read and learned from a pre-published draft copy of her book Kindergarten

Literacy (2006) used as our text. Dr. McGill-Franzen's instruction and textbook allowed me to know and understand true assessment and instruction in an RtI culture where schools were overwhelmingly purchasing and using DIBELS for assessment and scripted programs for instruction.

Dick Allington, author of *What Really Matters in RtI* (2009) and *No Quick Fix, The RTI Edition: Rethinking Literacy Programs in America's Elementary Schools* (2007) was also a faculty member at the university where I was a doctoral student and was a valued member of my dissertation committee. I listened and acquired a deep understanding of what RtI should involve as Dr. Allington taught in my doctoral courses and presented his research and thinking at national and international conferences where his work and leadership were well respected and valued.

While I was a student in their classes, Drs. McGill-Franzen and Allington were the editors of the 2010 premier edition of *The Handbook of Reading Disability Research*. The table of contents featuring the chapter authors and section editors reads as a who's who in the area of reading disability, assessment, and remediation. Again, being seated not virtually but literally at the table to hear the two editors discuss these chapters as they were being submitted and edited, chapters that according to Dr. McGill-Franzen (2010) in the prologue of the book "represent the breadth of paradigms on reading disability and the research within these paradigms" (p. xii) provided me with a view and understanding of reading disability that situated me as a member of the national culture on RtI.

Additionally, as the Common Core State Standards were introduced and states began adopting them as their curriculum, Dr. McGill-Franzen was asked to serve on a panel at the IRA annual conference to discuss the implications of the CCSS and RtI. I was working in school

systems that had already begun asking real questions about this topic, so I had previously gathered as much research-based guidance as I could on that subject. Dr. McGill-Franzen was able to incorporate what I had located and discussed with schools as a part of her thinking for this panel discussion. When she was then asked to author a chapter in the book *Quality Reading Instruction in the Age of Common Core Standards* (2013), Dr. McGill-Franzen invited me along as a co-author. Our chapter is entitled, "RTI and the Common Core."

The research and theoretical stances of Dr. McGill-Franzen and Dr. Allington were by far the strongest influences as I worked in the SIG and developed as both a researcher and a literacy expert, but theirs were not the only perspectives to which I was exposed. I heard nationally recognized special education and RtI researchers Doug and Lynn Fuchs share their findings and thoughts based on their data several times during this period. I was present as University of Texas colleagues of Sharon Vaughn discussed their RtI research there. I listened and took extensive notes as Dr. Rita Bean described the work that she and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh were leading in Pennsylvania where they had chosen to call their tiered-instructional initiative Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII).

Although certainly not nationally recognized myself, I had the opportunity to present sections of my own RtI research findings and thinking at more than one national conference. In those presentations, I followed the sage advice of UT professor Dr. Amy Broemmel and included in my presentations the areas of my research where I desired input and support from participants, some of whom were nationally-recognized RtI researchers. I was a highly invested participant in the national RtI culture.

Learning Disability Identification.

The use of an IQ test and ability test discrepancy in the identification of a learning disability was mistrusted by many (Fuchs et al., 2001) when the research was proposed, and that identification continues to be an area of much disagreement. In a recent search concerning the ongoing issue, I read for the first time an article (Siegel, 2012) containing what I believed to be original thinking of mine that I had included in Chapter 2 of this paper, that of metaphorically comparing the definition and identification of LD to the title character in "The Emperor's New Clothes" (Andersen, 1837). Siegel (2012) referenced her own research from as early as 1984, sharing that she "…published a number of papers advocating more precise definitions, based on achievement test scores and a recognition that there were at least two different subtypes (a reading disability and an arithmetic disability) and that not all children and adults with SLD were the same" (p. 64). Siegel's "black sheep of the learning disability field" (p. 64) proposal was simple: if a child is low achieving academically, he or she should receive help. She shared some thinking that serves only to add to the suspicions of the current identification of LD and then offered what appear to be simple and yet viable alternatives for determining who needs support. Siegel viewed RtI as having possibilities if the programs are "excellent" (p. 74).

In that same search of the EBSCO host database for current thinking about the "identification of a learning disability" I found another 35 search results with publication dates between 2010 and 2013 that align with one of the three methods of learning disability identification—IQ discrepancy, RtI, or both-- and so it appears reasonable to stop here and situate my research in the existing literature. First and foremost in the anchoring of my data, it is important to note that my findings concerning the definition and identification of a learning disability involved real academically struggling children and real teachers trying to meet the

instructional needs of those children. I see that as a detail worth emphasizing, and although my data derive from and are limited by the teachers' own experiences, their words yield findings similar to those of Siegel (2012), Zirkel (2013) and others.

When asked in the interviews to define a learning disability, Mrs. Shelley voiced her own thinking, and it aligned with Siegel's (2012) very profound idea of simply recognizing and helping the children that needed help. Classroom observations and video recordings captured Mrs. Shelley's work with struggling students at the small group table and documented her strong attraction to the most academically needy students in many classroom organizational patterns throughout the day. Mrs. Shelley, a former special education teacher, explained her lack of having made any referrals while I was observing in her classroom by saying, "…I didn't feel the need for them to get an IEP. I guess with my background, I took it upon myself just to go ahead and do what I felt was needed for that child …to succeed."

There are some obvious differences between Siegel's (2012) thinking and Mrs. Shelley's answer in the interview and work in the classroom. In Siegel's work, a child with a learning disability has an unexpected inability when he is in the academic setting. Siegel described it this way, "Learning disabilities are defined as significant difficulties in reading, spelling, computational arithmetic, mathematics and/or writing in spite of average or above average intelligence" (p. 65). I depended on the like thinking of Johnson and Mellard (2006) as I tried to guide teachers in a few school systems (that requested this work) to establish a working knowledge of distinctions between LD and low achieving. One of the main phrases I would ask them to hold on to was the idea of "unexpected given the student's ability" (Johnson and Mellard, 2006, website).

Siegel (2012) further suggested that the IQ discrepancy testing be replaced with real time assessments that not only provide information about the student's ability but are also assessments that guide, assessments that can be administered in a formative way to ascertain the effectiveness of the teaching. This researcher did not observe Mrs. Shelley in her classroom doing that type of work with students. I believe that in classrooms just like Mrs. Shelley's, to have a student "succeed" traditionally meant to have him get through the classwork in whatever venue he could garner the help: in the general education classroom in small group or whole group, in the Title 1 classroom, in the special education classroom, or at home with the parent telling him the answers. Success was not about long-term literacy that would prepare the student for life.
Success was about finishing the work well enough to receive a passing grade and move on. In those small group sessions in Mrs. Shelley's room, her help for those needy students to whom she was attracted was basically support that resulted in the right answer in the blank. Enough answers in blanks resulted in passing grades. Enough passing grades resulted in promotion. Such classrooms present a "Wait to Fail" model. Or, as Lindstrom and Sayeski (2013) call it in their table entitled "Shared Criticisms of Ability-Achievement Discrepancy and Response to Intervention Approaches for SLD Identification" (p. 9), it may be more accurately described as a "Watch Them Fail"(p. 9) model.

In a separate interview, Mrs. Samuels expressed the same basic orientation concerning struggling students, and her classroom instruction aligned with that expressed stance. In the fall semester when Mrs. Samuels discovered that one entire class of the fourth-grade students she was trying to teach in her traditional whole-group instruction couldn't read well enough to successfully accomplish independent reading of grade-level texts, she shifted her classroom

instructional methods to include more opportunities to meet students, incorporating the Daily Five organization into her instructional work.

I did not directly ask Mrs. Samuels about her beliefs concerning the validity of the discrepancy definition for identification of LD, but I did ask Mrs. Shelley, mostly because of her background in special education. Mrs. Shelley's experienced opinion aligned with Hale's (2010) method of using both RtI and discrepancy testing for LD identification. The interview transcript shows Mrs. Shelley hesitating when hearing that school systems were identifying students through the RtI process exclusively and adding that she believed some testing was appropriate.

Response to Intervention and Policy Implementation.

RtI and policy implementation are addressed jointly in this section because the research-recognized definition of the RtI framework (Fuchs et al., 2003, p. 159), that is, a fully-implemented, district-enforced RtI policy did not directly affect the classroom instruction of the two teachers and the learning experiences of their students in this research and, therefore, were "unseen" in the findings.

Interpretation of My Results As They Stand Alone

I shared in Chapter 4 that the assessment practices and choices in the two teachers' classrooms perplexed me as the researcher. The assessment practices and choices in the two teachers' classrooms that perplexed me as the researcher also seemed to perplex them. As a person with a healthy understanding of assessment practices, I examined assessment in these two classrooms from within, from without, as it occurred, and as it was overlooked, but this particular major category in this research continues to perplex me even as I interpret the findings here.

Following the thinking of Ryan and Bernard (2003), I situate my findings concerning assessment using a list that they included that explains the qualities that represent the importance

of a theme, especially in a cultural system like a classroom or school. Ryan and Bernard (2003) shared these as "1.) how often it (the theme) appears, 2.) how pervasive it is across different types of cultural ideas and practices, 3.) how people react when the theme is violated, and 4.) the degree to which the theme's expression is controlled by context" (p. 87).

The theme of assessment appeared from the beginning to the end of this research study, and in many ways, it was "pervasive across different types of cultural ideas and practices" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). As would be expected, in every observation recorded in both classrooms there were either assessments discussed, assessments conducted, or assessment opportunities bypassed. Both teachers were very aware of assessments from without, teaching to the standards assessed by the TCAP and the ThinkLink benchmark assessment, keeping data notebooks and having students publicly plot their unidentifiable ThinkLink scores in the hallway as a constant reminder of the score and the improvement goal.

The assessments the teachers could not control appeared to drive their instruction while the formative assessments that they actually could control, assessments that would give direction to their instruction, were habitually bypassed. Neither teacher used questions from the formative piece of the ThinkLink assessment to gain information concerning student ongoing knowledge and growth toward the benchmark test marks.

In thinking about how each teacher reacted when her idea of assessment was violated, there is one incident involving each teacher that I can recall. The single incident perhaps the closest to a violation involving Mrs. Shelley would be the one shared in Chapter 4. Although she did not continue to talk about it after a single mention, Mrs. Shelley indicated very early in our conversation about the school's report card that if the state department would treat the data in a certain way, Eastwood would be okay. The state department did not and the school joined a

group of struggling schools on a list that included as one of its punitive measures the letter that went home to parents. It is possible that in all of that Mrs. Shelley went back to the unfairness of the data combination, the violation of the theme of assessment. It would not have been like her to accuse or complain about the state department even as upset as she was when she showed me the letter.

Although I saw and know Mrs. Shelley's immediate reaction to the release of the report card data that resulted in the school's mandatory failing score, I do not know her ongoing concerns or actions about that violation of the themes of assessment. I do know that in the final interview, Mrs. Shelley shared a couple of changes that had been made in the school during the tenure of her administration as vice-principal. Again, I do not know that she was the leader in those changes, but I do know that the changes addressed concerns Mrs. Shelley had during the time in which I was a researcher in her classroom.

For Mrs. Samuels, the incident that I believe best represents her feelings about a violation of assessment occurred when she realized that the ability grouping of her students had created an unteachable grouping. She said in the transcript that she tells herself that they cannot read and then she immediately mentions the damage this may do to her TCAP scores. That is her language. Her reaction was well within the norms of what I had come to expect from both teachers.

Assessment was only minimally controlled by teachers in this research, but the two tests that were out of the teachers' immediate control were ThinkLink and the TCAP testing. In the days before and during this research, there were no negative repercussions for teachers attached to benchmark assessments in this district, and state assessment results had previously meant little for a variety of reasons. The standardized tests themselves lacked rigor. The standards they

assessed lacked rigor. The results arrived no earlier than six months after the administration of the assessments. The scores indicating proficiency were set at low levels. When I interviewed the teachers in their final interviews, we discussed the new teacher evaluations, but the two teachers were now administrators so were not directly impacted by the new state policies regarding data as a part of evaluation and teacher retention. Our discussion concerning violations of assessment might have been different if they had still been classroom teachers.

I saw "Big Ideas" in the documentation of classroom observations and informal conversations that occurred between researcher and teacher during the field experience. These ideas were compared and contrasted with the teachers' contextualized answers from the interviews. The themes concerning assessment that I formulated through this process were an absence of formative assessment created by an over reliance on summative assessment.

The basal reading test, the ThinkLink tests and the TCAP tests were the summative assessments that dominated the two classrooms. The basal reading test stood alone, I believe, in this grouping, and served simply as a grade to record in the teacher's grade book, closure to the traditional basal instruction for each week. At the time I was in the classrooms for this research, there was a movement among some teachers across the state to administer the basal reading test as an open-book test so that instead of students focusing on memorizing details from the story, the basal test was "repurposed" as an assessment of reading comprehension. I knew of teachers, especially in grades three and four, that were using the basal reading story and assessment as a reading inventory, having students read the story for the first time as they answered the reading test questions. I mentioned that "trend" to both teachers in this research but did not ever observe them change the purpose or format of the reading test.

The ThinkLink and TCAP tests were seen by the teachers as indicators of their teaching effectiveness more than evidence of student learning. These assessments were proposed to be aligned with state standards in a very new and rigorous standards-based culture that extended from the classroom to district, state, and federal levels. ThinkLink tests were seen as precursors for the TCAP. The TCAP assessment resulted in teacher, school, and district data that were released to the public.

Formative assessment opportunities were disregarded in both classroom settings throughout the data collection. As discussed previously, the one area in which I as the researcher stepped across the invisible line I had for myself as I observed in the classroom and became directly involved in student assessment was in Mrs. Shelley's room when I administered the QRI to her students in the fall semester. The results from that highly-regarded formative assessment were acknowledged by the teacher but were not used as instructional guidance, even though the researcher included notes on the papers of each student indicating next steps associated with student miscues and wrong answers. Mrs. Samuels knew about the QRI assessment in Mrs. Shelley's room but did not ask me to assist her in gaining valuable information concerning her students and their reading development.

I have discussed elsewhere other opportunities for formative assessment that were neglected by the teachers. I will discuss in the theme of instruction how formative assessment opportunities in these classrooms were additionally limited by the teacher-centered instructional methods.

Interpreting instruction by considering the qualities that measure the importance of a theme from the same list (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), the first two, the frequency and pervasiveness of the theme are obvious. Drilling down within the second quality to think about

instruction across different cultural ideas and practices, both teachers showed a strong propensity for whole group instruction although both conducted small group instruction especially during the first semester of the research study.

Both teachers, possibly because they saw themselves as the Holders of the Knowledge, were somewhat oblivious if not downright unappreciative of instruction that took place outside of their classrooms even it if was with their students. Mrs. Shelley made the choice to keep her students that needed intervention and provide that support herself. Mrs. Samuels was departmentalized with more students and probably less choice about when and from whom these students received academic support. She did indicate in the interview that additional adults, both professional and paraprofessional, were "good help," but she also balked at the idea at one time of allowing other adults to lead an instructional grouping in her classroom.

As I shared earlier, the centers and activities that the teachers included as a part of the rotation during the class periods in which I observed were low level, low engagement type activities. At one point, I offered, as "thank yous", to the two teachers for their graciousness, the supplies and directions needed to create a sticker story center for each of their classes. I had seen these in classrooms across the state and saw how students enjoyed the writing associated with the center. Both teachers said that my bringing those supplies to create a center would be great, so I did, making a center that I felt sure students would both enjoy and benefit from. Students did seem to really enjoy the center. As I continued to be in the classrooms, the writing produced in the sticker story center was shared with me, in Mrs. Samuels' classroom usually accompanied by a statement from her that included something to the effect, "Show Ms. Kandy what you did in her center." It was my center, created by me and seen by me as effective. The teachers, although seemingly very appreciative, did not take ownership.

A similar situation happened when I asked the teachers what they were doing with the Tennessee Academic Vocabulary (Tennessee Academic, 2009). After watching their standards-based instruction and the very controlled vocabulary instruction in these two classrooms and realizing how much I was doing as a consultant in other classrooms to enhance standards-based learning by encouraging teachers to abandon Tier 1 vocabulary instruction (aka the words from the basal story) and instead focus on Tier 2 words (with Tier 1 and Tier 2 here not referring to RtI but to the usage of the words), I mentioned to the two of them how helpful the inclusion of the TAV might be. I prepared several items that could initiate the inclusion of the TAV, including some very illustration-filled PowerPoints in which the words were featured and could be used for class review or center work. The teachers seemed appreciative of the materials, but I never saw the TAV materials used while I was in the classroom and never saw any indication that the materials were used when I was not there.

I conclude this section of the interpretations by stating I believe the two teachers owned instruction in their classrooms so much that they could not incorporate the suggestions or materials of someone else into their students' learning experiences.

I do not recall very many times when instructional time was violated other than those times like the day in Mrs. Shelley's room described in Chapter 4 where the writing on the white board indicated that the instructional day was going to be interrupted frequently by fund-raising reward activities. For the most part, the instructional time in the morning at Eastwood was protected from interruptions if at all possible.

The one time that I believe I could describe instructional expression as having been violated was in Mrs. Samuels' room when she realized that her traditional instructional method was not at all effective with the ability groupings she was teaching, and she transitioned toward a

different organizational method that did allow for more student-directed learning. The whole group instruction in the Daily Five framework continued to occupy the majority of the instructional time in Mrs. Samuels' classroom.

The "Big Ideas" concerning instruction that can be seen as patterns directly relate to the assessment themes that have already been presented. With standards-based summative assessment as the goal, whole group teacher-controlled instruction was the vehicle the teachers trusted for moving their students toward the goal. Grade level standards were offered to all students in the same way at the same time. The instruction in small groups was scaffolded by the teacher so that all students could complete, but not necessarily understand, the same work.

Symbolic Interactionism As an Organizing Framework.

Symbolic interactionism was introduced earlier as a part of my theoretical framework. As I explained earlier, I did not fully understand nor appreciate the theory in those initial pages. Recognizing and understanding symbolic interactionism was the turning point in organizing the data into results and findings. I will share more about symbolic interactionism as a part of my implications.

Research Questions: Summarizing the Interpretations.

My first research question was, "How does the teacher understand and define disability?" Both teachers answered this directly in their individual interviews, saying that they saw all children as having some type of need, such as an individual learning style or academic progress issue rather than a cognitive disability. Neither teacher referred a student for special education services during the study, and so I had no observational data of what the teacher's actions based on suspicions that might lead to a referral would include. We had no student to discuss as a point of reference for this question.

I did mention Sam to Mrs. Shelley in the interview as we discussed her understanding of a learning disability. My interview style may have affected her answers. She agreed with me but did not elaborate concerning her thinking about Sam. It is possible that because I administered an assessment that indicated that there was no disability concerning Sam's reading comprehension that both of us preferred to forego a discussion about why she initially thought there was possibly a disability.

Because of the teachers' graduate degrees and years of experience in both the general education classroom and in classrooms where struggling students received additional instructional support, I had reason to believe that both teachers should have had an understanding of at least the legal definition of a learning disability. Neither mentioned an understanding of the actual assessment and results from discrepancy testing, although Mrs. Shelley did mention the test as something for which she still saw a need as part of the referral process. I do not believe that my data provide more of an answer than the teachers provided in their direct answers as a part of the interview.

My summarized answer to the first question is that the teachers did not, according to my findings, understand the legal definition of a learning disability, the discrepancy testing that was used to identify a student as having a disability, the reason that RtI was being discussed as an alternative assessment for LD identification, or the instructional methods and strategies that would allow a struggling student with or without an IEP to have the opportunity to be successful in the general education classroom. I believe Mrs. Shelley's and Mrs. Samuel's lack of understanding represents the lack of understanding of many general education teachers.

The second question in this research was, "How does the teacher understand and implement Response to Intervention?" Both teachers indicated that they had received much of

their understanding of RtI from me as the SIG consultant to their district. I look back at the professional development that I delivered in the district and know what I shared, but I do not know for certain that both teachers were in all of those sessions. They were both familiar with the district's plan that involved assessment: ThinkLink as the benchmark assessments and programs like DIBELS and Study Island for official progress monitoring that resulted in data points. But, as I look at my calendar and add up the total hours of professional learning I led in that system, it is perhaps more than 30 but certainly less than 50 hours. The teachers' understanding based on only those hours would be expected to be limited at best.

The teachers' implementation of RtI was visually similar in the two classrooms in the spring semester of this study. They both had the room arrangement that was familiar to me as a consultant: an area for a small group instructional time with the teacher and then designated places where students would work with groups of peers when not working with the teacher. Both teachers had timers on their screens during the rotation. Entering the room in January, I had reason to believe that their understanding of RtI was similar to mine. I recognize now that in this research, that match between classroom and observer was not important. At the time, it was important to me, and I think it misled me at first to believe that these two teachers were, in fact, understanding and implementing RtI.

I do not have evidence in the results of this study that would indicate that either teacher understood or implemented RtI as a way to strengthen the daily reading instruction in the classroom or as a way to differentiate and formatively assess and reteach after seeing the student's academic position from that assessment. I also do not have evidence that would suggest that either of these teachers taught, assessed, responded in an ongoing cycle and then used the data from those interactions to, with a school-level team, make decisions about a student. Mrs.

Samuels indicated that there were team meetings. I believe those must have been traditional s-team meetings.

My final answer to the question of how Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels understood and implemented Response to Intervention is that they neither understood nor implemented RtI as a method for strengthening general education classroom instruction for all students nor as a method for the identification of a possibly learning disabled student who needed a more specialized instructional setting than general education might provide in order to progress academically at a typically-developing learning rate.

The third and final question in my study was, "How does the teacher's understanding influence the students' experiences in RtI?" As I observed in the classrooms, with the teacher's understanding of RtI unfortunately at the level of room arrangement and patterns of movement only, the students' experiences reflected that understanding. I have documentation in my classroom observation notes that show that students appeared excited to go to centers in both classrooms; I think that excitement was understandable because center work allowed for talking and mobility that was not allowed during whole group instruction. I did not ever record the teachers in either classroom indicating to students that the work created in centers would be assessed. If work in centers was not gathered and reviewed by the teacher, then students may have also regarded centers as including "free time" since there was no accountability.

The ThinkLink assessment was a part of the students' RtI experience, but I do not believe that what I captured of the teachers' understanding concerning RtI affected that benchmark assessment except perhaps in the one case where Mrs. Samuels used ThinkLink data to create small groups where instruction designed to specifically address individual student scores was

delivered to the students. I doubt that students understood those short sessions of instruction as a part of the RtI process because they were isolated and not a part of the normal classroom routine.

Those students that went to Tier 2 intervention from these classrooms probably had no idea what the time spent in those short sessions was about. Under the circumstances of the interventions at Eastwood Elementary, I believe the responsibility for helping students make the connections from the intervention sessions to the general education classrooms would have required much interaction between the classroom teachers and the interventionists. I believe that the two teachers in my research would have assumed responsibility for helping students make the connection if that were happening. I have no documentation to indicate that it was.

The summarized answer to my third question is that the students' experience directly reflected the teacher's understanding. My findings do not indicate that the teachers understood RtI as I believed I presented in professional development or as the district's plan suggested. Both teachers are highly intelligent, caring instructors that were motivated to provide excellent instruction to their students. The students' experiences in RtI were surface level changes in seating arrangements and the organization of instruction, not transformations of grade-level curricula or learning goals for individuals based on formative assessments. Somewhere in the process of offering RtI as policy to these two teachers, communication failed.

Conclusion.

If I were still a post-positivist, I would have had to at some point in this very long process reported back to my committee that my research had failed, adding that I saw none of what I believed would be seen, and going on to confess that I had gathered no data of importance in any way to education, I had chosen my teachers poorly, and that the results were worthless. I write those words believing that they are not true, and I ask the reader to return to Yin's (2009) five

general characteristics of an exemplary case study and weigh my research with me in the context of that thinking. As a reminder, Yin (2009) contends that the exemplary case study must 1.) be significant 2.) be "complete" 3.) consider alternative perspectives 4.) display sufficient evidence, and 5.) must be composed in an engaging manner (p. 186).

This research is significant. RtI is front and center in the state in which this research was conducted; the discrepancy model has been replaced with the RtI framework for the identification of a learning disability. The significance of assessment and instruction in student learning is obvious. There are teachers all across the state that are probably struggling to move from traditional instruction and assessment to student-centered instruction and formative assessment that will not only better fit the RtI framework but also support the six shifts associated with ELA instruction in the newly adopted Common Core State Standards.

Because this research was originally proposed as an ethnography, I believe there is a completeness to be found in the amount of time spent in the instructional setting with the two teachers. Unlike a 10-minute walkthrough, my observations were for the duration of the ELA/reading block so there is a complete element to the individual observations as well. I will concede that my findings represent only my observations of the classroom practices of two teachers at a time when few stakeholders in education, especially in Tennessee, understood LD or RtI, and there is therefore an incompleteness in my findings caused by a lack of overall guidance and support from outside of the classroom walls.

By situating the entirety of my findings in the organizing framework of symbolic interactionism, I have definitely considered alternative perspectives as I studied my data and shared the results and findings in this paper. Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Samuels were both effective teachers as judged by TCAP test scores, the district and their peers. They treated children kindly.

They worked hard and always appeared to love what they were doing. I have tried many times to put myself in their places and take on their meaning filters so that I could best understand what I am reporting here. I encourage the reader of this paper to do the same.

I wondered many times during this work if the two teachers' classrooms looked the same because they were friends or if the two teachers were friends because their two classrooms and professional stances were similar. I believe it was the latter. Both teachers were thinkers, strong women who seemed to know their own abilities and move from those.

I regretfully believe there is sufficient evidence to support the words I have used to state my findings around the themes of assessment and instruction and to share what I believe to be the most probable answers to the three research questions. It has been painful to me as the researcher to release these data knowing that it does not in many ways portray my respect and high regard for this year of work in the lives of these two educators. There is certainly the possibility that effective teachers do not have to follow a framework or policy in order to be effective.

And, finally, I have tried my best to compose my dissertation in an engaging manner, scattering metaphors and visuals throughout. I do, however, recognize the word "engaging" to be highly subjective.

Implications

I write these implications recognizing the limitations of case study methodology for generalization although believing that the findings from this research are important enough to being taken from the specific to the general so that inferences for other work can be made.

For Teacher Education.

I am a teacher educator. I teach literacy to undergraduate elementary teacher candidates and to secondary teacher candidates in a clinical model at a local high school. I also have the opportunity one evening a week to discuss literacy with a group of six women that are in an alternate licensure graduate program. I have thought about all of these teacher candidates and teacher education in general many times as I have completed the writing of this research.

I am hesitant to make too many broad, bold statements based on my findings from this research because, in some ways, life has already proven some of my beliefs wrong. An obvious statement, I believe, that I might make concerns the value of formative assessment as the only way to know students and guide their learning. This past fall in my premiere semester as a full time university instructor, I worked very hard to make certain that I prepared a formative assessment concerning the assigned reading each week. For an assessment to be truly formative, I feel that the element of chance that I believe exists in a multiple-choice question must be removed. My quizzes reflected that, and, after each class period during those first weeks of my first semester of teaching, I left the classroom with a stack of hand-written assessments containing information that is important for elementary literacy instruction. Those required many hours of reading and responding on my part as the instructor. I did the same for the mid-term and final. Again, many hours of reading were required to properly evaluate student learning. I not only saw those assessments as formative concerning student learning, I saw them as formative concerning my own instruction and made changes in my instruction based on those assessments.

In my midterm anonymous student evaluations, I received feedback complaining that I did not report grades in a timely manner (the assessments being formative, there were no grades) and that knowing that the quiz “didn’t count” made students not work hard. I also received

negative feedback because I had altered the sacred "Course Calendar" that states exactly what instructional topic the class will address each time we meet and what the assignment will be between each class meeting. I altered the Course Calendar, obviously, based on the information I received from students through those formative assessments. I continue to believe in the worth of formative assessment, but I offer it here to teacher educators with hesitancy from my own experience.

I also entered the university classroom with and continue to maintain a strong appreciation for student-centered learning, an appreciation that grew over the period of this research. Negative feedback directly addressing that student-centered approach also appeared on my students' evaluations, documents I am told by many to ignore, but documents that, to me, provide formative assessment, so I continue to read them and think about them. In the case of the feedback concerning my student-centered learning approach, students complained that I did not post PowerPoints on Blackboard and provide them with study guides so that they could give back to me as learning what I gave to them as instruction. They were looking for Professor-as-Container-of-Knowledge and some did not appreciate the amount of work that being a University-Student-as-Director-of-His-Own-Learning took. I did have one student that wrote that I was the hardest professor he had ever had, but that he also felt it was the first time he, as a junior, was in a true college course.

No doubt enough preoccupation with my own student evaluation results, I conclude by sharing that although I explained my theoretical stance and shared research to support both formative assessment and student-centered learning and modeled both although I continuously assured students their learning and understanding concerning early grades literacy instruction would be deeper and more complete, I am not certain that I changed the minds of many of the

students that are in training to be future educators. I will add that these choices that I made for instruction and describe here were with my elementary education teacher candidates.

There is another instructional component that comes as an implication from this work. I am striving to include what I suggest here in my own work, and I believe it would positively affect student learning in classrooms of all grade levels. This suggestion comes from my work as a part of this research around symbolic interactionism, academic optimism, and Robert Pianta's (1999) research concerning classroom interactions between teachers and students.

Symbolic interactionism has been discussed and interpreted throughout this paper. If there were a way in teacher education to assess the teacher candidate's "Me" understanding of his role as the teacher and the student's role as the learner, his "Me" understanding of instruction and assessment and other important concepts around teaching, I would be willing to administer that assessment to teacher candidates that were willing to participate in that assessment with real focus and intent. Based on the results of that assessment, I would then lead the teacher candidate to examine all meanings that conflict with the research and be willing to discard those, replacing them with an understanding in each of those areas that would not only strengthen the "Me" of the teacher candidate but also allow the "I" to be a part of what he does in his teacher education studies and in his future teaching.

If that could happen, I believe those teacher candidates would have what Hoy (2006, 2010) calls academic optimism. Academic optimism has also been explained earlier in this paper. Having it would enable each teacher to believe that he can teach and his students can learn, a belief that according to Hoy's research, positively affects students learning. Pianta's (1999, 2009) research would add to academic optimism a rich understanding of what respectful interactions like those described in the examples I have included in the case studies of the two

teachers in this research bring as value to the classroom. Pianta's work was brought to my attention at a very late time in this process, but will be discussed in my defense presentation and included or excluded as the committee directs.

My research describes two teachers that did not use formative assessment or student-directed learning and yet had very good test scores that were believed at the time of this study to represent student learning of high standards assessed at a very rigorous level. It could be that RtI does not matter a great deal in the face of teacher expertise in classroom teaching. I situate that statement in a need for further examination of the classroom instruction I observed in light of the work of Hoy (2006, 2010) and Pianta (1999, 2009). Teacher education, although certainly emphasizing student-directed learning and formative assessment, should also attempt to mold the thinking that teachers take with them into the classroom so that the classroom environment in which the student is learning and the teacher is teaching is conducive to accomplishing that very complicated and highly important work. I am not sure that an assessment and a specific curriculum for this will ever be possible, but I would suggest to teacher educators that we must first lead by modeling in our own courses at the university level.

For Additional Research.

There are so many things about which I would like to know more even after the amount of time it has taken me to complete this process. I would like to go back into a classroom in this same school now that RtI is mandated policy in Tennessee and observe what the differences between RtI as district-level policy that is never truly enforced and RtI as policy mandated from the state might be. The RtI^2 policy training has been conducted by school psychologists. I would be very interested in seeing if the training they have provided has penetrated the thick classroom walls better than I believe the training that I provided must have.

I teach in a state now were the RtI state policy stipulates that the needs of all learners be addressed in the tiers. Struggling readers as well as highly successful perhaps above grade level readers are to move into a Tier 2 intervention. I immediately wondered as I studied this state policy if the requirement for addressing all students' needs might help a teacher see the formative assessment that is necessary in order to differentiate instruction. I contend that many teachers were successful students and the parents of successful students. It would be interesting to attempt to gain a better understanding of how that might influence differentiation in a way that emphasizing the needs of struggling students has not. I could include in that research how the discontinuation of the use of TVAAS data affects differentiation if the lawsuits that were filed even today as I write this final section move forward successfully.

Finally, I do long for a better understanding of how the teachers in this research could care so very much about students and learning, and I write that believing that I captured data to support it, and yet remain so whole group and standards-based. In that same research, I would like to attempt to better understand how they maintained their effectiveness with students even as their instructional style bumped up against the research that holds a more constructivist approach toward teaching and learning.

Conclusion.

Attempting to gather and portray another person's understanding through observation and interview is some of the most difficult work I have ever undertaken. In the process of attempting to understand someone else, I have gained a much deeper understanding of myself and of the research process. I hold a deeply ingrained belief in the value and power of research, but I also contend that the research setting in this study, that of a school classroom, may be one of the most complex entities in any society. Research conducted in the classroom must be regarded as

difficult work in a complex setting. Findings gained from classroom research should be offered as fleeting glimpses of moments in that complexity of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families. (2002). Available at: https://education.ucf.edu/mirc/Research/President's%20Commission%20on%20Excellence%20in%20Special%20Education.pdfNCLD

Allington, R.L. (2002). Research on reading/learning disability interventions. In A. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 261-290). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Allington, R. L. (2008). *What really matters in Response to Intervention: Research-based designs.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Allington, R. L., & Walmsley, S. A. (1995). *No quick fix: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Andersen, Hans Christian – The Emperor's New Clothes – found at http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/68/fairy-tales-and-other-traditional-stories/5637/the-emperors-new-clothes/

Ash, G.E., Kuhn, M.R., & Walpole, S. (2009). Analyzing "inconsistencies" in practice: Teachers' continued use of Round Robin Reading. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *25*, 87–103.

Batsche, G.M., Kavale, K.A., & Kovaleski, J.F. (2006). Competing views: A dialogue on Response to Intervention. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, *32*(1), 6-19.

Beard, K., Hoy, W.K., and Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2010). Academic optimism of individual teachers: Confirming a new construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education. 26*(5), 1136-1144.

Berger, M., Yule, W., & Rutter, M. (1975). Attainment and adjustment in two geographical areas. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, *126*, 510-519.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Doolittle, J. (2007). Responsiveness to Intervention: 1997 to 2007. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 39*(5), 8-12.

Benton, B. (2010). Bredesen warns parents of 'reality' in TCAP scores. Timesfreepress.com. Available from: http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2010/sep/21/bredesen-warns-parents-reality-tcap-scores/

Bruner, E. (1973). The missing tins of chicken: A symbolic interactionist approach to culture change. *Ethos, 1*(2), 219-238.

Burawoy, M., Burton, A., Ferguson, A. A., Fox, K. J., Gamson, J., Gartrell, N., Hurst, L., Kurzman, C., Salzinger, L., Schiffman, J., & Ui, S. (1991*). Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Buyandelger, M. (2012). HCW Tylor's definition of culture: Session 2. How Culture Works. Fall 2010. MIT OpenCourseWare. http://ocw.mit.edu.

Cassidy, J., & Cassidy, D. (2009). What's hot for 2009. *Reading TODAY*, pp. 1, 8.

Cassidy, J., & Cassidy, D. (2010). What's hot for 2010. *Reading TODAY*.

Cassidy, J., & Cassidy, D. (2011). What's hot for 2011. *Reading TODAY*.

Cassidy, J. & Grote-Garcia, S. (2012). Defining the literacy agenda: Results of the 2013 *What's Hot, What's Not* literacy survey. *Reading Today*, 9-12.

Compton, D.L., Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., & Bryant, J.D. (2006). Selecting at-risk readers in first grade for early intervention: A two-year longitudinal study of decision rules and procedures. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(2), 394-409.

Cooley, C. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribner's,

Cortiella, C. (2011). *The state of learning disabilities.* New York, NY: National Center for Learning Disabilities.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 124-131.

Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cuban, L. (2013). *Inside the black box of classroom practice: Change without reform in American education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Cummings, K., Atkins, T., Allison, R., Cole, C. (2008). Response to Intervention: Investigating the new role of special educators. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 40*(4), 24-31.

Eisenhart, M. (2001). Educational ethnography past, present, and future: Ideas to think with. *Educational Researcher, 30*(8), 16-28.

Englert, K., Fries, D., Martin-Glenn, M., & Douglas, B. (2007). Accountability systems: A comparative analysis of superintendent, principal, and teacher perceptions. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 2*(4), 1-12.

Erickson, F. & Wilson, J. (1982). *Sights and sounds of life in schools: A resource guide to film and videotape for research and education.* East Lansing, MI: Institute for Research on Teaching of the college of Education at Michigan State University.

Federal guidelines for identification of a specific learning disability (2007). Retrieved July 26, 2008, from http://tennessee.gov/education/speced/doc/Spec_Learn_Dis.pdf.

Finn, P. (1999). *Literacy with an attitude*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Finnigan, K. & Gross, B. (2007). Do accountability policy sanctions influence teacher motivation? Lessons from Chicago's low-performing schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*, 594-630.

Firestone, W. A. (2001, October). The governance of teaching and standards-based reform from the 1970s to the new millennium. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from www.cepa.gse.rutgers.edu/Shortcut%20to%20Governabilitybib.lnk.pdf

Fletcher, J.M., Lyon, G.R., Barnes, M., Stuebing, K.K., Francis, D.J., Olson, R.K., Shaywitz, S.E., & Shaywitz, B.A. (2001). Classification of learning disabilities: an evidence-based evaluation. Paper presented at the Learning Disabilities Summit: Building a Foundation for the Future. Washington DC.

Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Florio, S., & Walsh, M. (1981). The teacher as colleague in classroom research. In H. Trueba, G. P. Guthrie, & K. H.-P. Au (Eds.), *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography* (pp. 87-101). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Foorman, B. R., Francis, D. J., Fletcher, J. M., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (1998). The role of instruction in learning to read: Preventing reading disabilities in at-risk children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*, 37–55.

Four pillars of NCLB (2004, July 1). Retrieved October 7, 2008, from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html

Forvo Website. Available from: http://www.forvo.com/word/verstehend/

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006). Introduction to Response to Intervention: What, why, and how valid is it? *Reading Research Quarterly*, *41*, 93-99.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., Mathes, P.G., Lipsey, M.W., & Roberts, P.H. (2001). Is "learning disabilities" just a fancy term for low achievement? A meta-analysis of reading differences between low achievers with and without the label. Paper presented at the Office of Special Education Program's LD Initiative Conference, August 27-29, Washington, DC.

Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness-to-Intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *18*(3), 157-171.

Goodwin, B., Englert, K., & Cicchinelli, L. F. (2003). *Comprehensive accountability systems: A framework for evaluation* (rev. ed.) (REL Deliverable #2002-07). Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Goetz, J.P.; LeCompte, M.D. 1984. *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* Orlando, FL:Academic Press.

Gonzalez, G.M. (2006). Influence of NCLB on K-12 systemic educational reform. *TechTrends, 50*(2), 28-29.

Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Hale, J. B., Alfonso, V., Berninger, V., Bracken, B., Christo, C., Clark, E., . . . & Yalof, J. (2010). Critical issues in response to intervention, comprehensive evaluation, and specific

learning disabilities identification and intervention: An expert white paper consensus. Learning Disability Quarterly, 33, 223–236.

Hallahan, D. P., & Mercer, C. D. (2002). Learning disabilities: Historical perspectives. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: research to practice.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hardman, M.L. & Dawson, S. (2008). The impact of federal public policy on curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities in the general classroom. *Preventing School Failure, 52*(2), 5-11.

Harmon, H., Gordanier, J., Henry, L., & George, A. (2007). Changing teacher practices in rural schools. *The Rural Educator, 28*(2), 8-12.

Harr-Robins, J.J., Shambaugh, L.S., and Parrish, T. (2009). The status of state-level response to intervention policies and procedures in the West Region states and five other states (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2009–No. 077). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs.

Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Heider, K. (1988). The Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree. *American Anthropologist, 90*(1), 73-82.

Hill, P. & Lake, R. (2002). Standards and accountability in Washington State. Brookings Papers on Education Policy, 119-234.

Hollenbeck, A. F. (2007). From IDEA to implementation: A discussion of foundational and future Responsiveness-to-Intervention research. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 22*(2), 137-146.

Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Hoy, A. W. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(3), 425-446.

Hughes, C., & Dexter, D. D. (2008). Field studies of RTI programs. Retrieved December 15, 2008, from http://www.rtinetwork.org/Learn/Research/ar/FieldStudies.

Institute for a Competitive Workplace. (2007). United States Chamber of Commerce Report Card. Available from : http://education.uschamber.com

IRIS Center (2007). www.ideapartnership.org/documents/IRIS_DG_IQ-Discrep_RTI.pdf. IRIS Center Online Dictionary (2007). http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/onlinedictionary.html.

Johnson, E., & Mellard, D.F. (2006). Getting started with SLD determination: After IDEA reauthorization. Lawrence, KS: National Research Center on Learning Disabilities.

Johnson, E., Mellard, D.F., Fuchs, D., & McKnight, M.A. (2006). Responsiveness to intervention (RTI): How to do it. Lawrence, KS: National Research Center on Learning Disabilities.

Jones, R.E., & Ball, C.R. (2012). Introduction to the special issue. Addressing response to intervention implementation: Questions from the field. *Psychology in the Schools, 49*(3), 207-209.

Kim, A., Vaughn, S., Klingner, J., Woodruff, A., Reutebuch, C., Kouzekanani, K. (2006). Improving the reading comprehension of middle school students with disabilities through

computer-assisted collaborative strategic reading. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(4), 235-249.

Kirk, S. A. (1962). *Educating exceptional children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Klingner, J. & Edwards, P. (2006). Cultural considerations with Response to Intervention models. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *41*, 108-117.

Kovaleski, J. (2012). RTI and SLD identification in Pennsylvania: Beginnings: Establishing the Response to Intervention and intervention infrastructure. Available from: http://rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/195ins

Lareau, A. (2000). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education.* (2nd Edition) Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Designing & conducting ethnographic research.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Lewis, J. D. (1976). The classical American pragmatists as forerunners to symbolic interactionism," *Sociological Quarterly*, *17*(3), 347-359.

Lindstrom, J. & Sayeski, K. (2013): Identifying best practice in a shifting landscape: Making sense of RTI in the context of SLD identification, *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal, 21*(1), 5-18

Lipsky, M. (1980) *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Loeb, H., Knapp, M. S., & Elfers, A. M.. (2008). Teachers' response to standards-based reform: Probing reform assumptions in Washington State. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 16*(9). Retrieved April, 2009 from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v16n9/.

Lohman, J. Office of Legislative Research. Connecticut General Assembly. (2007). OLR Research Report: Response to Intervention Plans. Retrieved from http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/rpt/2007-R-0067.htm

Machek, G. & Nelson, J. (2007). How should reading disabilities be operationalized? A survey of practicing school psychologists. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 22(2), 147-157,

Manis, J. G., & Meltzer, B. N. (Eds.). (1978). *Symbolic interaction: A reader in social psychology*. (3rd ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Marston, D. (2005). Tiers of intervention in responsiveness to intervention: Prevention outcomes and learning disabilities identification patterns. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *38*(6), 539-544.

Martinez, R. S., Nellis, L. M., & Prendergast, K. A. (2006, September). Closing the achievement gap series: Part II response to intervention (RTI) - basic elements, practical applications, and policy recommendations. Retrieved July 7, 2008, from http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V4N8_Fall_2006_AchivementGap.pdf.

McCray, E. D., & McHatton, P. (2011). "Less afraid to have 'them' in My Classroom": Understanding pre-service general educators' perceptions about inclusion. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *38*(4), 135-155.

McGill-Franzen, A. (1987). Failure to learn to read: Formulating a policy problem. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *22*(4), 475-490.

McGill-Franzen, A. (2006). *Kindergarten literacy: Matching assessment and instruction in kindergarten*. New York: Scholastic.

McGill-Franzen, A., & Allington, R. L. (Eds.). (2011). *Handbook of reading disability research.* New York: Routledge.

McGill-Franzen, A., & Smith, K. J. (2013). RTI and the common core. In S. B. Neuman & L. B. Gambrell (Eds.), *Quality reading instruction in the age of common core standards*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist.* C.W. Morris (Ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mead, M. (1930). Growing up in New Guinea. New York: Blue Ribbon Books.

Mehan, H. (1992). Understanding inequality in schools: The contribution of interpretive studies. *Sociology of Education*, *65*(1), 1-20.

Mehan, H., Hertweck, A., & Meihls, J.L. (1986). *Handicapping the handicapped: Decision making in students' educational careers*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press.

Mellard, D.F., Byrd, S.E., Johnson, E., Tollefson, J.M., & Boesche, L. (2004). Foundations and research on identifying model responsiveness-to-intervention sites. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 27*, 243-256.

Moats, L. (2004). Efficacy of a structured, systematic language curriculum for adolescent poor readers. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 20*, 145-159.

Morris, C. (1934). *Mind, self, & society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist. Works of George Herbert Mead.* Volume 1.

National Education Association (2008). Disproportionality: Inappropriate identification of culturally and linguistically diverse children. Retrieved February 22, 2009, from www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_PB02_DispropoRtIonality.pdf.

NCLD. (2013). Available from: http://www.ncld.org

New Oxford American Dictionary. (2013). Available from: http://oaadonline.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com

Nielsen, D.C., Barry, A.L. & Staab, P.T. (2008). Teachers reflections of professional change during a literacy-reform initiative. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies. (24)*5, 1288-1303.

Nye, B., Konstantopoulos, S., & Hedges, L.V. (2004). How large are teacher effects? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *26*(3) 237-257.

Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Purcell-Gates, V., & Waterman, R. A. (2000). *Now We Read, We See, We Speak: Portrait of Literacy Development in an Adult Freirean-Based Class*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Response to intervention: Guiding principles for educators from the International Reading Association, (2010). Available from: http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-marketplace-list/entry/1/158

Rist, R.C. (1980) Blitzkrieg ethnography: On the transformation of a method into a movement. *Educational Researcher, 9*(2), 8-10.

RtI Action Network. (2013). Available at: http://www.rtinetwork.org

RTI^2 Initiative. (2003) Available for download from: http://www.tncore.org/sites/www/Uploads/RTI2%20Implementation%20Guide-FINAL-08.22.13.pdf

Rutter, M., & Yule, W. (1975). The concept of specific reading retardation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 16*, 181-197.

Rutter, M., Tizard, J., Yule, W., Graham, P., & Whitmore, K. (1976). Isle of Wight Studies, 1964–1974. *Psychological Medicine, 6,* p. 313-332. doi:10.1017/S003329170001388X.

Ryan, G. & Bernard, H. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods,* 15(1), 85-109.

Shapiro, E. S., & Clemens, N. H. (2009). A conceptual model for evaluating system effects of response to intervention. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 35*, 3 – 16.

Siegel, L. (2012). Confessions and reflections of the black sheep of the learning disabilities field. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, 17*(2), 63-77.

Slavin, R.E. (2002). Evidence-based education policies: Transforming educational practice and research. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 15-21.

Smit, B. & Fritz, E. (2008). Understanding teacher identity from a symbolic interactionist perspective: Two ethnographic narratives. *South African Journal of Education*, 28(1), 91-102.

Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Spradley, J. and McCurdy, D. (1972). *The cultural experience: Ethnography in complex society.* Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Strauss, A. (1987). Qualitative analysis for social scientists. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sutton, R. & Staw, B. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *40* (3), 371-384.

Stecker, P. M., Lembke, E. S., & Foegen, A. (2008). Using progress-monitoring data to improve instructional decision making. *Preventing School Failure, 52*(2), 48-58.

Taylor, I. (2007). Discretion and control in education: The teacher as street-level bureaucrat. *Educational Management Administration Leadership, 35*(4), 555-572.

Taylor, G., Shepard, L., Kinner, F., & Rosenthal, J. (2002). A survey of teachers' perspectives on high-stakes testing in Colorado: What gets taught, what gets lost. (*CSE Technical Report 588*). University of Colorado, Bolder: CRESST/CREDE.

Tennessee Department of Education. (2010). Report card: http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:40:739726019405916::NO:::

Tennessee First to the Top 2010 http://tn.gov/firsttothetop/

Tennessee State Personnel Development Grant. (2013). Student assessment outcomes. Personal communication from outside evaluators, University of Kentucky, 2013.

Thomas, W. (1931). The unadjusted girl. Boston: Little, Brown.

Thorndike, R.(1963). The concepts of over- and under-achievement. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Torgesen, J.K., Alexander, A.W.,Wagner, R.K., Rashotte, C.A., Voeller, K., Conway, T., & Rose, E. (2001). Intensive remedial instruction for children with severe reading disabilities: Immediate and long-term outcomes from two instructional approaches. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *34*, 337-358.

Turner, B. (2006). Classical sociology and cosmopolitanism: A critical defence of the social. *The British Journal, 57* (1), 133-151.

University of California at Los Angeles: Concerns=Opportunities: Addressing student disengagement, acting out, and dropouts by moving in new directions. (2006, Spring). *Addressing barriers to learning.* Retrieved from http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.htm

Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(3), 519-558.

Van Veen, K., Sleegers, P., & Van de Ven, P. (2005). One teacher's identity, emotions, and commitment to change: A case study into the cognitive-affective processes of a secondary school teacher in the context of reforms. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*, 917-934.

Vaughn, S., Fletcher, J., Francis, D. Denton, C., Wanzek, J., Wexler, J., Cirino, P., Barth, A., & Romain, M. (2008). Response to intervention with older students with reading difficulties. *Learning and Individual Differences, 18*, 338-345.

Vaughn, S., & Fuchs, L. (2003). Redefining learning disabilities as inadequate response to instruction: The promise and potential problems. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 18*(3), 137-146.

Vaughn, S., Linan-Thompson, S., & Hickman, P. (2003). Response to instruction as a means of identifying students with reading/learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 69*(4), 391-409.

Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C., Scammacca, N., Linan-Thompson, S., & Woodruff, Althea. (2009). Response to early reading intervention: examining higher and lower responders. *Exceptional Children, 75*(2), 165-183.

Walcott, H. (2002). Ethnography? Or Educational Travel Writing? In Y. Zou & E. Trueba (Eds), *Ethnography and schools: Qualitative approaches to the study of education*. Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland.

Wanzek, J. & Vaughn, S. (2008). Response to varying amounts of time in reading intervention for students with low response to intervention. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 41*(2), 126-142.

Wexler, J., Vaughn, S., Edmonds, M., & Reutebuch, C. (2008). A synthesis of fluency interventions for secondary struggling readers. *Read Writ*, *21*(4), 317-347.

White, J., Drew, S., Hay, T. (2008) Ethnography versus case study: Positioning research and researchers. Available from: http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/keepingconnected/downloads/Ethnography_versus_case_study.pdf

Will, M. (1986). Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility. *Exceptional Children, 52*(5), 411–415.

Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Witt, J. C., Elliot, S. N., Daly III, E. J., Gresham, F. M., & Kramer, J. J. (1998). *Assessment of at-risk and special needs children*. (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ysseldyke, J., & Algozzine, B. (1983). LD or not LD: That's not the question! *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 16*, 29-31.

Zou, Y. & Trueba, E. (2002). *Ethnography and schools: Qualitative approaches to the study of education.* Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland.

APPENDIX

Timeline – Archival Documents

DATE	SCHOOL/DISTRICT where research was conducted	STATE		FEDERAL
		SCORE, First to the Top	RTI, SIG, SPDG	
2003				
			The Tennessee State Improvement Grant begins, working with Reading First schools in its first years.	Iowa begins conversations about RtI.
2004				
				Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that includes language allowing for the use of RtI for identification of a Learning Disability (LD).
2005				
		FEBRUARY Tennessee is one of two states to receive an "F" for "Truth in Advertising About Student Proficiency" on a United States Chamber of Commerce report.	FALL TN SIG announces new partner: IRIS Center at Vanderbilt SEPTEMBER Tennessee Department of Education authorizes Tennessee State Improvement Grant (SIG) to provide state-wide training and technical assistance in Response to Intervention	Pennsylvania begins discussing the use of RtI.

2006				
		Senator Bill Frist concludes his tenure in Washington, D.C. and returns to Tennessee with heightened interest in the state of education as it correlates with health.	**APRIL** One of largest school systems in state begins discussions with SIG concerning RtI partnership that would include instructional professional development from SIG for system's teachers	Colorado begins discussing RtI.
			JUNE SPDG Consultant attends the "Train the Trainer" events with IRIS Center	
			SEPTEMBER Memo to Tennessee Special Education Supervisors announces formation of an RtI task force to develop RTI guidelines and recommendations for districts.	
2007				
	OCTOBER SIG Consultant/Researcher begins consulting with high school concerning freshman reading, summer reading list		**JULY** TN SIG Director Kathy Strunk presents "Building a TN RtI Road Map" at National OSEP Conference.	
	Middle school and high school in system in which research will eventually occur both placed on TDOE High Priority list		**NOVEMBER** TDOE releases "Template for RTI Guidelines" DRAFT	
			DECEMBER Joe Fisher memo; districts must begin including RtI as a part of the LD identification process	
2008				

	APRIL SIG Consultant/Researcher begins working with the Freshman Success Academy, assisting primarily in the area of reading assessment	Tennessee joins American Diploma Project in an effort to raise academic standards.	**MAY** School districts with a state-approved RTI plan (submission of a plan still optional) receive permission to identify LD via the RTI process.	
	JUNE SIG Consultant/Researcher contacted by Special Ed Supervisor in school system; responds with offer to consult and sends RTI template to system			
	JULY SIG Consultant/Researcher presents an overview of RtI to all teachers in school system (where research is eventually conducted) on opening day of school year		**AUGUST** Tennessee SIG receives additional funding as TN State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG); proposal includes an increased emphasis on RtI	
	AUGUST SPDG Consultant/Researcher meets with School System Personnel (from both general and special education, a first) to discuss System's options for getting started with Rti; system has RTI template completed		**AUGUST** TN SPDG and FIRST PARTNER County form partnership as district implements RTI initiative.	
	AUGUST School District introduces Response to Intervention 2008-2009 Timeline (have this document)			
	SEPTEMBER SPDG consultant/researcher continues to support instruction in system – Freshmen Academy, reading assessments with individual elementary and middle school teachers			
	OCTOBER SPDG consultant/researcher			

	continues to support instruction in system – Freshmen Academy, reading assessments with individual elementary and middle school teachers			
	NOVEMBER SPDG consultant/researcher presents RtI professional development session at elementary school were RtI is already in place			
	DECEMBER SPDG consultant/researcher continues to support instruction in system – Freshmen Academy, reading assessments with individual elementary and middle school teachers			
2009				
	JANUARY SPDG Consultant/Researcher conducts QRI-4 reading assessments with all 9th graders at high school.	Former Senator Bill Frist creates TN SCORE – Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education.		
	FEBRUARY SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	MARCH SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	APRIL			

	SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	MAY SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	JUNE SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	JULY SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators	**JULY** SCORE Report released: "The State of Education in Tennessee"		
	AUGUST SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators	**AUGUST** Higher academic standards (Diploma Project Standards) take effect in Tennessee schools		
	SEPTEMBER			

	SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	OCTOBER SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators	**OCTOBER** SCORE releases "A Roadmap to Success: A Plan to Make Tennessee Schools #1 in the Southeast Within Five Years"		
	NOVEMBER SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
	DECEMBER SPDG consultant/researcher consults with system in all conventional ways: formal PD, classroom observations, meetings with central office staff, small group meetings with teachers and administrators			
2010				
	JANUARY Researcher continues to work in system as SPDG consultant and begins collecting research data in two classrooms.	**JANUARY** MEDIA RELEASE "Tennessee Submits Race to the Top Plan"		Common Core State Standards released.
			FEBRUARY Doug Fuchs Keynote Speaker TN Special Education	

			Conference "Special Education's Role in RtI"	
		MARCH TENNESSEE one of only two states selected to receive millions of dollars for education in the first round of the federal government's Race to the Top competition (have this document) Tennessee's proposal called "First to the Top"		Federal Government mandates that state departments have test results back to systems two weeks prior to the beginning of the school year.
		MARCH TCAP testing window two weeks earlier than in years past – March 22-April 9		
			AUGUST SPDG Consultants Conference Call with Battelle for Kids Consultant; Battelle for Kids contracted as part of First to the Top	
			NOVEMBER Formative Instructional Practices Workshop SPDG Consultants trained with school system teams by Battelle for Kids District Value-Added Leadership Workshop SPDG Consultants trained with school system team by Battelle for Kids	
			DECEMBER 33 of 136 districts (24%) at least	

			initially involved in the implementation of the RtI framework	
2011				
	JANUARY Researcher concludes observations in classrooms	APRIL Governor Bill Haslam appoints Kevin Huffman as the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Education.		
	JUNE Both teachers that participated in research ask researcher for a letter of reference for administrative positions that are being proposed.	MARCH SCORE releases: "The State of Education in Tennessee – 2010" Some district data comparisons published.		
	AUGUST Researcher conducts final interviews/member checks with two teachers; both are now administrators (assistant principals) in schools in same system in which research was conducted.			
2012				
2013				
		MARCH The TDOE releases the RtI^2 Initiative document at the annual Special Education Conference that included for the first time a RtI Summit as part of the conference offerings.		
		SEPTEMBER Sixty Three (63) Superintendents of school districts in TN sign "Huffman Petition" asking Governor Haslam and the Tennessee General Assembly to consider "carefully and prayerfully" their		

		concerns about Commissioner Huffman's leadership of the TDOE.		
		NOVEMBER NAEP Scores – Tennessee ranks first in the nation as the fastest improving state in the last two years in terms of math and reading scores as measured by NAEP (have Tennessee Education Report Document Nov. 7, 2013)		

VITA

Kandy Curtis Smith was born in Lebanon, TN, to Tommy and Virginia Curtis. She was educated in Tennessee, Texas, and Pennsylvania, returning to Belmont College in Nashville, TN to complete an undergraduate degree in English and Education in 1981. In 1995, she received a Masters of Arts degree in Supervision and Administration from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, TN. Kandy graduated with a PhD in Teacher Education with a focus in literacy in May of 2014. Kandy has taught English and Spanish in middle and high school, served as an elementary principal, and consulted in schools across the state of Tennessee as a part of a federal project. Kandy has two grown children and lives in Bowling Green, KY where she is an assistant professor of literacy at Western Kentucky University.