

A CASE STUDY OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION DELIVERED TO
KINDERGARTEN STRUGGLING READERS WITHIN THE RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION MODEL IN THREE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 1995
M.S., Kansas State University, 2005

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

A portion of the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), Response to Intervention (RtI), aims to prevent unnecessary student placement in special education. The intent of RtI is to provide all students with effective classroom instruction first and afford low-performing students with increasingly intensive, individualized interventions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). Although there is considerable information available in regard to the effectiveness of the multi-tiered model of the Response to Intervention approach to deliver intervention services to struggling readers (Speece & Walker, 2007), very little is known about implementing RtI in the schools (Allington, 2009).

This qualitative, exploratory, collective case study was conducted during the fall/spring semesters of the 2009/2010 school year between November 16, 2009 and February 26, 2010. This study investigated how three kindergarten classroom teachers, located in two elementary schools, delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction to kindergarten struggling readers within the Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. Multiple data sources were gathered from interviews with administrators and teachers, guided conversations with students, classroom observations and field notes, and documents/artifacts. Data were collected and analyzed during three phases of the study.

This study's findings established that in the new era of Response to Intervention (RtI), teachers were able to apply literacy instructional approaches and pedagogy based on their teaching philosophy to address the needs of at-risk struggling readers within the kindergarten classroom environment. However, data analysis

revealed dissimilar perceptions of the three case study teachers regarding their roles and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach which influenced how they delivered Tier 2 intervention instruction. The three classroom teachers utilized the modeled, shared, and guided approaches to literacy instruction and provided lessons in phonemic awareness and phonics during Tier 2 small group literacy interventions. In addition, the data collection and analysis identified three pedagogies which occurred during Tier 2 instruction: 1) monitoring of learning; 2) encouraging and supportive learning environments; and 3) feedback and reinforcement. Data analysis also revealed the student participant benefits included positive attitudes towards reading, students' perception of themselves as self-confident and motivated readers, development of an emerging love of reading, and enjoyment of practicing their reading skills in small groups.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When Eric's third-grade teacher approached me early in the school year, she described him as a very verbal student with limited basic skills in reading and writing. In the few short weeks he was already showing signs of frustration and was struggling with his daily assignments. Eric was new to our school. He was well liked by his peers and had developed many friendships, but his literacy skills were limited. Instead of being an active participant in reading related activities, he proceeded to be a passive listener, and on occasions tuned out everything. Work time proved to be a time of great dependence on this teacher. Eric's guardian was also concerned about his literacy skills and had expressed to the classroom teacher her concern that Eric may have a reading disability, a concern also held by the teacher. It was at this time, like so many times before in my career, that I became involved.

The majority of my teaching experience has focused on teaching primary grade children how to read. As a classroom teacher, reading specialist, and special education teacher, I have observed how a child's early successes or failures in learning to read notably influence the child's life. Currently, I have had the opportunity to teach K-6 reading methods and K-6 language arts methods to undergraduate college students and supervise preservice teachers. As a result of my experience, I have become increasingly interested in effective approaches and practices that make early and intensive reading instruction successful in all schools and for all learners.

There is substantial evidence that indicates that early identification and intervention is the most effective course of action to assist students who are experiencing difficulties learning to read (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). Further evidence has been well-documented that students who struggle to learn to read in first and second grades are likely to continue to struggle with reading (Juel, 1988; Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990). There is also widespread agreement that early identification and intervention is an effective approach to lessen the severity and/or avert a reading disability (Bos, Mather, Friedman, Narr, & Babur, 1999; Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2001).

Educators cannot teach all students to read if they do not focus attention on students who have difficulty learning to read. High-quality classroom instruction will meet the needs of most students; however, a complete and effective system that provides high quality, successful reading strategies, interventions, and opportunities is required to meet the needs of all students (Torgesen, 2006).

In their annual report published by the International Reading Association, Cassidy and Cassidy (2009) describe Response to Intervention (RtI) as a “very hot topic” in the reading community. Part of the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), Response to Intervention aims to prevent unnecessary placement in special education. The intent of RtI is to provide all students with excellent classroom instruction first and afford low-performing students with increasingly intensive, individualized interventions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). Response to Intervention (RtI) is an approach focused on the organization of reading interventions for at-risk students in the emergent and early literacy stages.

This is the period of time in which interventions are most effective for equalizing disparities among lower achieving and higher achieving children (Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman-Davis, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006). Reading interventions delivered during this period are considered preventive, aimed at lowering a child's risk for developing later reading difficulty by building skills that are associated with skilled reading success (Lyon, 2004).

I first encountered Response to Intervention in 2006. Though a relatively new concept, I believed that RtI was a topic of critical importance for educators seeking to meet the needs of all students. I found it difficult to curb my enthusiasm over what I believed may possibly prove to be an enormously successful comprehensive early detection and prevention approach to identify struggling readers and assist them before their skills fall behind their peers. However, my excitement eventually turned to frustration when I realized that most schools were not providing the interventions within the framework of the Response to Intervention approach. I soon realized that the challenge facing educators is how to take what is documented in the research and put it into action in the schools. Busy schedules and lack of additional personnel to provide interventions to struggling readers are the reasons most often expressed to me for not adhering to the framework of the instructional practices within the Response to Intervention model.

This qualitative, exploratory, collective case study focused on providing an in-depth perspective on how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the Response to Intervention model. The intention of this

proposed research study is to provide classroom teachers with examples of how they can accomplish effective Tier 2 interventions within the classroom. Discussion in this chapter is organized in the following sections: (1) overview of the issues, (2) statement of the problem, (3) purpose of the study, (4) research questions, (5) significance of the study, (6) limitations of the study, (6) definition of terms, and (7) organization of the study.

Overview of the Issues

Numerous definitions of literacy exist. Literacy used to simply refer to the ability to read. However, that term now has broadened to include both reading and writing (Tompkins, 2007). The National Reading Panel (2000) defined reading as a purposeful and active action. The reader reads to construct meaning from the text, pieces together memory representations of what he/she understands, and then puts this knowledge to use.

The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1989) state that literacy is the ability “to carry out the complex tasks using reading and writing related to the world of work and to life outside the school” (p. 36). Gordon and Gordon (2003) described literacy standards as surfacing from the social, economic, and technical demands of a particular time and place.

The National Center for Educational Progress (2007) defines literacy as both task-based and skills-based. The task-based (conceptual) definition of literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. The skills-based (operational)

definition of literacy focuses on the knowledge and skills that one must possess in order to perform these tasks. These skills range from basic, word-level skills (such as recognizing words) to higher-level skills (such as drawing inferences from text). Literacy is the key that allows access to many forms of knowledge and information; thus literacy is perhaps the skill most critical to learning (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

The National Institute for Literacy (2009) defines literacy as more than just an individual's ability to read. They reason that as information and technology have increasingly shaped our society, the skills needed to function successfully have gone beyond reading, and thus literacy has come to include an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), although the reading scores for White, Black, and Hispanic students have improved since the first assessment 15 years ago, gains made by minority students have not resulted in narrowing the achievement gaps with White students. Current prevalence data show that more than one-fourth of our nation's fourth graders do not exhibit basic reading proficiency. Among students failing to achieve basic-level reading skills, there is a strikingly disproportionate representation of African American (60% below basic), Hispanic (56% below basic), and low-income students (55% below basic).

The number of children who fail at reading in our nation's schools far exceeds that which can be attributed to "natural" causes or even normal variability (Shaywitz, Escobar, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Makuch, 1992). Rather, many children who perform

poorly in reading achievement do so because schools fail to provide adequate instruction to at-risk students (Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) specifies that early and intensive reading instruction must be a priority for schools, especially for those that serve at-risk students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

There is a considerable amount of research documenting instructional practices that have the potential to improve the literacy development of all students while lessening the likelihood that at-risk readers will continue to struggle, thus decreasing the odds of special education placement (Ehri, Nunes, & Stahl, 2001). A balanced literacy program that dramatically increases quantities of reading during the school day (Allington, 2009) and reading instruction that focuses on scientifically-based instructional methods (Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Shanahan, 2002) can be the foundation of effective reading instruction for all students.

According to the National Institute for Literacy (2009), effective instructional practice is constructed from scientifically-based evidence. Most notably are the findings from the National Reading Panel which outline effective approaches to teach reading. The National Institute for Literacy (2009) summarizes the key features of the report as:

- Certain instructional methods are more effective than others. Many of the more effective methods are ready for implementation in the classroom.
- To teach reading well, teachers must use a combination of strategies, incorporated in a coherent plan with specific goals. A teacher who

addresses only one area of reading or uses one instructional approach will probably not be successful.

- Teachers must be provided with appropriate and intensive training to ensure that they know when and how to teach specific strategies.

Teachers must know how children learn to read, why some children have difficulty reading, and how to identify and implement instructional strategies for different children (n.p.).

A key factor in the implementation of reading programs that effectively service all students, especially those identified as at-risk for reading failure, is a comprehensive program in which teachers are able to accurately assess student needs and plan and deliver instruction centered on meeting those needs. However, implementing such programs brought limited success (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). In addition, a driving force in the current political climate is No Child Left Behind 2001 (P.L. 107-110), which mandates that schools equalize the reading disparities among students and the Reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-446), and which allows states to move away from the “wait to fail” approach before students receive intervention services.

These educational legislations along with current research that has documented that early and long-term reading difficulties in most children are caused primarily by instructional deficits rather than by biologically-based cognitive deficits have led to considerable attention for Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI shows promise as an

effective approach to bridge the gaps between research and effective instructional practice, especially in the area of reading instruction (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

Response to Intervention is an integrated approach that includes general, remedial, and special education to enhance outcomes for all students. The concept of RtI was developed as an early intervention and prevention approach in contrast to the “wait to fail” method of the present special education identification process (National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2006). Current research describes Response to Intervention as a process with the potential to decrease academic failure of all students while also increasing accuracy in identifying students with learning disabilities. The RtI model uses multi-tiered interventions for delivering differentiated instruction and support for all students (Allington, 2009; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Marston, 2005; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005; Vaughn, & Denton, 2008).

Although the number of tiers within Response to Intervention can vary, typically there are three tiers. In the first tier, all students receive instruction in the core-curriculum reading program in the regular classroom. Each student’s rate of reading growth is monitored. Those students who are identified through universal screening as needing additional interventions are moved to the second tier. In Tier 2, the student’s progress continues to be monitored while he/she receives small-group instruction (Taylor, 2008). The purpose of this second tier is to improve reading by delivering a more intensive and effective intervention that accelerates reading development. Failure to show improvement in Tier 2 instruction signals a need for

additional and more intensive interventions. In this situation, the student moves to a third and final tier (Vaughn & Denton, 2008). This final tier, Tier 3, is usually synonymous with some form of special education services (Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 2008; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

Although a relatively new concept, Response to Intervention and multi-tiered models of interventions are becoming increasingly common largely for the reason that they offer two potential advantages. Struggling students are provided additional assistance learning how to read early in their school careers. Typically in the past, struggling readers were not provided additional assistance until they had experienced reading failure approaching the third grade. At this time, they were officially diagnosed with a reading disability and additional assistance came in the form of special education services. This remained the practice even though research consistently documented that early intervention can prevent or considerably reduce reading difficulties for a large majority of children (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

According to Gersten, Compton, Connor, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly (2008), Response to Intervention also encourages schools to utilize scientifically-based practices to provide reading instruction in all tiers and to apply assessment information to identify those students who need additional assistance learning to read. Response to Intervention helps to accurately identify which students may possess a reading disability since only students who do not respond to increasingly intensive interventions are considered for special education. Thus, RtI

may reduce the number of inappropriate placements in special education as well as increase the reading achievement of at-risk student populations.

Statement of Problem

There is widespread agreement that early identification and intervention is the most effective method for prevention of reading difficulties and reading disabilities (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). Although there is substantial evidence that the multi-tiered approach of Response to Intervention has the potential to capture all children who are struggling to learn to read while also offering interventions at the most critical time in the child's school career, little is known about the experiences and challenges practitioners and school staff face to implement this approach in a school setting (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Jimmerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Speece & Walker, 2007).

Speece and Walker (2007) argued that Response to Intervention “potentially” offers an ideal solution to meet the needs of struggling readers. However, with less than a decade of active empirical investigation, the promise of RtI surmounts the evidence. They contended that there is a great deal of variability in reading instruction in both Tier 1 and Tier 2, and concluded that additional research is needed to determine which models and/or combination of models are most effective.

This contention is shared by Allington (2009) who acknowledged that the majority of studies on Response to Intervention affirm that at-risk students benefit from early and intensive interventions offered in the multi-tiered approach to literacy instruction. However, the challenge facing educators is how to take what is

documented in the research and put it into action in the schools since the interventions that were offered in the research studies are dissimilar to what is available in most schools. Allington (2009) emphasized that there is no single, simple solution to the dilemma of how to teach all children to read - no one size of instruction fits all. He calls for further research in instructional models that have been documented to be effective when implemented by teachers in the school environment.

Purpose of the Study

Although there is considerable information available in regard to the effectiveness of the multi-tiered model of the Response to Intervention approach to deliver intervention services to struggling readers (Speece & Walker, 2007), very little is known about implementing RtI in the schools (Allington, 2009). According to Jimerson, Burns, and VanDerHeyden (2007) “educational practices are already being modified; however, there is a paucity of resources that synthesize essential knowledge regarding the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of Response to Intervention and actual implementation” (p. 7). The Response to Intervention approach measures the child's progress within multiple tiers of reading instruction and provides support and interventions. RtI has the potential to identify struggling readers at the very first signs that they are experiencing difficulties, allowing implementation of interventions early in the child's school career when probability of remediation was greatest (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). However, few studies exist that explore the implementation of Response to Intervention in the schools (Bradley,

Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Jimmerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Speece & Walker, 2007).

This qualitative exploratory collective case study proposes to fill this gap in the research on Response to Intervention by focusing on providing an in-depth perspective on how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model. Since many districts/schools have limited resources to provide adequate support of a reading specialist to provide Tier 2 literacy instruction, this study explored how classroom teachers delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction within the classroom environment to at-risk struggling readers whose performance was below grade level expectations.

Research Questions

Research questions are typically found in qualitative research instead of objectives or hypotheses. This qualitative exploratory/collective case study will be directed by the following research questions. The overarching research question guiding this study is:

How is Tier 2 literacy instruction delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting?

The following sub-questions will guide the research and data analysis for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach within the classroom?
2. What instructional approaches are kindergarten teachers implementing in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?
3. How do kindergarten teachers apply literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?
4. What are the responses of kindergarten struggling readers to the delivery of literacy interventions in Tier 2 instruction?

Significance of the Study

Experts in the field have described Response to Intervention as both an alternative to the current IQ/ achievement discrepancy method to identify students with a reading disability as well as an effective approach to meet the needs of all students who may be experiencing difficulties learning to read. However, Speece and Walker (2007) caution that the evidence on the potential benefits of the multi-tiered model of RtI overwhelms the research. They assert, "There is, however, a lack of consistency in the field regarding which qualities are essential to the second and third tiers of instruction or regarding which attributes differentiate Tier 2 from Tier 3 instruction. These differences may cause one to wonder how important a stringent, three-tier concept is to the effectiveness of this form of reading instruction" (p. 291).

In addition, others have described the Response to Intervention approach as limited in evidence in regard to implementing this at the school level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) also caution that RtI is still new and that implementation guidelines should be viewed as tentative until additional research becomes available. Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) state that the Response to Intervention approach is still in its early development and, therefore, not fully understood by state departments of education, school districts, administrators, or by teachers.

A review of the literature to date on Response to Intervention has left several questions unanswered. This study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature by providing an in-depth perspective on how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the Response to Intervention model. This study will explore how teachers are delivering Tier 2 literacy instruction within the classroom environment for at-risk struggling readers whose performance is below grade level expectations.

Limitations of the Study

There are several possible limitations in this qualitative study. This study was conducted at only two elementary schools in the same district. These schools service children of military personnel and consequently have higher than normal transience levels. However, data collection took place over a 12-week period thus lessening the likelihood that students would move during the study. In addition, the study focused

on students identified for Tier 2 instruction; hence, if students moved, they were unlikely to differ notably from the remaining sample in terms of academic needs.

Limited student participation was a limitation of this study. However, since this study examined specific literacy instructional models and practices educators were utilizing to deliver Tier 2 instruction, and the results revealed a realistic picture of providing interventions to kindergarten struggling readers within the classroom environment utilizing the framework of the Response to Intervention approach.

The age of the students also introduced a limitation to this study. Kindergarten struggling readers were interviewed to gain insights into their perceptions of the delivery of literacy interventions during Tier 2 instruction. However, given that the students were five years old their ability to express themselves verbally was restricted. Therefore, their sometimes partial responses resulted in researcher interpretation.

Another limitation of this study was researcher bias. Because of my experience teaching K-6 reading methods, K-6 language arts methods, and working in the public school setting as a reading specialist, special educator, and classroom teacher, I have strong opinions about instructional methods and practices that are effective for providing interventions to kindergarten struggling readers. However, the researcher's role was that of an observer. It was important for me as the researcher to remain open-minded during this research and to remember that this is an exploratory collective case study; thus the findings must speak for themselves.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as they are related in the context of this dissertation proposal:

- 1. Automaticity:** The ability to carry out a task without having to give it much attention (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).
- 2. Classroom setting:** The context and environment of the classroom in which literacy instruction takes place (Allington, 2009).
- 3. Comprehension:** The part of reading that involves constructing meaning by interacting with text. Comprehension is one part of the reading process (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- 4. Concepts of print:** Features of printed text; usually divided into four categories: books, sentences, words and letters (Clay, 1979).
- 5. Curriculum-based:** General outcome progress monitoring for which most of the research has been conducted. It can systematically sample the curriculum or can rely on a single behavior that functions as an overall indicator of competence (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008)
- 6. Decodable text:** A published or created text that is suitable for the application of previously taught phonics skills (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002).
- 7. Decoding:** The process of translating written language into verbal speech sounds. Decoding is one part of reading (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002).
- 8. Differentiated instruction:** Instruction that is designed to accommodate a student's strengths, needs, and stage of development (Juel, 2000).

- 9. Direct instruction:** Explicit, teacher-led or teacher-modeled instruction (Strickland, 2002).
- 10. Emergent literacy:** The developmental process of literacy acquisition (Clay, 1979).
- 11. Explicit instruction:** Direct, teacher-led instruction. It involves teacher modeling, student practice with teacher guidance and feedback, and student application in a new situation. This term is used interchangeable with *direct instruction* (Strickland, 2002).
- 12. Fluency:** The ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding words, they can focus their attention on what the text means (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- 13. Guided reading:** A small group instructional model of delivery that provides structure and purpose for reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).
- 14. Instructional Approaches:** Varying levels of support teachers employ to scaffold literacy development as they demonstrate, guide, and teach according to their instructional purpose and the children's needs. The levels of reading instructional approaches, moving from the greatest amount of support to the least are: (1) modeled; (2) shared; (3) guided; and (4) independent reading (Tompkins, 2007).
- 15. IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model:** The identification of a learning disability and eligibility for special education determined by the existence a severe discrepancy between the student's academic achievement and normal or

near normal potential (National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2006).

16. Literacy: The ability to listen, speak, read, write, and think (National Institute of Literacy, 2009).

17. Metacognition: Knowledge and control of one's own thinking and learning. In reading, metacognition refers to the reader being aware of when reading makes sense and adjusting his or her reading when comprehension fails (Allington, 2009).

18. Multi-tiered prevention approach: Involves the use of several levels of instructional interventions that increase in duration and intensity over time and are based on individual student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008).

19. Pedagogy: The instructional strategies, style, and/or techniques used by the teacher (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

20. Pedagogical content knowledge: The complex interplay between subject-matter knowledge and teaching adeptness (Shulman, 1987).

21. Perceptions: The attitude or understanding based on what is observed in regard to the event or situation (Allington, 2009).

22. Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound in speech; for example, the word *cat* has three phonemes /c/ /a/ /t/ and the word *meet* has three phonemes /m/ /e/ /t/. The letters *ee* stand for the long *e* phoneme (National Reading Panel, 2000).

23. Phonemic awareness: The ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. An example of how beginning readers

show us they have phonemic awareness is combining or blending the separate sounds of a word to say the word ("/c/ /a/ /t/ - **cat.**") (National Reading Panel, 2000).

24. Phonics: A form of instruction to cultivate the understanding and use of the alphabetic principle, that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes (the sounds in spoken language) and graphemes, the letters that represent those sounds in written language and that this information can be used to read or decode words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

25. Phonological awareness: Covers a range of understandings related to the sounds of words and word parts, including identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes. It also includes phonemic awareness as well as other aspects of spoken language such as rhyming and syllabication (National Reading Panel, 2000).

26. Progress monitoring data: individual student data collected and analyzed as an ongoing process in order to determine progress toward either specific skills or general outcomes. This information allows for immediate instructional decisions based on the review and analysis of the collected data (Harn, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2007).

27. Reading disability: affects the learner's ability to read words in isolation and in passages. Students with learning disabilities in basic reading typically have difficulty recognizing and remembering the relationships between sounds and the letters used to represent them (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

- 28. Reading intervention program:** A program that improves reading achievement by providing additional instructional time and interventions (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008).
- 29. Reading instructional method:** A set of teaching and learning materials and/or activities often given a label such as phonics method, literature based method, or language experience method (International Reading Association, 1999).
- 30. Reading instructional practice:** The act of providing instructional contexts and support to teach reading to include attention to motivation, composition, oral language, and critical thinking (Gambrell, Morrow, Pressley, 2007).
- 31. Response to Intervention (RtI):** A multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Students' progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both. (National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2006).
- 32. Responsibilities:** The state or position of being accountable for literacy instruction (Allington, 2009).
- 33. Role:** The specific function or expected function of the teacher during literacy instruction (Allington, 2009).
- 34. Struggling reader:** A student who is having difficulty learning to read (Allington, 2006).

- 35. Tier 1 literacy instruction:** Whole class instruction using the core reading program (Taylor, 2008).
- 36. Tier 2 literacy instruction:** Reading intervention provided by a certified teacher, either in small groups or individually, in addition to the core instruction. It is designed to help students who are experiencing difficulty learning to read (Vaughn & Denton, 2008).
- 37. Tier 3 literacy instruction:** Instruction designed for the struggling reader with the most severe needs (Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 2008).
- 38. Vocabulary:** Refers to the words a reader knows. *Listening vocabulary* refers to the words a person knows when hearing them in oral speech. *Speaking vocabulary* refers to the words we use when we speak. *Reading vocabulary* refers to the words a person knows when seeing them in print. *Writing vocabulary* refers to the words we use in writing (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Organization of the Study

Chapter One introduces this study in which the researcher will focus on providing an in-depth perspective on specific literacy instructional models and practices educators are utilizing to deliver Tier 2 instruction to kindergarten struggling readers within the classroom environment. This chapter includes an overview of the issues, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study.

Chapter Two provides the theoretical perspectives that serve as a framework for the proposed study. The cognitive constructivist theory, the social constructivist theory, and the transactional perspective on reading difficulties will present the groundwork for the research. Chapter Two also presents an overview of research related to emergent literacy, the 2000 National Reading Panel Report, effective approaches to reading instruction, struggling readers, the Matthew Effect, IQ-achievement discrepancy for identifying a reading disability, the multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention, and the most recent research on Response to Intervention leading toward the current study.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology, which includes a description of the research design, data collection, and data analysis. A review of the pilot study is included which provided a brief exploration and insight into this proposed topic focus and research design. Chapter Three also includes a description of the proposed research setting and participants. In addition, the role of the researcher and trustworthiness are discussed.

Chapter Four describes the results of acquiring and analyzing the data collection of three kindergarten case studies in which three teachers delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction. This instruction took place within the classroom environment and was delivered to readers whose performances were below emergent literacy expectations. A description of the literacy environments, teaching philosophies, instructional approaches/pedagogies, and student's perceptions will provide the context for an examination of how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers.

Chapter Five examines the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn from the data analysis. The implications for delivering Tier 2 Response to Intervention reading lessons to struggling at-risk kindergarten students are discussed. Recommendations for future research studies beyond this grade level will also be addressed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The proposed research study focuses on identifying what literacy instructional models and practices are being utilized to deliver instruction to struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model. Understanding the complexity of cognitive theories, struggling and disabled readers, and approaches to support reading development requires a thorough investigation of past and current research. A review of the literature supporting this research includes theoretical perspectives as well as relevant research and teaching methodologies.

The first section presents the theoretical perspectives, including the cognitive constructivist theory, the social constructivist theory, and the transactional perspective on reading difficulties. The second section presents an overview of related research. Research areas addressed include emergent literacy, the 2000 National Reading Panel Report, effective approaches to reading instruction, struggling readers, the Matthew Effect, IQ-achievement discrepancy for identifying a reading disability, the multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention, and the most recent research on Response to Intervention leading toward the proposed study. This research study seeks to explore and identify how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting.

Theoretical Perspectives

The major theories that provided support to this study are cognitive constructivism, social constructivism, and transactional perspective on reading difficulties. These theories view reading difficulties as situated within variable social and cognitive contexts. The cognitive constructivist theory focuses on learning as an active process of mental construction. From this theory educators have learned that existing knowledge structures and beliefs work to enable or impede new learning, that intelligent thought involves self-monitoring, and awareness about when and how to use skills and not just an accumulation of information. The social constructivist theory emphasizes how meaning and understandings extend beyond the social encounters as active learners interact with the physical and social world (Fosnot, 1996). Traditionally, the reading process was viewed as internal to the reader; however, the transactional theory perspective provides literacy educators a broader view of factors that contribute to learning to read. This theory contributes to the explanation of the natural variability of readers.

Constructivism

Constructivism is an epistemology, a philosophical view about the nature of learning that has emerged as an influential approach to instruction over the past decade (Airasian & Walsh, 1997). The constructivist theory considers both how people learn and the nature of knowledge. It examines

learners as they construct knowledge for themselves both individually and within their social context.

Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning have emerged over the years from the work of several prominent theorists. Most noteworthy are the works of Jean Piaget (1969) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Constructivism can be viewed from two major perspectives, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Although different in emphasis, they share many common perspectives about teaching and learning (Kaufman, 2004).

Cognitive constructivism is based on the work of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1969). Piaget's theory of cognitive development and individual construction of knowledge suggests that learners do not immediately understand and use new information. Instead, we must "construct" our own knowledge and understanding through our experiences. Experiences enable us to create schemas, mental models in our heads, which are changed, enlarged, and made more sophisticated through two different yet equally important processes of assimilation and accommodation. Learning develops in all children through the continually shifting balance between the assimilation of new information into existing cognitive structures and the accommodation of those structures themselves to the new information (Von Glasersfeld, 1995).

Building on the work of Piaget (1969), cognitive psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), expanded Piaget's assumptions by placing a greater emphasis on the social context in which learning takes place. Vygotsky viewed social

experience as the channel by which the ways of thinking and interpreting the world are shaped (Jaramillo, 1996). Piaget's (1969) cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory share many of the same assumptions. However, Vygotsky's constructivist theory, which is often called *social constructivism*, stresses the importance of the role of the teacher. For Vygotsky, the environment is instrumental in stimulating the child's cognitive development. The type and quality of the child's environment determines, to a much greater extent than they do in Piaget's theory, the pattern and rate of development (Mooney, 2000).

Central to the constructivist theory is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1986) observed that when children independently attempted new tasks, they rarely did as well as when working in collaboration with an adult. Vygotsky revealed that it was not that the adult who assisted the child to perform the task, but instead the process of engagement with the adult which facilitated the child to refine his/her thinking or performance in order to make the learning process more effective. According to Vygotsky, there are skills that the child can accomplish alone and at the other extent are skills that they cannot perform even with assistance. In the middle, lie the skills that the child can achieve with adult assistance; this is what Vygotsky termed the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*. The zone of proximal development is the point at which a child can learn a new skill in cooperation with adult assistance, enabling him/her to perform the skill independently at a later time. According to Vygotsky, the teacher assumes a critical role in the child's ability

to successfully acquire new skills. The constructivist approach to literacy views an effective reading teacher as one who knows (a) what skills the child must learn, (b) where the child is in his/her literacy development, and (c) which skills the child is ready to learn - the child's zone of proximal development (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007).

Overall, the constructivist learning theoretical perspective supports the belief that reading is conceptualized as an orchestrated set of cognitive processes. These processes are the result of experiences that individual readers acquire through formal instruction, as well as the social practice in which the learning takes place. Cambourne (2002) identifies the core theoretical assumptions of constructivism as three separate, but overlapping assumptions that he defines as *conditions of learning*:

- (1) What is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it was learned.
- (2) The purposes or goals that the learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learned.
- (3) Knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through the processes of negotiation, evaluation, and transformation (p.26).

When applying this first assumption to literacy development, constructivism recognizes that the experiences and contexts in which the child learns to read and write are critical to the child's literacy development. Cambourne (2002) states that the constructivist approach to literacy instruction

considers the means employed to teach reading and writing determine the child's understanding of and ability to use reading and writing effectively.

Au (2005) states that the most important contribution of the constructivist approach to literacy instruction is that it provides a better understanding of how to effectively teach students of diverse backgrounds. Au (2005) defines students of diverse backgrounds to include all children who are African American, Asian American, Latino, or Native American in ethnicity; who speak a first language other than standard American English; and who come from low-income families. The constructivist approach identifies the way in which reading is taught as the determining factor in how well a child learns to read and write (Cambourne, 2002).

Cambourne's (2002) second assumption states that the purposes or goals that the learner brings to the learning situation are central to what is learned. He explains that the degree to which learners are engaged (or not engaged) in literacy instruction is central to what is learned. Cambourne argues that student engagement is directly linked to: (a) the student's belief that he/she is capable of learning whatever is being demonstrated; (b) the student sees value in learning the task and/or skill; (c) the student is free from anxiety; and (d) instruction is given by someone the student respects (Cambourne, 1995; Savery & Duffy, 1995). Au (2005) reasons that the constructivist approach values the students' ownership in their literacy development. This ownership occurs when the student has positive attitudes about reading and, therefore, makes reading a part of his/her everyday life at home as well as at

school. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) point out that the reader's purpose and goals lay the foundation that supports and defines their learning opportunities. When readers are deeply invested and deeply engaged in reading, there is an effective application of cognitive and metacognitive comprehension strategies that support learning.

The third assumption, according to Cambourne (2002), implies that individuals experience the world based on knowledge that is socially constructed. Although there is a real world, the constructivist theory argues that this world does not exist independently, just waiting to be discovered and understood. Rather, the manner in which individuals impose meaning on the real world determines their understanding of it. Therefore, in terms of literacy development, constructivism views social interaction as a primary mechanism for learners to develop their individual understandings and knowledge about reading and writing.

Cambourne's (2002) framework provides a connection between the constructivist theory and instructional reading practice in the classroom. According to cognitive constructivism, learning to read is a process of assimilation of new information into existing cognitive structures and the accommodation of those structures into new information. Expanding cognitive constructivism, social constructivism views reading instruction as characterized by collaborative and cooperative learning. Learners develop their individual understandings and knowledge through social interactions that

enrich, interweave, and expand their learning of issues and phenomena (Cambourne, 2002).

Transactional Theory Perspective on Reading

Transactional theory, as it applies to literacy, suggests that literacy development is a “reciprocal, mutually defining relationship” that emerges from innumerable transactions between the reader and texts (Rosenblatt, 1978). Rosenblatt (1978) maintains that the reading of any work of literature is, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of the reader. Rosenblatt argues that literacy development is not an “interaction” but instead a mutually shaping exchange between reader and written text. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1978) helps to explain the perspective on the natural variability of literacy development, as well as a broader view of factors that contribute to literacy learning.

According to McEneaney, Lose, and Schwartz (2006) since the mid-1970s, educators have viewed reading difficulties as factors internal to readers, however, the recent Response to Intervention initiative views variability in reading ability from a broader perspective. The transactional theoretical perspective on reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) provides a foundation for the RtI approach. McEneaney, Lose, and Schwartz (2006) wrote:

Much of the research on reading difficulties has sought to distinguish low-achieving readers from those with a reading disability. A transactional perspective on reading and reading difficulties, however,

advocates that understanding natural variability of readers is more important and productive than diagnostic categories that have more to do with funding policy and legislation than they do with learning to read (p. 120).

The transactional theory perspective places an emphasis on the natural variability of a reader's ability depending on the contextual circumstances of the environment. Specifically, this theoretical perspective focuses on the complex circumstances of the classroom and on the contribution of the teacher in supporting successful literacy development (McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006). The transactional theoretical perspective on reading has profound implications for understanding variability in literacy development, as well as the potential to successfully respond to children experiencing difficulties learning to read. According to the transactional theory perspective, literacy development is the process of the exchange between the learner and the conditions that support the learner: the instructional approach, teacher, classroom, school, and cultural variables within this exchange.

Klingner and Edwards (2006) make the point that even with superior classroom instruction, some variability in literacy development will naturally occur among students, particularly students who enter school with a variation in their literacy experiences. McEneaney, Lose, and Schwartz (2006) acknowledge this fact and support adopting the transactional perspective to assist educators to more effectively address reading difficulties. This

theoretical perspective views variability in literacy development as a normal occurrence that with early intervention provides the greatest likelihood of reducing or preventing further difficulty. The transactional theoretical perspective helps to explain the natural variability of readers, as well as a broader view of factors that contribute to learning to read.

Related Research

The theories of cognitive constructivism (Piaget, 1969), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and the transactional theoretical perspective on reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) provide the foundation for effective literacy instruction in the elementary classroom. The following additional areas of research provide a framework for the proposed research study. They include a chronological order of research on emergent literacy, the findings of the 2000 National Reading Panel Report, effective approaches to reading instruction, research related to struggling readers, slight variations in early reading development later magnified through the Matthew Effect, the current IQ-Achievement discrepancy model for identifying a reading disability, the potential of the multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention (RtI), and recent research on RtI influencing the purpose of this study.

Emergent Literacy

Early literacy development is critical to a child's success in school and life; learning to read and write is one of the best predictors of success in school and the likelihood that the child will grow up to actively contribute to our increasingly literate global community (National Association for the Education of Young Children & the International Reading Association, 1998). How best to teach beginning literacy skills has been widely debated for many years. One reason that educators and the public care so deeply about this topic is because literacy is the key to success for both the child and our democracy (Adams, 1990).

The concept that the building blocks for success in literacy begin long before preschool first surfaced in Dolores Durkin's (1966) book, *Children Who Read Early*. Durkin's research explored why and how some children entered school already able to read. She found that early readers engaged in various reading behaviors, most notably pretend reading and writing activities. In addition, these children had caregivers who frequently read to them. Durkin concluded that early readers were not easily identified by tests. However, these children shared a singular common element that supported their early reading development - their caregivers made reading and writing a priority.

Read's (1971) research revealed new knowledge of how children learn to spell and write. He found that children's spelling progressed through several developmental stages. Pretend writing (using letters or symbols to represent words) advanced to invented spelling (using letters to represent all the sounds

in words) to very nearly correct spelling. Marie Clay (1979) was the first to use the term *emergent literacy* to refer to the developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing (Sulzby, 1989; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and the influence of the child's environment that aids in this development (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000).

Several additional studies (Chomsky, 1979; Clarke, 1988; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000) have demonstrated that children's knowledge of letter sounds is an important building block in early literacy development. Similar research by Graves (1983), Dyson (1985, 1987, 1990, 1995), and Sulzby (1985) have also investigated the link between reading and writing and have concluded that both reflect and support early literacy development.

Marie Clay (1979) believed that letter knowledge is only one of a number of print-related concepts of value to the beginning reader. Her *Concepts of Print Test* (1998), which developed as part of her research into beginning reading and reading failure, requires the reader to show knowledge of aspects of a printed text such as: orientation (being able to place a book the correct way up); recognizing that print carries the verbal message; understanding that print is read from left to right; locating the first and last parts of the story; recognizing that the top line of print is read first; and understanding that the page number is not part of the story.

Over the years, works from a number of researchers have expanded educators' understanding of emergent literacy. Research in the 1980s began to study literacy learning in a new way as an effort was made to examine literacy

development from the child's perspective. Researchers began to perceive learning from multidisciplinary perspectives grounded in cognitive psychology, anthropology, child development, and social interaction theory (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). From this research, a vivid description of how children acquire literacy skills emerged. Goodman (1986) found that as early as age two or three, children can identify signs, logos, and labels in their environment.

What is apparent is that children's literacy development proceeds along a continuum and that children acquire literacy skills in a variety of ways and at different ages (McGee & Richgels, 1996). Strickland & Morrow (1989) describe emergent literacy as a framework which includes the following components or skills that predict later success in reading and writing: conventions of print, literacy environments, phonological awareness, letter/sound identification, and language abilities. Although these are independent and identifiable skills, they never function in isolation; they are a result of the acquisition of strategies that children attain as they learn to construct meaning with language.

In 1998, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International Reading Association released a joint position statement regarding best practices and important policies in fostering literacy development in children from birth to age eight. The NAEYC and the IRA (1998) documented these six important practices:

1. Children take their first critical steps toward learning to read and write very early in life.
2. Children do not become literate automatically; therefore, careful planning and instruction are essential.
3. Ongoing assessment of children's knowledge and skills helps teachers plan effective instruction.
4. No one teaching method or approach is likely too be effective for all children.
5. As children move from preschool into kindergarten and the primary grades, instruction focused on phonemic awareness, letter recognition, segmenting words into sounds, and decoding printed text will support later reading competence.
6. Children who are learning English as a second language will become literate more easily if they have a strong foundation in their primary language (pp. 3-5).

It is essential that educators are knowledgeable regarding children's literacy development which involves a continuum of proceedings over the years. This knowledge allows educators to provide an optimum environment to foster early reading and writing development. Well informed educators are better able to facilitate literacy advancement by providing developmentally appropriate practices designed to meet the needs of all learners.

Over a decade ago, interest resurfaced among policy makers regarding how to improve emergent literacy. In response to public concern, the U.S. Congress in 1997 authorized the creation of the National Reading Panel (NRP). It was given the task of investigating the most effective methods for teaching children to read. In April 2000 the panel released their findings which have impacted evidenced-based literacy instruction for the past decade.

The National Reading Panel Report

The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed more than 100,000 research studies in the areas of alphabets (phonemic awareness and phonics), fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction in order to identify methods that consistently resulted in reading success. The National Reading Panel (NRP) determined that effective reading instruction included the teaching of: (1) phonemic awareness (breaking apart and manipulating the sounds in words); (2) phonics (the relationships between written letters and sounds heard in words); (3) vocabulary (word meanings); (4) fluency (the ability to read text accurately and quickly; and (5) comprehension (understanding what is read). The panel also found that improvement in teachers' knowledge and practice leads to higher student achievement.

As described by Allington (2006), the NRP report concluded that:

- Developing phonemic awareness and phonics skills in kindergarten and first grade was supported by the research, but

that systematic phonics was not effective for struggling readers in grades 2 to 6.

- Providing regular guided oral reading with a focus on fluency was important.
- Silent reading was recommended for developing fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills (though the panel felt that the research reviewed had not adequately demonstrated the benefits of various incentive programs for increasing reading volume).
- Direct teaching of comprehension strategies was recommended.
- Providing good comprehension strategy instruction is a complex activity. Thus, the panel recommended extensive, formal preparation in comprehension strategies teaching for all teachers (p. 2).

This report was the first of its kind developed from an explicit rule-based procedure which guided the selection, synthesis, and analysis of research that identified proven methods that work in reading education (Shanahan, 2002). The true value in the National Reading Panel's report was that it gathered information exclusively from scientifically-based research to determine effective, evidence-based reading instruction methods (Shanahan, 2002).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is crucial for children to learn to read and write (Adams, 1990) and is one of the best predictors of success in early literacy development (Ehri & Nunes, 2002). Phonemic awareness is the ability to understand that spoken language is made up of individual sounds or phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in spoken language (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). First, children realize that spoken language is made up of individual words. Following word awareness, children learn that words are composed of syllables. Next, they become aware that syllables are composed of onsets (sounds before the vowel) and rimes (the vowel and sounds after it). Lastly, children learn that all of the sounds in the word can be broken down into individual sounds that can be manipulated to create different words (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007).

Unlike phonics where beginning readers recognize, blend, and segment printed letters, phonemic awareness involves only spoken words and sounds. Beginning readers must understand that the spoken word *cat* begins with the sound /c/ and that *cat* contains three speech sounds: /c/ /a/ /t/. The understanding that individual speech sounds can be blended and segmented forms the foundation for learning phonics - the blending and segmenting of printed letter sounds (Griffith & Olson, 1992).

Ehri and Nunes (2002) identify the following tasks to examine a child's ability to distinguish phonemes in words:

1. *Phoneme isolation*, which requires recognizing individual sounds in words. For example, “Tell me the first sound in *hot*.” (/h/)
2. *Phoneme identity*, which requires recognizing the common sound in different words. For example, “Tell me the sound that is the same in *pig*, *pepper*, and *pot*.” (/p/)
3. *Phoneme categorization*, which requires recognizing the word with the odd sound in a sequence of three or four words. For example, “Which word does not belong? *Dog*, *donut*, or *boy*.” (*boy*)
4. *Phoneme blending*, which requires listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them to form a recognizable word. For example, “What word is /sh/ /i/ /p/? (*ship*)
5. *Phoneme segmentation*, which requires breaking a word into its sounds by tapping out or counting the sounds, or by pronouncing and positioning a marker for each sound. For example, “How many phonemes in the word *choose*? (three: /ch/ /oo/ /z/)
6. *Phoneme deletion*, which requires stating the word that remains when a specified phoneme is removed. For example, “What is *bat* without the /b/? (*at*) (pp. 111-112).

The National Reading Panel (2000) identifies phoneme blending and segmenting as the two skills most directly related to reading and spelling.

Phoneme blending is the precursor to putting letter sounds together to pronounce/read words. Segmenting is the skill needed for hearing and writing the individual sounds to spell words (Adams, 1990; Yopp, 1992).

In recent years, a number of studies have documented the effects of phonemic awareness on early literacy development. The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed 52 studies published in peer-reviewed journals in order to evaluate the impact of phonemic awareness instruction on helping children learn to read and write. From this meta-analysis, several important findings emerged: (1) phonemic awareness can be taught and learned; (2) direct instruction of phonemic awareness skills helps children learn to read and spell; (3) phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using letters; and (4) phoneme manipulation should focus on no more than one or two types.

Difficulties in learning to read and write typically result from a deficit in the ability to understand that spoken language can be broken down into phonemes. Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz (2003) found this awareness is usually missing in children with dyslexia, an impairment in the brain's ability to translate written images received from the eyes into meaningful language. Gray (2008) documented that although dyslexia is not curable, children with dyslexia can make significant gains in overcoming reading difficulties by receiving intensive direct instruction in phoneme blending, segmenting, and manipulation. The results provided by brain-imaging technology provide proof that direct intensive instruction in phonemic awareness can make positive, long-term changes in brain functioning (Gray, 2008).

The International Reading Association (1998) offered the following suggestions for high-quality instruction in phonemic awareness:

- Provide students with a print-rich environment.
- Engage students with surrounding print as both readers and writers.
- Engage children in language activities that focus on both the form and the content of spoken and written language.
- Provide explicit explanations in support of students' discovery of the alphabetic principle.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice reading and writing for real reasons in a variety of contexts to promote fluency and independence (p. 6).

Phonics

The instruction in and acquisition of phonemic awareness leads directly to teaching letter-sound associations. Phonics is the ability to distinguish the relationship between phonemes (the sounds in spoken language) and graphemes (the letters of the alphabet that represent those sounds) (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). The term *phonics* is used almost interchangeably with other terms including *sounding out*, *decoding*, and *word attack*. Simply, phonics is the process of combining the sounds of printed letters in a word to produce its pronunciation. For example, beginning readers will blend the sounds of the printed letters *d-o-g* to pronounce the word *dog*. With phonetically regular words such as *hot*, *pig*, *cat*, *big* and *sat*, phonics works easily. However, with irregular words such as *was*, *is*, *love*, and *does*, using the sounds of the letters

at least gives readers a place to begin trying to pronounce the word (Smith & Read, 2009).

Explicit, systematic phonics instruction provides readers with the skills to become successful readers (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and also is a necessary component of a balanced reading program (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007). The National Reading Panel (2000) reminded teachers that although a necessary element, phonics is only one part of a balanced early literacy program. Cunningham and Cunningham (2002) suggested that phonics related instruction and activities should not consist of more than twenty-five percent of a total reading program.

Although few studies have compared different forms of phonics instruction, research has revealed that explicit, systematic phonics instruction is better than little or no phonics instruction (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000). Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2004) describe effective phonics programs as those that include the direct teaching of letter-sound relationships which includes both consonants and vowels. By sequencing the instruction of particular groups of consonants and vowels, children can begin to blend these sounds in order to read words even before they learn all of the letter-sound relationships.

Explicit and systematic phonics instruction which includes instruction in vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing development using authentic literature can help children to become enthusiastic lifelong readers. Similarly, if phonics instruction is offered as a separate, prerequisite skill to

learning to read, it can stifle children's reading growth and create a dislike for reading (Adams, 1990; Reutzel & Cooter, 2007).

When the National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed the research on phonics instruction, they concluded that the most effective programs were well-organized and taught letter-sound relationships in a predetermined, logical sequence along with many opportunities to apply these skills. This instruction should begin in kindergarten and be completed by third grade. Marilyn Adams (1990) documented similar conclusions from her research, which revealed that phonics is an important element of a balanced reading program and that phonics instruction should focus on intensive, systematic instruction.

Reutzel and Cooter (2007) identified several approaches to phonics instruction supported in the research. The following approaches to teaching phonics are sometimes modified or combined together:

1. *Synthetic phonics instruction.* The traditional phonics instruction that begins by teaching children individual sounds for letters and then having them blend those letters together to sound out words. Synthetic phonics programs use decodable texts that are constructed to have children practice their decoding skills and are restricted to sounds they can blend to make words, plus a few essential sight words.
2. *Embedded phonics instruction.* The teaching of phonics within text reading. This is a more implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning.

3. *Analogy-based phonics*. Best known as word families. A variation of onset and rime instruction in which the students identify new words that have that same word part. For example, students learn to produce the word *moat* by using their prior knowledge of the *-oat* rime form three words they already know: *boat, coat, goat*.
4. *Analytic phonics instruction*. This approach is a variation of the previous two approaches in which students study previously learned whole words to discover letter-sound relationships. For example, *stop, sturdy, steam, and story* all begin with the *st* consonant blend.
5. *Phonics through spelling*. Sometimes called invented spelling. Students segment spoken words into phonemes and write the letters that represent those sounds. For example, *dog* can be sounded out and written phonetically. This approach is most often used as part of a process writing program (p. 207).

There have been few studies that have compared different types of systematic phonics instruction; instead, most have compared one kind of systematic phonics instruction with either no phonics instruction or ‘hit-or-miss’ phonics instruction (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002). Research does indicate that children need to develop phonemic awareness and sequential decoding skills and have the opportunity to practice and apply this knowledge regularly. However, research does not support the use of any phonics

instructional approach in isolation; instead, research encourages the use of all of the above approaches. The most effective method to teach children phonics is by applying a variety of activities and approaches, thereby providing children with the opportunity to apply skills and become actively engaged in what they are learning (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002).

In response to the debated "reading wars" the teaching of phonics in place of teaching for meaning (the whole language approach), the International Reading Association (1997) developed a position statement. This statement made the following three assertions regarding the role of phonics in reading instruction: (1) the teaching of phonics is an important aspect of beginning reading instruction; (2) classroom teachers in the primary grades value and teach phonics as part of their reading programs; and (3) phonics instruction, to be effective in promoting independence in reading, must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program (pp. 3-4).

Fluency

The ultimate goal of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction is to help readers develop fluency in reading. Fluency as defined by the National Reading Panel (2000) is the process of reading text quickly, accurately, and with expression which plays a significant role in the development of comprehension (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). According to Allington (2006), fluency is the foundation for learning to read; it is the prerequisite for constructing meaning from text which is the ultimate goal of reading. Hudson,

Lane, and Pullen (2005) identified three key elements of reading fluency: accuracy in word decoding, automaticity in recognizing words, and appropriate use of prosody (expression) while reading orally.

The National Reading Panel (2000) revealed that fluent readers are able to focus their attention comprehending the text, while less fluent readers must focus on decoding words. Each reader has a limited amount of attention capacity that can be allocated among several items simultaneously; therefore, the more attention needed to decode words, the less there is left to comprehend what is being read. Rasinski (2006) wrote:

Too many developing readers (a) make an excessive number of decoding errors while reading; (b) read words in text correctly but put such effort into the task that they exhaust their cognitive resources, which should be devoted to comprehension; or (c) decode words accurately and effortlessly but are unable to put them together in a way that adds appropriate and meaningful expression to their oral reading. The result of any of these manifestations is often poor comprehension, a decided lack enthusiasm for reading, and a personal sense of failure (p. 704).

Although much of word identification instruction takes place at the word level, fluency instruction occurs at the passage level as students practice reading sections of text until they can read aloud quickly, accurately, and with expression. Pikulski and Chard (2005) described fluency as part of a

developmental process which forms the bridge between successful word identification and reading comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) use the term *automaticity* to describe the development of fluency. Automaticity refers to the ability engage and coordinate a number of complex subskills and strategies with little cognitive effort. For example, when operating a car, most drivers do not think about turning the wheel or pushing on the pedals; therefore, attention can be focused on other tasks such as watching for pedestrians or traffic lights. In the same way as children develop as readers, a growing number of words are recognized with little effort, thus allowing conscious attention to be focused on understanding what is being read (Allington, 2006). Adams (1990) make this statement about automaticity:

Laboratory research indicates that the most critical factor beneath fluent word reading is the ability to recognize letters, spelling patterns, and words effortlessly, automatically and visually. The central goal of all reading instruction—comprehension--depends critically on this ability (pp. 54).

After reviewing recent research on fluency instruction, the National Reading Panel (2000) found no evidence that independent reading contributed to the development of fluency; however, the practice of repeated reading does have a positive effect on fluency. Although the practice of repeated readings is effective, the reason is not clear. It is possible that repeated readings are effective because they increase the amount of time spent reading, improve

reader confidence, and/or allow children access to material that they might otherwise not be able to read (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003).

Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2004) suggested the following instructional methods to improve reading fluency: (1) reading with a model reader; (2) choral reading; (3) tape-recorded readings; (4) readers' theater or reading performances; and (5) partner reading. Allington (2006) takes these instructional methods and groups them into three clusters:

1. *Tutorial approaches* rely on an external source to monitor and respond to the reader. This approach could be offered in or outside the classroom and could be delivered by the classroom teacher, a specialist teacher, trained paraprofessional or adult volunteer or even by an older student who has been trained on how to listen and respond as the child reads aloud. Tutorial approaches include paired reading peer tutors and rereading to meet a standard.
2. *Small-group approaches* can be offered in the classroom or in special programs. This approach includes choral reading, teacher modeling, and echo reading.
3. *Whole-class instructional redesign*. This approach focuses on intervention strategies used for whole-group instruction. They include fluency-oriented reading instruction, shared book experiences, repeated readings for interpretation, and readers' theater.

Rasinski (2006) cautioned against engaging children in repeated readings solely for the purpose of improving reading rates which could result in manifestations of poor comprehension, lack of enthusiasm for reading, and a personal sense of failure. Instead, he proposed repeated readings in the form of meaningful and expressive oral interpretation or performance of text, as the key instructional method for developing reading fluency. Research by Rasinski and Stevenson (2005) examined the results of first-graders who practiced rehearsing poetry nightly with their parents. They documented that students identified as at-risk for reading failure made nearly two and one-half times improvement in reading rate as those students who read with their parents but did not practice rehearsing text. They concluded that an emphasis on reading with expression, enthusiasm, and meaning resulted in a significant improvement in reading fluency.

Instructional approaches to improve reading fluency are very useful for the vast majority of children, especially struggling readers. However, Allington (2006) suggested they should be considered as short-term interventions with the goal of moving readers to higher levels reading skills and extended independent reading activities.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary development is the ability to store the meanings and pronunciations of words in order to communicate effectively (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). Researchers often refer to two types of vocabulary: (1) oral vocabulary,

words used in speaking and listening; and (2) reading vocabulary, words that we need to know to understand what we read and words that we use in writing (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). In the beginning stages of reading, virtually all the words are known by the readers because the words are in their listening vocabularies. However, as students progress to higher-level texts, vocabulary development becomes a key element in their continued growth as readers and writers (Gunning, 2010).

The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that vocabulary can be taught through direct, explicit instruction and is acquired through indirect, everyday experiences with language. Traditionally, teachers have taught vocabulary with the use of lists and exercises, but such activities only store the new information in short-term memory (Strickland, 2005). Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) described their general theoretical orientation to vocabulary instruction as a *balanced cognitive-constructivist* approach. They recommended a four-part vocabulary program that maintains a balance between cognitive and affective factors.

1. *Wide reading.* Children learn vocabulary by being immersed in words. Reading aloud to children and children reading books themselves is the best way to expand their vocabularies. Also, increasing the variety of their reading experiences will significantly increase the words they learn (Cunningham, 2005).
2. *Teaching individual words.* The explicit teaching of words plays

3. a very important role in elementary classrooms (Yopp & Yopp, 2007). Vocabulary instruction is most effective when children are given both the definition and the contextual information about the word, and when they experience multiple encounters with the word (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002).
4. *Teaching word learning strategies.* Teaching children to use context clues is the most widely recommended and most useful strategy to teach vocabulary, and a necessary element of a comprehensive vocabulary program (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002). Teaching word parts (prefixes and suffixes) is highly recommended because it helps children to unlock the meanings of unknown words.
5. *Fostering word consciousness.* Word consciousness combines metacognition and interest and enjoyment for learning words. Word consciousness is fostered by the teacher modeling both enthusiasm for and proficiency in skillful word usage and by promoting word play activities (Graves & Watta-Taffe, 2002).

Allington (2006) supported the position that wide, independent reading is the most important factor in increasing new word meanings. This view was corroborated by Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) whose research explored the link between the role of reading volume and cognitive development. They found that as reading experiences increase, the ability to store and use a wide range of word meanings in both oral and reading vocabulary also increases.

Although research reveals that by increasing reading volume, vocabulary increases, Robbins and Ehri (1994) found that children with limited vocabularies benefited more from the direct teaching of word meanings. Their research documented that during storybook reading, kindergarten children with limited vocabularies did not easily learn new word meanings unless these words were directly and explicitly taught. Research has also documented a strong link between vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Therefore, instructional strategies that increase vocabulary development also have a positive effect on comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Vocabulary development is an ongoing activity, and many opportunities should be provided to encourage its expansion. Having rich reading experiences and working with words are important factors in increasing children's vocabularies

Comprehension

The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) defines comprehension as the process of extracting and constructing meaning through the connection and interaction with written text. They describe comprehension as the interaction of four important elements: (1) the reader comprehending, (2) a text to be comprehended, and (3) an activity contributing to comprehension, within (4) a sociocultural context. The first three essential elements of reading comprehension occur within the fourth essential element of reading comprehension, the sociocultural context of the school classroom, the home,

and other social and cultural situations. The interaction of all four factors must be taken into consideration to improve comprehension. It is through the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency that children receive the building blocks of literacy, thereby establishing the foundation for comprehension and the appreciation and understanding of text which is the ultimate goal of learning to read (Gunning, 2010).

The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that teachers must be skillful in their instruction and must be able to respond to students' needs for instructive feedback as they read. In order to achieve this, teachers must have knowledge of instructional strategies to teach comprehension, as well as the ability to select the instructional strategy to achieve their goal. A great deal of research suggests that comprehension can be improved by direct instruction of specific skills and strategies. The National Reading Panel (2000) recommended teaching the following comprehension strategies: prediction, activating prior knowledge, think alouds, text structure, graphic organizers, summarization, and question generating/answering.

From his research, Gunning (2010) developed an instructional model that connects and integrates the teaching of comprehension strategies with opportunities to read and write. This model includes the following six steps:

1. *Introduce the strategy.* Give an explicit description of the strategy, why it is being taught, and when and how it should be used.

2. *Model the strategy.* Show how the strategy is used; model the process, and do a think-aloud demonstration of the strategy.
3. *Guided practice of the strategy.* At first, provide highly structured guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility as students become more comfortable using the strategy and are able to apply it correctly.
4. *Independent practice of the strategy.* Give students opportunities to use the strategy independently during reading and writing activities.
5. *Assessment and reteaching.* Observe students applying the strategy. Reteach and review as necessary.
6. *Ongoing reinforcement and implementation.* After students have used the strategy for some time, they will add it to their repertoire and focus their learning on new strategies. However, continue to review the strategy from time to time and also remind students to use it (pp. 312-313).

Learning to read and write is the most important milestone in a child's education and one of the best predictors of the child's future success in school (International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). It is hard to diminish the importance of this issue and one reason that researchers, educators, and the public will continue to focus their concern on this topic.

Over the years, different approaches to reading instruction have emerged and disappeared. However, the National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed more than 100,000 research studies in the area of literacy development to identify methods that consistently resulted in reading success. The National Reading Panel determined that effective reading instruction included the teaching of: (1) phonemic awareness (breaking apart and manipulating the sounds in words); (2) phonics (the relationships between written letters and sounds heard in words); (3) vocabulary (word meanings); (4) fluency (the ability to read text accurately and quickly; and (5) comprehension (understanding what is read). The panel also found that improvement in teachers' literacy knowledge and instructional practice leads to higher student achievement. The proposed study will attempt to identify how educators are applying the findings of National Reading Panel and the concepts of Response to Intervention to assist struggling readers identified for Tier 2 instruction.

Effective Approaches to Reading Instruction

Learning to read is the most important and satisfying achievement in a child's early elementary school experience (Strickland, 2002). Cunningham and Allington (1999) define readers not just as people who can read, but people who choose to read for their own information and pleasure. The more children read, the better readers they become; and the more they enjoy reading,

the more they read (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). How then do we ensure that each child is successful in reading?

The position taken by the International Reading Association (1999) is that there is no single method to effectively teach all students to read. They maintain that teachers must have a strong knowledge of each child in their care and apply a variety of teaching methods based on the child's strengths and needs. By individualizing and differentiating reading instruction, teachers can ensure the best possible outcome for each child's success. Also, effective reading teachers understand that sometimes large-group instruction does not benefit all children and, therefore, small-group or individual instruction is more appropriate (International Reading Association, 2000). This position was supported by Adams (1990) who wrote:


I do not believe that a best method can be defined in outline. The effectiveness of a method depends too much on the details of its realization-its materials, its teachers, its students, and the compatibility of each with the other. By extension, there can be no such thing as a universal method (p. 423)

According to Vygotsky (1986), learning takes place at the child's zone of proximal development, the point at which a child can perform a new task or skill with adult assistance. The teacher is most effective by serving as a mediating adult within this

zone providing a combination of encouragement, prompts, reminders, and questions to move the student from doing something with support to performing independently (Durkin, 2004).

To become successful readers, students require a continuum of various instructional approaches that are consistent with a constructivist framework. A combination of these varied approaches enable students to learn to identify words, read them fluently, comprehend text, construct themes, and develop personal responses to literature (Au, 2005). Figure 2.1 summarizes the levels of instructional approaches- modeled, shared, guided, and independent reading.

Figure 2.1 Continuum of Instructional Approaches

Continuum of Instructional Approaches			
	Approach	Description	Examples
High  Low	Modeled	Teacher reads aloud, modeling how good readers read fluently and with expression. Books too difficult for children to read themselves are used.	Reading aloud to children Listening centers
	Shared	Teacher and children read books together, with the children following as the teacher reads and then repeating familiar refrains. Books children can't read by themselves are used.	Big books Buddy reading
	Guided	Teacher plans and teaches reading lessons to small, homogeneous groups using instructional-level books. Focus is on supporting and observing children's use of strategies.	Guided reading groups
	Independent	Children choose and read self-selected books independently. Teachers conference with children to monitor their progress.	Reading workshop Reading centers

Adapted from G. Tompkins (2007) *Literacy for the 21st Century*, p. 18.

Modeled Reading

Sometimes the best way to help children understand a particular text is to read it aloud and discuss it with them. Modeled reading allows teachers to demonstrate or model how expert readers read fluently and with expression while providing teachers with the opportunity to discuss talk about the strategies they apply while they are reading (Tompkins, 2007). This type of reading helps to activate knowledge that the students already possess and to develop their background vocabulary and concepts. Routman (2002) contends that reading aloud in all grades is a critical part of creating successful readers and interested learners. The most worthy books are those that reflect students' culture and interests, ones with which they can identify, discuss, and write.

Reading aloud for instructional purposes provides the most support for students (Tompkins, 2007). It is used when a particular piece of text has difficult concepts or words, is hard for students to decode, or is difficult to follow. Sometimes after the teacher has read a piece aloud, students then read it with the teacher's guidance, cooperatively or independently. It is well documented that modeled reading has a significant impact on the acquisition of fluency in reading (Reutzel & Cooter, 2009).

Au (2005) points out that many children from low-income families enter school without experiencing storybook reading; therefore, modeled reading provides teachers with the opportunity to introduce children to the joys of reading and books. Reading aloud to children affords teachers the opportunity to invite children as listeners to share their thoughts, feelings, and

connections about literature; thus, preparing them for personal connections they will encounter in future reading experiences (Hancock, 2007).

Shared Reading

During shared reading, both teachers and children take part in the reading experience. The most important way that shared reading differs from modeled reading is that during shared reading children directly participate in reading; whereas, during modeled reading children simply listen to what is being read (Tompkins, 2007). Shared reading involves the teacher reading from big books while students join in during the reading of familiar and repeated words and phrases. This instructional approach encourages children to begin to read successfully in an enjoyable and nonthreatening manner (Hancock, 2007).

Shared reading also helps children to develop word-identification skills. Sulzby (1985) found that by participating in shared reading experiences, children moved from paying attention only to the illustrations to paying attention to print. Shared reading as an effective approach to teach children about *concepts of print* (Clay, 1978). When children follow along as teachers read from large print text, they learn about *functions of print*, that print can be used to communicate. Teachers model *conventions of print*, such as directionality. Children gain knowledge about *forms of print*, including letters of the alphabet and punctuation. Also, during a shared reading experience,

teachers help develop children's phonemic awareness by bringing attention to words that rhyme, or begin or end with the same sounds.

Yopp and Yopp (2000) advocate for the use of shared reading instruction as a way to engage and instruct students with various types of sound manipulation activities (matching, isolation, substitution, blending, segmentation, and deletion) for syllables, onset-rime, and phonemes. The use of children's literature that introduce speech sounds through rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and phonemic manipulation is one of the best ways to improve children's sensitivity to the phonemes that make up our language (Yopp, 1995). Richgels, Poremba, and McGee (1996) state that proficiency in phonemic awareness is critical to successful literacy development; thus, they insist that providing students with opportunities to practice linguistic awareness and attend to print in a meaningful, motivating, and engaging must be an integral part of every early literacy program. Children need shared reading experiences in order to build their oral language development while they learn to read. Along with instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding skills, teachers must read with young children and talk about the stories to expand their language development (Routman, 2002).

Although typically identified as a primary grade instructional approach, upper elementary grade teachers also use shared reading; however, they use the approach somewhat differently. Upper elementary grade teachers frequently use shared reading when reading difficult chapter books with students. Shared reading enables teachers to read aloud from a text while students follow along

from their own copy of the same text, reading silently or softly to themselves (Tompkins, 2007). During shared reading experiences, children develop a foundation for independence in word identification skills and strategies encouraged through guided reading (Au, 2005).

Guided Reading

The International Reading Association (2000) maintains that effective classroom teachers use whole-group as well as small-group reading instruction to meet the needs of all students. The National Reading Panel (2000) supported this finding by identifying the small-group instructional method of guided reading as an important component of a well-balanced reading program.

Guided reading allows classroom teachers to deliver instructional interventions to small-groups of students with similar reading profiles. The National Reading Panel (2000) pointed out that as our student population continues to become increasingly diverse, guided reading allows classroom teachers to deliver intervention strategies to meet the varying needs of students. Just as no one text is appropriate for each student, no one method of teaching reading is effective for each student. During small-group instruction teachers can support students as they attempt new skills through a process called "scaffolding" (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007; 2009). Scaffolding provides the bridge between what the child can do independently and his/her potential abilities. Scaffolding allows students to develop the strategies and skills

necessary for them to become strategic independent readers under the guidance of an adult (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007; 2009).

Guided reading is an instructional method that allows the teacher to work with small-groups of four to six students with similar instructional needs in reading and word study (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Tyner, 2004). Typically, guiding reading groups meet three to five times per week for 20 to 30 minutes each session. During this time, the teacher provides guidance and support while instructing at each reader's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which is the instructional level at which the reader can succeed with assistance but not yet on his/her own.

Grouping must remain flexible to meet the changing strengths and needs of the students as they progress in their literacy development; thus, avoiding static composition of the groupings that resulted in the "buzzards" verses the "eagles" reading groups of previous decades (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007). This practice frequently damaged the self-esteem of the reader, as well as the academic expectations of both the teacher and of the reader him/herself. Reutzel and Cooter (2007) maintain that guided reading lessons should include explicit instruction in literacy skills. This instruction should focus on scientifically-based reading research strategies in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Tyner, 2004). The ultimate goal of guided reading is to help students develop the necessary skills and motivation essential for them to become successful independent readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Guided reading, as a researched-based method of reading instruction, could have growing implications for the Response to Intervention approach to addressing the challenges of differentiated literacy instruction for struggling readers. Current research on guided reading has documented this instructional method as a vital component of today's balanced literacy program (Ford & Opitz, 2008).

A study conducted by Suits (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of guided reading instruction for second-language learners. She conducted a case study in which she was a participant. She met daily with guided reading groups which consisted of 39 students in grades 1-3 that included both second-language and native-speaker students. Her research focused on four questions: What reading strategies work best with second-language learners? Are guided reading groups beneficial to second-language learners? How could she communicate with the classroom teachers regarding the guided reading groups that she was meeting with? Did the SLL students progress through the reading levels?

Suits (2003) evidenced guided reading to be an effective method of instruction for both native-speaking and second-language students. She discovered that the use of small groups of students with similar reading processes enabled children to read books at their level, develop cooperative skills, improve communication, and improve self-confidence in a non-threatening environment. Suits found guided reading to be an effective method of instruction to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez and Rascon (2007) examined the effectiveness of guided reading instruction for English-language learners. This study modified the traditional method of guided reading instruction by including explicit instruction in vocabulary, text structure (e.g., semantics, syntax, morphology), and cultural relevance. This case study included two elementary classrooms of 23 students. One classroom was located in an inner-city urban school where 96% of the student population qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch. The other classroom was located in an urban school where 65% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

After receiving twenty-four, 30-minute sessions, the students from the inner-city urban school gained an average of 1.3 grade levels in reading. After receiving thirty-six, 30-minute sessions, the students from the urban school averaged a gain of 1.8 grade levels in reading. In addition, the students were surveyed following the study to determine their perceptions of the experience. Overwhelmingly, the students reported that it was a positive experience. Specifically, they reported feeling that they learned more about reading, writing, and speaking during the sessions than during their whole group classroom instruction.

Fawson and Reutzel (2000) conducted a study that examined guided reading instruction in grades K-2. They contended that many teachers do not have the large numbers of leveled stories necessary to conduct guided reading instruction. Therefore, they investigated whether basal reading programs could be adapted for guided reading by leveling the stories for small group

instruction. They surveyed several school districts to identify five of the most commonly used basal reading programs. They documented the five most prevalent K-2 basal reading programs as Harcourt Brace, Silver Burden Ginn, Houghton Mifflin, Scott Foresman, and Scholastic.

A committee of experienced teachers who were also pursuing graduate degrees in reading worked to level the basal stories using Fountas and Pinell's (1999) A through R text gradient criteria. These teachers then used the basal selections to provide guided reading instruction in their classrooms. This study surveyed the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of using the stories in basal programs for small group instruction. The findings indicated that leveling stories in a basal program was an effective method to access additional stories for teachers who do not have access to the large numbers of leveled books to use with guided reading.

Relationship Between Guided Reading and Response to Intervention

Research over the last decade has demonstrated that guided reading instruction is an effective approach for early literacy development. Guided reading allows teachers to provide direct instruction to small groups of students with like instructional needs and abilities. All students benefit when teachers use the guided reading instructional model (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez & Rascon, 2007). Since instruction is tailored to their individual needs and abilities, teachers can provide appropriate support and intervention to help students to achieve a high degree of reading fluency, thus reducing frustration

and in turn promoting positive attitudes toward reading (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008).

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 has brought considerable attention to Response to Intervention and its role in identifying students with learning disabilities. This change shifts the focus away from the identification process to support and intervention of students during the earliest stage of experiencing difficulties learning to read (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). There are two primary intervention approaches in the Response to Intervention model: the problem solving approach and the standard treatment response method. Although the standard treatment response method has been used in most research studies, the problem solving approach is most widely adopted by school districts (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The popularity of the problem-solving approach centers on its desire to personalize assessment and interventions and ability to implement with existing personal.

Although appealing, this practice can result in a weakness in the implementation of the Response to Intervention model. Many times schools are left with insufficient funding, resources, time, and teacher training to effectively put into practice the problem-solving model (Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000). Most often classroom teachers are the practitioners implementing the interventions in the problem-solving approach which often times results in practical limitations. Often, this situation causes the schools to fall short of desired student outcomes as practitioners struggle with how to

implement the problem-solving approach in a school setting (Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000).

This situation sheds light on the benefits of guided reading instruction. Guided reading as part of a balanced reading program combines whole group instruction of the core grade level curriculum along with small group instruction to address the individual needs of each student. During guiding reading instruction, students are grouped in small, flexible groups with similar strengths and instructional needs; group membership changes frequently as children progress in their reading development (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007). Ford and Opitz (2008) revealed the results of a national survey of 1500 K-2 teachers describing understandings and practices related to guided reading. They wrote:

After struggling with how to accommodate individual differences in whole group instruction, teachers are rediscovering the value of balancing whole group instruction with the use of small groups to differentiate instruction in their reading programs (309).

The International Reading Association (1999) identified guided instruction as an effective research-based method of reading instruction. Guiding reading also provides the means by which the Response to Intervention model, which uses multi-tiered intervention for delivering differentiated instruction, can be applied in schools using the problem-solving approach.

The theoretical framework of guiding reading instruction is mirrored by that of Tier 2 instruction in the Response to Intervention model. In Tier 1, all students receive whole-group instruction of the core reading program. Tier 2 interventions within the Response to Intervention model are intended to meet the individual needs of children who are struggling to learn to read in Tier 1. It is designed to respond to the independent needs of these students by providing them with an additional intensive, small-group reading instruction. The guided reading method of instruction meets this need. Guided reading offers teachers the ability to implement Tier 2, research-based instruction in a powerful and effective manner.

Independent Reading

During independent reading, students read by themselves, applying and practicing the procedures, concepts, strategies, and skills they have learned through modeled, shared, and guided reading (Tompkins, 2007). According to Cooper and Kiger (2009), independent reading as an instructional approach should not be confused with independent, self-selected (voluntary) reading. Independent reading involves the least amount of teacher support; thus, it should be used as an instructional approach only when students have the ability to read a piece of text without support.

Since high levels of reading accuracy produce the best reading growth, only instructional-level text should be used for independent reading (Allington, 2009). However, this approach can be used for rereading more difficult text,

but only after students have received sufficient support through other reading instructional approaches. Allington (2009) also mentions that frequently struggling readers may get few, if any, opportunities to read whole pieces of quality literature independently. Unfortunately, struggling readers need more instruction as well as more practice to apply what they've been taught. This opinion is supported by The National Reading Panel (2000) who found a significant correlation between a student's reading achievement and the amount of time they spend reading.

Beyond offering choice and increasing motivation, independent reading also provides a time for children to apply the skills they have learned (Tompkins, 2007). Smith and Read (2009) reason that time for independent reading needs to be just as structured as other parts of the school day. They state that too often during independent reading, precious time is wasted as students struggle to make decisions about what to read. A way to improve this situation is to have students select books for independent reading at the beginning of each school day before instruction starts so that when independent reading time arrives they won't spend reading time determining what to read (Smith & Read, 2009).

Many teachers hold individual student-teacher reading conferences in between small-group instruction to help keep track of the quantity and quality of students' independent reading. Maintaining an ongoing reading log provides an excellent motivational tool which assists children to feel confidence and accomplishment with each independent reading they complete (Hancock,

2007) as well as a method for teachers to evaluate the student's reading interests (Tompkins, 2007).

Although these four approaches to reading instruction are often associated with particular grade levels, they are not linear. Teachers may use a variation of any approach or a combination of these approaches with any grade level. The teacher's choice of approach should be dependent on the needs of the students or the nature of the text (Au, 2005). The International Reading Association (1999) stated:

We know that a sound and effective beginning reading program must incorporate a variety of activities in order to give children positive attitudes toward literacy, as well as the knowledge, strategies, and skills they need to be successful readers. Studies point to a number of instructional practices that can promote young children's literacy learning. All of these practices can be effective, depending on how well they fit with children's needs in learning to read. Legislation at the federal and state levels should not prescribe particular methods. Policy makers also must support further research on successful classroom practice, deriving from a range of perspectives (p. 4).

Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (2008) further argued, "Despite the promises associated with Response to Intervention, and despite the educational community having useful knowledge about how to implement it, major issues remain. Among the most important is whether practitioners will indeed

implement evidence-based instruction and assessment practices with fidelity” (pp. 97).

In addition, with two instructional tiers in general education, the needs of more at-risk readers will be served by a system of multiple layers of increasingly intensive, evidence-based reading instruction that takes place in the general education classroom. The proposed study will attempt to explore ways in which educators in the general elementary education classroom use high-quality reading instruction to meet the needs of Tier 2 struggling readers.

Struggling/Learning Disabled Readers

Children who struggle with learning to read and write cannot be easily categorized. A struggling reader is any student who is having difficulty learning to read (Johnston & Allington, 1991; Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Research indicates that the reasons readers have difficulties are as varied as the children themselves (Stanovich (1994). A student may have difficulty with oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, or some other factor the interferes with his/her ability to learn to read (Cooper, Chard, & Kiger, 2006). No two struggling readers are exactly the same; therefore, no single approach or program will meet the needs of all who are experiencing difficulty (International Reading Association, 2000).

In the past, educators used the term *remediation* to describe the methods of providing instruction for students who struggled with learning to read. Remediation is the process of correcting a deficiency; teachers waited

until the child had an established problem and attempted to correct it (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte, and Olson, 2001). This approach was not successful or effective in helping struggling readers overcome their problems, primarily because it focused on weaknesses in skill areas rather than the actual reading process (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Johnson and Allington (1991) explained that this term paralleled the medical model - assess (diagnose) the reading difficulty (disease), then apply different instruction (medication) to cure the existing condition.

Under the medical model, it was believed that children diagnosed as having a reading disability required different instructional methods than children labeled as struggling readers (Johnston & Allington, 1991). Therefore, both groups of students were removed from the regular classroom for reading instruction. Those identified as having a reading disability received instruction from a special education teacher, while the struggling readers received instruction from the reading specialist (Walmsley & Allington, 1995)

Although children are still categorized as either having a reading disability or as a struggling reader, there is a growing concern that unnecessary labels are placed on children who actually exhibit the same reading profile (Stanovich, 1994). McGill-Franzen (1987) documented that for a decade after the passage of the Education of Handicapped Children Act (1975) there had been a steady decline in the number of children identified as struggling readers and an equal increase in the number of children identified as having a reading

disability. Likewise, federal funding during this period shifted from reading teacher preparation to special education teacher preparation programs (McGill-Franzen, 1987).

Changes in the federal regulations and funding to public schools also created incentives for redefining reading difficulties as a disability. First, there was a shift in funding from remedial reading programs (i.e. Title 1) to special education programs. In addition, changes in regulations no longer mandated that children eligible for remedial reading receive such services. However, stricter guidelines expanded and mandated special education services. Second, children identified as having a reading disability were exempt from participating from the new educational accountability testing, whereas children with reading difficulties were not (Allington, 2002). Dramatic increase in the prevalence of students identified as having a reading disability has raised concerns about the methods by which these children are identified (Fuch, Fuch, & Compton, 2004).

Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte, and Olson, (2001) expressed their perspective on this issue:

The exclusionary and IQ-achievement elements of the definition have served as artificial ‘caps’ on learning disability (LD) prevalence while the lack of robust interventions for academically unsuccessful students in general and compensatory education has inflated LD identification rates. A key to more effective responses to LD in general education and lowered LD prevalence will be policies that do not simply change

the criteria for identifying LD, but that truly improve the capacity of teachers and schools to implement sound early interventions with the necessary fidelity (p. 280).

The literature is beginning to question whether children with a learning disability require special and unique instructional strategies different from those for children identified as struggling readers (Johnston & Allington, 1991; Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Corresponding to this view, Stanovich (1994) stated, "It appears that children having difficulties in reading who have aptitude/achievement discrepancies (i.e., disabilities) have cognitive profiles that are surprisingly similar to children who do not" (p. 33).

Nationwide education initiatives like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) aim to close the gap in academic achievement which continues to exist between groups of American school children. As part of NCLB, there has been a call for reading programs and interventions that are scientifically research-based which include instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In addition to orchestrating instruction of the essential components of reading, educators must also implement instruction in a manner that is appropriate and individualized to meet the needs and abilities of all students (Taylor, 2008).

In the past few years, policymakers and educators have searched for more effective approaches to meet the needs of all students, especially those identified as at risk for reading failure. Today, the accepted approach is

intervention. A reading intervention attempts to either prevent or stop failure by providing additional instructional time. The reading intervention approach doesn't wait for a problem to occur; instead, as soon as a student begins to struggle, the additional instruction is provided to help him/her overcome the difficulty. The importance of the additional instructional time rests on the reality that struggling readers require an acceleration of their reading; in one month's instruction, they must achieve more than a month's growth in order to ultimately read at grade level (Cooper & Kiger, 2009).

Strickland (2002) cautioned that extra assistance in the way of additional instructional time should be spent on actually reading rather than on seatwork or other activities that are taught in a manner suggesting they can only learn to read by accumulating distinct pieces of information. Strickland (2002) outlined the following instructional strategies to promote learning:

1. Multilevel activities help ensure that students who are struggling will engage in the same intellectual processes as everyone else, with expectations appropriate to their current level of performance. With multilevel tasks, the teacher gives the same task to the entire group with the understanding that each child will respond according to his or her ability. For example, most writing assignments in response to reading are multilevel because they allow struggling students to participate in the same thought processes and communications activities as the rest of the class. The teacher analyzes the products for

possible teaching points and evidence of continuing growth in every child.

2. Children experiencing difficulty need special help in monitoring their own comprehension. They must be taught to self-question: Does this make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right? As with all learners, these children need to treat learning to read and write as problem-solving activities that they are increasingly equipped to handle on their own.
3. Scaffolded instruction that makes use of modeling and demonstrations should be a key element of reading and writing lessons. Of particular value are think-alouds, in which teachers say aloud what they are thinking as they read and write. This helps make the processes visible for struggling learners. These children need to know how skilled readers and writers do what they do.
4. Instruction in reading and writing should be linked together and taught so that they are used skillfully and strategically. Struggling learners need to be taught in ways that help them generate new knowledge and new applications. Teachers need to be explicit about how what is learned about reading can help with writing and vice versa (p. 79-80).

Research has demonstrated that children who fall behind their peers in literacy achievement may fall further and further behind in each successive year of reading instruction (Stanovich & West, 1989). Therefore, in an attempt to help struggling readers, including those with reading disabilities, the current focus is on a multi-step approach to providing services and interventions to students who struggle with reading. While research on the effectiveness of a multi-step approach has contributed to professional understanding of the effectiveness of providing interventions at the first signs of difficulties in literacy development, this research has been limited by its lack of connection to classroom practice (Speece & Walker, 2007). By examining the complex interactions between the teacher and struggling readers, this proposed study seeks to contribute to the research literature on effective literacy-based interventions implemented in the classroom setting.

The Matthew Effect

Gersten, Compton, Connor, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, and Tilly (2008) insist that an emphasis should be placed on providing reading interventions for K-1 struggling readers. In their report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education they wrote:

There are two potential advantages of RtI and multi-tiered intervention. Struggling students are provided with help in learning how to read early in their school careers. In the past many students were not provided with additional assistance in reading until they were officially

diagnosed with a specific learning disability, often not until grade 2 or 3. This was the practice even though longitudinal research consistently showed that students who were weak readers at the early elementary grades tended to stay weak readers in the higher grades (p. 5).

Moreover, children who do not acquire literacy skills during the first years of school will continue to experience reading difficulties throughout their school career (Juel, 1988; Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990; Stanovich, 1986).

Stanovich (1986) developed a model to demonstrate how variations in early reading development were later magnified by differential cognitive, motivational, and educational experiences. Stanovich outlined a framework to illustrate a reciprocal relationship between reading ability and the efficiency of cognitive process. He hypothesized that a child's reading ability affects their response to their environment which in turn affects their reading ability. This was supported by Allington's (1983) finding that less-skilled readers receive low-grade instruction when compared to their peers. Therefore, not only do less-skilled readers receive less support to overcome their difficulties, but they are also exposed to instructional environments that further limit their reading development.

A child's attitude toward reading is a vital element in his/her literacy development. Reading achievement is greatly diminished if students don't want to read (Allington, 2009). Readers who do not read often will have a harder time becoming better readers. Children who do not enjoy reading will spend their time doing things other than reading and will forgo the critical

practice they need to improve as readers (Cunningham, 2005; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

A strong body of evidence indicates that these students who experience reading difficulties the first few years are at high-risk of later academic failure, becoming frustrated, and dropping out of school at a much higher rate than their peers who experienced success with learning to read in the early primary grades (Stanovich, 1986; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). This occurrence of the "rich get richer" (i.e., the children who learn early literacy skills) and the "poor get poorer" (i.e., children who do not) has been termed the *Matthew Effect* (Stanovich, 1986).

The *Matthew Effect* helps to explain this phenomenon. Students who do not make satisfactory initial progress in early reading skills find it increasingly difficult ever to master the process (Stanovich, 1986). The basic concept of this framework is that children who have more advanced early-reading skills tend to build on those skills and thrive in school while their less-skilled peers are left further behind. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the fact that children who fall behind in reading then read less, thereby increasing the gap between their achievement and that of their peers. Later, when students need to "read to learn" (whereas before they were learning to read), their reading difficulties create problems in most other content areas. In this way, they fall further and further behind in school, dropping out of school at a much higher rate than their peers. Therefore, they are not able to tap into education as a way to improve their lives, essentially

becoming "poorer" academically while others become "richer" (Stanovich , 1986).

The lasting effects of a weak start have also been documented in Juel's (1988) longitudinal study of 54 children from first through fourth grade. This research revealed an almost 90% probability that a child who is a poor reader at the end of first grade will be a poor reader in fourth grade. This was an important finding because it helped to explain why children grow to dislike reading and, as a result, read considerably less than good readers (Strickland, 2002). Since time spent reading is highly correlated with becoming a good reader, poor readers continue to experience difficulty in reading (Allington, 1980; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998). The study documented the delivery of early literacy interventions for at-risk struggling readers identified for Tier 2 interventions, thereby lessening the likelihood that the Matthew Effect will result in lower rates of subsequent reading achievement.

The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Model for Identifying a Reading Disability

The gap between skilled and less-skilled readers begins early in the child's academic career and widens over the elementary years (Stanovich, 1986). Successful reading interventions become increasingly rare after the first few years in elementary school (Juel, 1988). Difficulties in reading remediation have been documented in Morris, Shaw, and Perney's (1990) study of 30 children in second and third grade. This research found that although the

tutored children in the study made gains, a full year of tutoring did not produce a full year's gain in reading. This belief was also expressed by Marie Clay (1979) when she wrote:

There is an unbounded optimism among teachers that children who are late in starting will indeed catch up. Given time, something will happen! In particular, there is a belief that the intelligent child who fails to learn to read will catch up to his classmates once he has made a start. We do not have any evidence of accelerated progress in late starters (p. 13).

The concept of a learning disability first appeared in the literature when Samuel Kirk (1962) used this term to explain children who exhibited unexplained difficulties learning. In 1969, the Learning Disabilities Act, which also integrated the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1970 included learning disabilities as a category for receiving special educational services. This category was reaffirmed in 1975 by the Education for all Handicapped Children Act.

Typically, in the past, educators have waited until children have experienced reading failure as much as one to two years behind their peers before providing additional assistance, which came in the way of special education services (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). This practice resulted from the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, which stated that a child may be diagnosed as having a

specific learning disability if the child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability. However, a “severe discrepancy” resulted only after the child had usually experienced failure for an extended period of time. This “wait until they fail” method has come under widespread and persistent criticism (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2006) from researchers who question why a severe gap between IQ and achievement must occur before the child receives services (Stanovich, 1994).

Vellutino, Scanlon, and Lyon (2000) have expressed that the IQ-achievement discrepancy model is not a valid method to identify the presence of a learning disability. Stanovich (1994) documented that children identified with a learning disability and low-achieving children exhibited very similar processing profiles; therefore, unnecessary labels were being placed on children. This practice led G. Reid Lyon (1999) of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to identify special education as the method by which failures in general education were justified.

According to Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, and Linan-Thompson (2007), approximately 60% of students identified as having a reading disability were identified too late to receive full benefit from interventions. Educators are finally beginning to realize that early intervention can prevent or significantly reduce reading difficulties for a large majority of children. They also point out that in an attempt to prevent the wrong children from being identified for special education services, better methods, such as evaluating a student's response to scientifically-based instruction, must be part of the

criteria for identifying a disability. Response to Intervention may be an effective method to prevent or significantly reduce reading difficulties for a large majority of children (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

To address this concern, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 changed the process by which states may identify a learning disability. School districts are no longer required to document that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and IQ to identify the presence of a learning disability. Instead, schools may determine a child has a learning disability by documenting that the child did not respond to appropriate, scientifically researched-based interventions. This alternative approach to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model to provide interventions at the first stages of academic difficulties and make eligibility determinations is called Response to Intervention (Vaughn & Klingner, 2007).

Multi-Tiered Model of Response to Intervention

Concerns over the early identification and intervention for children experiencing difficulties in reading have led to the development of a preventive approach to reading instruction (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). This approach measures the child's progress within multiple tiers of reading instruction and provides support and interventions beginning in general education and moving to special education depending on the child's response to the interventions. The Response to Intervention (RtI) approach has the

potential to be an effective approach to teaching all children, including students with disabilities (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005).

Early and long-term reading difficulties in most children are caused primarily by experiential and instructional deficits rather than by biologically-based cognitive deficits (Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006). The majority of children who received intervention in kindergarten performed better than children who did not (Menzie, Mahdavi, & Lewis, 2008). Since most of these children were no longer at risk in first-grade and beyond, Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele (2006) suggested that early identification of at-risk children in kindergarten and early intervention revealed a distinction between experientially and biologically-based causes of early reading difficulties. As such, RtI may also represent an attractive alternative to the current IQ-discrepancy method for identifying children with reading disabilities (Gresham, 2002; Marston, 2001; Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Lynn, & Bryant, 2006).

Usually a student does not possess a large enough discrepancy between intelligence quotient and achievement in kindergarten and first-grade to qualify for special education services. Therefore, the student must continue to struggle with early literacy development while he/she falls further and further behind peers until the student's discrepancy reaches an arbitrary size sufficient to qualify him/her for special education services (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). However, had that student received services in the first-grade general education classroom when the probability of remediation was

greatest, he/she might not have developed a discrepancy (Stage, Abbott, Jenkins, & Berninger, 2003). Early intervention in reading has the potential to significantly reduce the number of children who require special education services later in schooling (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2006; Stage, Abbott, Jenkins, & Berninger, 2003).

Marston, Muyskins, Lau, and Canter (2003) conducted a research study in the Minneapolis Public Schools over a four-year period. Their study investigated the use of the problem-solving approach for intervention assistance, referral, evaluation, and eligibility decision making for students experiencing academic difficulties. As part of their study, they examined the outcome on ethnic groups when using the problem-solving approach of Response to Intervention. Specifically, they examined the effects of Response to Intervention on the disproportionate placement of African-American and Native-American students in special education. Their research revealed positive results for all minority students in schools using the multi-tiered support system. In particular, their findings documented significant increases in the reading achievement of African American students when using the problem-solving approach to identify and develop early interventions, which also resulted in a considerable decrease in the number of referrals for special education.

The acknowledgement that generally effective early literacy programs do not accommodate the learning needs of all students has led to a strong interest in a “multilevel” approach (Al Otaiba , Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2006). Sugai,

Horner, and Gresham (2002) identified Response to Intervention as an effective approach for delivering differentiated instruction and support to all students. When using the RtI model, the performance of all students is monitored and multi-tiered interventions are implemented at the first signs that a student is experiencing difficulties. This approach measures the child's progress within multiple tiers of increasingly intense interventions based on the child's response to these interventions. That is, if a student does not demonstrate satisfactory progress in a tier, then a higher tier with more intensive interventions is considered.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006, 2008) support RtI as a means to monitor the progress of students with or without disabilities. Although there is no universal model for the Response to Intervention approach, it is generally understood that multiple tiers provide support for academic and/or behavior difficulties. Typically, this multi-tiered model of interventions includes the primary intervention for all students in the classroom, a secondary level of intervention for students who need some additional support, and a tertiary level for those students needing the most intensive support and interventions.

Multi-leveled models appear necessary because many students need more intensive instruction than is delivered in general education classrooms. Multi-leveled models are also preferable to traditional service delivery models because they may provide intensive services sooner than special education (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). Special education may benefit from an identification process that moves away from focusing primarily on

problems within the learner to instead focusing on increasing student achievement by improving the overall instructional process for all students (Haager & Mahdavi, 2007).

RtI provides early intervention at the first stages of academic difficulties. It offers support to improve the achievement of all students by providing preventive and remedial services. This approach provides support to at-risk students and reveals the potential of providing improved data for identifying students with learning disabilities. The assumption behind this model is that when afforded quality instruction and remedial services, a student without a disability will make satisfactory progress while a student who does not respond may have a disability (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

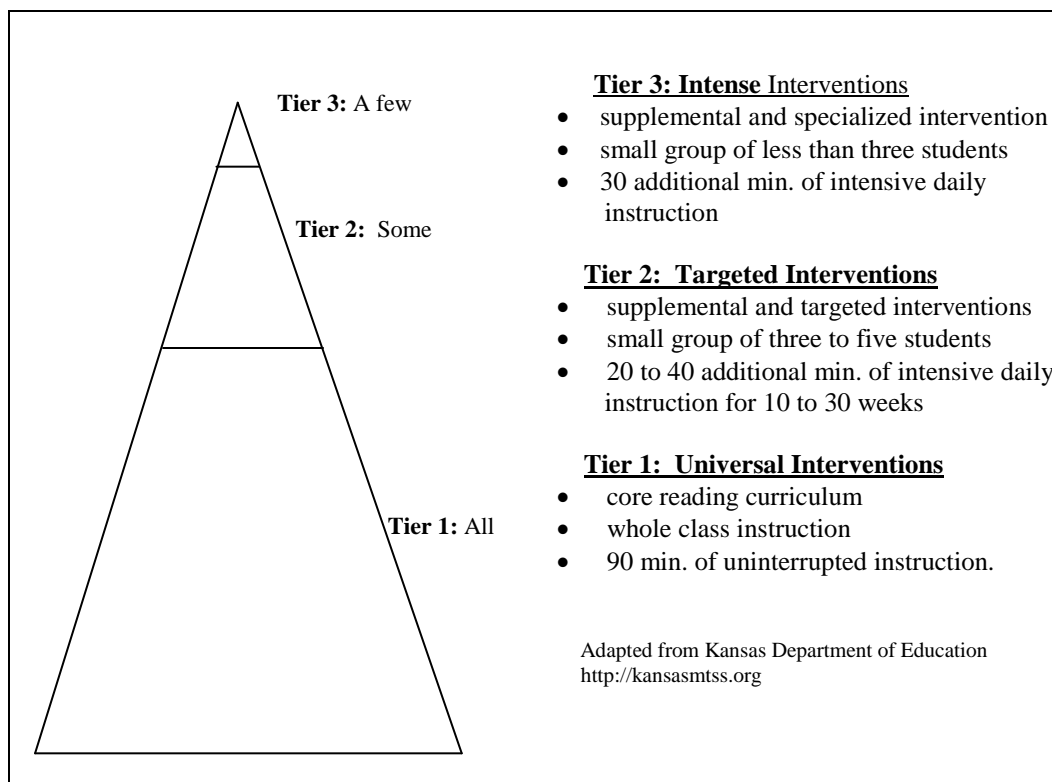
The tiered service delivery system allows each student's individual needs to be addressed. While the number of tiers may vary, typically services are offered through three tiers. The first tier, or primary instruction, refers to the core reading instruction provided by the classroom teacher to all students. Each student's progress is monitored through formal universal screening and informal observations and assessments.

Those students who are identified as needing additional support and interventions may be moved to the second tier. In the second tier, or secondary level of intervention, supplemental services and interventions are provided to students who need additional support. The third or tertiary tier, provides more

intensive interventions to students who continue to struggle with reading after receiving Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions.

RtI promotes screening for all students followed by interventions for those students who are not progressing due to academic or behavior concerns. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006, 2007, 2008), the key component in the three-tiered model of Response to Intervention is assessment. Purposeful assessment is the means by which students are identified for closer monitoring, evaluated for responsiveness to interventions, and receive tailored individualized interventions. The current focus on the most effective form of progress monitoring is curriculum-based measurement (CBM). Figure 2.2 illustrates the tiered service delivery system:

Figure 2.2 Tiered Approach to Supporting Reading



The following sections provide detailed discussions on the method of instruction and students serviced in each instructional tier.

Tier 1: Primary Instruction

Instruction in Tier 1 consists of the core reading program grounded in scientifically-based research that is provided by the classroom teacher to all students. Taylor (2008) contends that the most effective method to fulfill this goal is to provide at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted effective classroom reading instruction to all students. Foorman, Carlson, and Santi (2007) assert that a meaningful way to improve reading outcomes is through an effective core reading program that achieves prevention in lieu of the need for later intervention. For a K-2 core reading program to be effective, it must include explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding skills, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Greenwood, Kamps, Terry, & Linebarger, 2007).

Although estimates vary, typically 70-80% of students are effectively serviced in Tier 1 without the need for additional interventions (Simmons, Kame'enu, & Good, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 1999). For screening purposes, during the first month of the school year, each student's reading performance is evaluated using a brief assessment tool using progress monitoring measures such as the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in which the criterion is established to predict future performance (Good & Kaminski, 2002). A cut score is designated to identify which students may

succeed or experience difficulties on later curriculum-based measured (CBM) assessments. Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) note that within a multi-tiered prevention system, assessment plays three important roles:

1. Identifying students who should be targeted for attention.
2. Quantifying responsiveness to intervention among those targeted for attention.
3. Tailoring individualized instructional programs for the most unresponsive subset of students (p. 45).

As the Tier 1 core reading curriculum was implemented, those children whose screening scores were below the cut score are closely monitored to determine their level of responsiveness to instruction. In spite of effective curriculum, monitoring, and responsive primary instruction, not all students respond to whole-class or large-group instruction, even when it is focused on effective instructional practices and activities. It is for these students that Tier 2 intervention is designed. These children will need supplementary interventions in addition to primary classroom instruction in order to become successful readers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008; Hoover, 2009).

Tier 2: Secondary Interventions

Tier 2 or secondary intervention consists of supplemental programs, interventions, and strategies to support the existing instruction of the core reading program. Tier 2 is meant to enhance, not replace, the instruction in Tier 1. By providing effective primary reading instruction and improving the

skills of at-risk readers with the additional support in Tier 2, the Response to Intervention approach may prevent the need for the most intensive interventions reserved for Tier 3 (Allington, 2009). Vaughn et al. (2007) contend that 20-30% of students will require Tier 2 support in addition to the core reading instruction provided in Tier 1.

Although the number of students in a group varies, it is typically a homogeneous group consisting of 3 to 5 students. Typically, these students are provided 20 to 40 minutes of additional instruction using specialized, scientifically-based reading interventions over a period of 10 to 30 weeks in an attempt to remediate any weaknesses in their reading achievement (Vaughn & Denton, 2008).

Although researchers differ in their conceptions of the structure of the Tier 2 component of the multi-tiered model (Speece & Walker, 2007), interventions are provided via the standard protocol or the problem-solving approach (Fuchs et al, 2003; Strangeman, et al, 2006). The standard protocol approach has been the method used in most research studies on Response to Intervention, while, the problem-solving approach is most widely used by practitioners.(Strangeman, et al, 2006).

The standard protocol approach, provides interventions either individually or in small groups outside of the classroom. Students are identified and grouped based on their reading assessment scores and expected performance on benchmarks or standards (Vaughn & Denton, 2008). The primary advantage of the standard protocol approach is that it uses protocols

that are scripted, thereby ensuring the reliability of the instruction. The standard protocol approach has been used by most researchers to document the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention approach; however, it is rarely used by school practitioners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

To date, the problem-solving approach is most widely used by practitioners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The popularity of the problem-solving approach can be attributed to its appeal of meeting the individual student's needs through a process of personalized assessment and selection of interventions (Hoover, 2009). However, this individualized approach may be a weakness as well as a strength. The problem-solving approach relies heavily on the ability of the practitioner to skillfully assess and administer the appropriate interventions to effectively meet the needs of the student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), as well as determine if the student is or is not a student with a disability (Hoover, 2009). Therefore, the effectiveness of this approach is dependent on the knowledge and skills of the practitioner.

The school practitioner who is responsible to select and implement the intervention, monitor the student's responsiveness, and determine the effectiveness of the intervention is usually the classroom teacher. Therefore, despite the popularity of the use of the problem solving model in schools, it has failed to be documented as an effective approach due to lack of quality control of instruction (Fuchs et al., 2003).

Research evidence strongly supports that children who experience difficulties learning to read may be effectively remediated by intense and

explicit scientifically-based Tier 2 reading instruction (Lyon, 2004). At the core of Response to Intervention is this focus on reading research (Vaughn et al., 2007). With the recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 and the renewed focus on student outcomes established by No Child Left Behind of 2001, the educational community is searching for effective methods to bridge the gap between research and instructional practice (Vaughn & Klingner, 2007), especially in the area of reading instruction (Allington, 2009). Substantial evidence exists that indicates that early identification and intervention is the most effective course of action to assist students who are experiencing difficulties learning to read (Coyne, Kame'enu, & Simmons, 2001).

Further evidence is well-documented that students who struggle with learning to read in the first and second grades are likely to continue to experience difficulties learning to read (Juel, 1988; Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990). There is also widespread agreement that early identification and intervention is the most effective approach to lessen the severity and/or the prevention of a reading disability (Bos, Mather, Friedman, Narr, & Babur, 1999).

However, in spite of the use of scientifically-based reading instruction provided effectively to small-groups of students exhibiting similar reading profiles, a few students will still not make adequate progress. These children will need Tier 3 interventions, the most intensive interventions that the school can provide.

Tier 3: Tertiary Interventions

Although the number of tiers varies in the Response to Intervention three-tiered model, Tier 3 instruction is reserved for those students requiring more intensive, specialized interventions (Vaughn et al., 2007). According to Harn, Kame'enui, and Simmons (2007), typically one to five percent of students are low responders to primary and secondary interventions. These students demonstrate both low skills and little progress when provided with additional instructional support. Students needing Tier 3 support require significantly more instructional resources delivered with greater intensity than available in Tier 2. These students continue to struggle with learning to read and, therefore, may be classified as having a reading disability. Tier 3, usually synonymous with special education, allows for more intensive, specialized services for groups of less than three students for an extended period of time.

Research clearly demonstrates that some students will not achieve complete success in reading without additional instructional support (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998); however, one of the more challenging questions is when, during the school day, to provide interventions (Cooper & Kiger, 2009). Cooper and Kiger (2009) maintain that intervention may be provided in a number of ways:

1. In the classroom as a small group taught by the classroom teacher or another teacher who comes into the room.

2. As a pullout program (students leave the classroom to work with another teacher, usually the reading specialist). Within extended-day programs that take place before or after school.
3. During summer school.

The challenging issue teachers face is finding the time to provide additional instruction since the student should never miss the core instruction in reading and language arts. Strickland (2002) states:

Many schools are still grappling with issues related to pull-out intervention programs versus programs that involve special help within the classroom. More information on the positive and negative features of both and the circumstances that encourage or discourage positive results would be useful (p. 82).

Research on successful intervention programs revealed the following shared characteristics (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998): (1) interventions were administered to either individual or small groups of students; (2) lessons were structured and fast-paced; (3) the same pattern of instruction was followed daily for 30 to 40 minutes; (4) skills were modeled and taught within the actual context of reading activities; (5) texts were leveled and sequenced in difficulty, moving from simple to complex; (6) the lessons were taught by a certified teacher. The use of the Three-Tier Model offers a framework for assisting educators in providing successful intervention programs that include effective

instruction, appropriate interventions, and sound instructional decisions (Vaughn, Wanzek, Wookruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

Response to Intervention is a comprehensive early intervention and prevention approach that identifies at-risk students and assists them at the very first sign of their struggles. RtI combines universal screening and high-quality instruction for all students and targets struggling students with appropriate interventions. Response to Intervention was developed in response to the "wait to fail" method of the present special education identification process. Researchers agree that Response to Intervention can be described as a process with the potential to increase the academic achievement of struggling students, thereby, reducing the likelihood of a later need for special education services. Yet little research has been conducted regarding effective classroom practices that support successful implementation of Response to Intervention. This proposed study will seek to document these classroom practices through direct observations, interviews, and artifacts.

Recent Research Conducted on Response to Intervention

Current research on Response to Intervention has growing implications for literacy instruction. RtI has emerged as an appealing alternative to the current IQ-achievement discrepancy method for identifying children with reading disabilities (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Lynn, & Bryant, 2006; Gresham, 2002; Marston, 2005). The IQ-achievement discrepancy method lacks coverage, requires too much time for children to exhibit discrepancies, and

does not attend to instruction (Speece & Walker, 2007). RtI potentially negates each of these problems by attending to all children who are not learning and allowing implementation of interventions at the first signs that the child is experiencing difficulties.

Current research conducted on Response to Intervention can be categorized into the following themes: (1) benefits of using the RtI approach with students experiencing difficulties learning to read; (2) school organizational factors that promote and/or impede RtI implementation; (3) the role of data collection, implementation of interventions, and progress monitoring. Speece and Walker (2007) maintain that Response to Intervention has been the subject of less than 10 years of active empirical investigation, and open to many possibilities of further investigation. Interesting findings emerged from the following research as well as recommendations for future research.

Benefits of RtI. Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, and Cirino (2006) conducted a quantitative study which focused on the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention approach for 103 English language learners identified as at-risk readers. These students were identified in the fall of first-grade and reexamined at the end of first-grade and then at the end of second-grade. The students in this study were randomly assigned to an intervention or a control group. The students in the intervention groups received small-group supplemental reading interventions that consisted of explicit, systematic, and

intensive teaching of word reading strategies daily for 50 minutes from October to April. The students in the control group received the school's existing program for struggling readers.

In this study, the researchers documented that more students who participated in the intervention groups met the established benchmark criteria than the students in the control group. Furthermore, these gains were maintained through the end of second grade. The researchers concluded that the Response to Intervention approach benefits ELL students who are identified at risk for developing reading disabilities. The researchers also discussed the need for further research on the benefits of using the Response to Intervention approach with students experiencing difficulties learning to read.

A quantitative longitudinal study conducted by Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, and Fanuele (2006) examined 1,373 kindergartners over a 5-year period. These students were identified as at risk for early reading difficulties upon entry into kindergarten. The children were randomly assigned to either intervention groups or control groups. The intervention groups received services two to three times a week throughout their kindergarten year. The control groups received whatever remedial services were offered by their schools during the year. The students in both groups were again assessed at the beginning of first-grade, and those who continued to struggle in reading were assigned to daily tutoring in one-on-one intervention or whatever remedial assistance was offered by their school. The progress of all of the children in this study was periodically assessed through the end of third-grade.

The results of this study concluded that early kindergarten intervention or a combination of early kindergarten and first-grade intervention are effective in preventing reading difficulties in most children (Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, and Fanuele, 2006). This study also supports the contention that reading difficulties in most children are caused by deficits in instructional methods rather than biologically based cognitive deficits.

Organizational Factors of RtI. Telzrow, McNamara, and Hollinger (2000) conducted a quantitative study that examined the problem solving approach in Tier 2 interventions of the multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention. They investigated the relationship between the fidelity of the problem-solving approach implemented by multidisciplinary teams in 227 schools and student goal attainment. Participating school teams volunteered to be part of this study in return for training that focused on collaboration, problem solving, intervention design, data collection, and progress monitoring. Training included workshops, focused small group training, and on-site modeling and coaching. The researchers reported that the highest fidelity scores were associated when a clear definition of the problem was identified and when specific student outcome goals were established. The lowest fidelity scores were associated with a hypothesized reason for the problem and when the treatment integrity was left up to the practitioner implementing the interventions.

The results of this study suggested that when reliable execution of the problem solving approach exists, student outcomes are measurable. However, this study found that appropriate implementation of the problem solving approach in schools remains elusive. The researchers recommended further investigations should continue to examine the problem solving approach in applied settings and the manner in which fidelity may be influenced by training and organizational factors.

Spaulding (2006) conducted a qualitative study that examined early literacy intervention programs to support first-grade struggling readers. This study analyzed the academic achievement of two groups of children experiencing difficulties learning to read. The first group of children received instruction only in the primary core reading program, while the second group received instruction in the primary core reading program and also received Tier 2 supplemental interventions in an effort to remediate weaknesses in their reading achievement. Spaulding (2006) identified her study as a qualitative research design that used grounded theory to analyze data collected and to generate a theory to identify the organizational process of executing the multiple-tiered approach of Response to Intervention.

Spaulding (2006) stated that although educators have the ability to identify students at-risk for reading difficulties, little is known about how to access the most effective materials, strategies, and environments to offer differentiated instruction to remediate difficulties in learning to read. Therefore, the purpose in her study was to investigate the effects of

supplemental interventions on the achievement of students who received early literacy intervention instruction. In addition, she strived to highlight school policies that effectively supported this early intervention model.

Data collection consisted of obtaining reading achievement results to identify those students at-risk for reading failure. Once these students were identified, they were randomly assigned to either intervention groups or control groups. Students in the control groups received whatever remedial service was offered by their school, while the intervention groups received services two to three times a week throughout their first grade year. The reading achievement of both groups of students continued to be monitored through third grade. In addition, data were collected through interviews with administrators and staff involved in implementing the early intervention model and students were surveyed using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to determine if there was a difference in how the two groups of students saw themselves as readers.

Findings indicated that students who had been identified as at-risk and received intervention instruction in addition to their classroom instruction made gains that placed them in the average range of reading achievement. Moreover, these students continued to experience achievement in the average range through third grade. The school in this study demonstrated many characteristics that supported this early intervention program for struggling readers. The staff at this school often collaborated to meet the individual needs of each student, student progress was frequently monitored, and intervention strategies were changed if adequate progress was not met. The results of the

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey revealed little difference in the students' perceptions of their reading abilities; both groups reported their abilities to be lower than their actual achievement scores. The researcher recommended that intervention instruction include more opportunities for children to experience the enjoyment of books based on the students' self-reported below average attitude toward reading.

Porter (2008) conducted a qualitative collective case study that focused on the implementation of Response to Intervention in an elementary school. This study examined the perceptions of members of three Student Improvement Teams (SIT) in one large elementary school while observing the practices of implementing the Response to Intervention model. Porter's research sought to identify effective procedures carried out by Student Improvement Teams to assist students referred due to difficulties learning to read.

Porter (2008) acknowledged that although research has documented the Response to Intervention model as an effective approach to remediate reading difficulties, her research was based on the standard protocol approach, although school teams and practitioners commonly use the problem-solving approach. In addition, Porter (2008) expressed her concern that too little is known about the challenges and experiences that schools face when implementing the Response to Intervention model. Therefore, her study sought to fill that gap by providing valuable information outlining effective

practices used by Student Improvement Teams for schools interested in implementing the Response to Intervention approach.

The theoretical framework used in this research was based on the practice of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement adopts the opinion that anything can be improved upon by making incremental advancements, even if those steps forward are small. The continuous improvement framework requires that School Improvement Teams adopt the practice of frequent monitoring of student progress as to identify discrepancies between actual and desired achievement results.

Porter's (2008) study used a collective case study to investigate the practices of three Student Improvement Teams as they implemented the Response to Intervention model in their school. The data collection for this study included observations, interviews, and artifacts all obtained during Student Improvement Team meetings. Porter analyzed the data collected from SIT meetings by first reviewing statements made by group members, organizing observations, and reviewing SIT meeting artifacts and sorting this information into common groupings, looking for patterns to emerge. Then she organized this information into common themes and determined what factors participants viewed as positive or negative during the implementation of the tiered model approach of Response to Intervention.

Findings indicated that although the purpose of the Student Improvement Team meeting was to gather information and implement strategies to improve the student's reading skills, some participants viewed the

SIT purpose was to collect information to refer for special education evaluation. In addition, participants found it helpful when provided a variety of formal and informal assessment data to gain informed knowledge of the student's strengths and needs. This study also revealed that assigning specific roles and assignments to each group member facilitated a better problem-solving process. The researcher discussed the need for further research related to the viability of providing additional support to students in the general education classroom that may prevent the implementation of reading interventions before referral to special education.

Kimmel (2008) analyzed data from two elementary schools which highlighted the successes and challenges of implementing Response to Intervention. The researcher chose to investigate two elementary schools that had implemented the RtI model for at least two consecutive school years. In addition, these schools documented a reduction in the need for special education services since applying the Response to Intervention approach to meet the needs of at-risk students. The researcher explains that although prior research on RtI has documented that it has the ability to improve student achievement and is an effective tool to identify learning disabled students, little research has studied the factors that facilitate or hinder RtI implementation. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the successes and challenges to the Response to Intervention model.

The data collection for this study consisted of observations, interviews, and artifacts. All of these data were examined and coded based on research

questions and by themes that emerged while analyzing the data. The researcher triangulated the findings by the three sources of data collected and organized the results by the research questions generated at the beginning of the study. The findings in this case study revealed that principal leadership, teacher buy-in, professional development, and resources are the factors that supported the successful implementation of RtI.

Jacobs (2008) used a qualitative case study to investigate the outcomes of implementation of Response to Intervention. This study evaluated two elementary school sites by examining twenty-eight educators' perceived effectiveness in the remediation of reading difficulties by using the RtI model. Although RtI models were being widely put into practice, these models were not based on research conducted for school wide implementation. Jacobs stated that this problem has led to little data that explain the conditions that warrant effective RtI implementation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the factors that are associated with effective RtI execution. This collective case study design included data collection which consisted of observations, interviews, and artifacts relevant to RtI implementation. The data were analyzed, coded, categorized, and the findings were triangulated and matched to the research questions.

Although both schools successfully implemented the RtI model, the findings documented similarities and differences at each site. Both schools possessed strong leadership, teacher buy-in, resources, and professional development; however, there were differences in the integrity and fidelity of

some of these factors. Since both schools were able to make minor changes to fit their particular needs, the implementation was successful.

Data Collection, Interventions, and Progress Monitoring. A study conducted by Menzies, Mahdavi, and Lewis (2008) focused on the effectiveness of scientifically-based reading intervention strategies in a first-grade population. The participants were 42 first-grade students who were identified as at-risk for reading difficulties. Three strategies were implemented: (1) DIBELS was implemented as a method to assess and monitor the student's progress; (2) intervention was provided four days a week for a 45-minute period to children in small groups; (3) explicit instruction was provided to three instructional groups based on their skill level. These three groups focused on phonemic awareness skills, decoding and reading fluency, and guided reading groups for those students who had near grade-level skills. The research conducted by Menzies, Mahdavi, and Lewis (2008) consisted of a low teacher-student ratio. Participants consisted of 42 first-graders, three first grade teachers, one special education resource specialist, four paraprofessionals, and a literacy coach.

This study documented a 95% success rate of participants that met or exceeded grade level expectations by the end of the year. Of those children that did not meet grade level expectations, 75% were eligible for special education services. This study revealed that classroom teachers are able to implement scientifically-based reading strategies to small groups of students in

an effective manner. The researchers recommended that future research should examine if similar results could be obtained using fewer resources, thereby increasing the likelihood that early intervention programs may be more widely implemented.

A case study conducted by Kort (2008) addressed teacher use of data within an elementary school that had adopted a Response to Intervention model. Specifically, the study focused on teacher use of student assessment data and the impact of data on teacher understanding and decision making in regard to the RtI problem-solving approach. The researcher employed qualitative methodology to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that promote a viable service model. Kort (2008) analyzed three first grade teachers by utilizing multiple sources of data collected over a five month period which included interviews, observations, document review, and personal experience.

Findings uncovered three overarching themes that contributed to a teacher's understanding and use of student assessment data, the impact it has on student decision making, the link between assessment and intervention, and the RtI model. The three themes identified were: (1) making sense of the data through interpersonal interaction; (2) challenging personal assumptions and thinking about practice; and (3) promoting a dynamic and collaborative learning community. Kort (2008) recommended future research should document what methods teachers are actually implementing in the classroom with regard to core curriculum (Tier 1) and interventions (Tier 2). She also

recommended investigating if teachers are actually enacting what they say they are planning for Tier 1 instruction and/or Tier 2 interventions.

Speece and Walker (2007) argue that Response to Intervention “potentially” offers an ideal solution to meet the needs of all students experiencing difficulties learning to read. However, with less than a decade of active empirical investigation, the promise of RtI swamps the evidence. They contended that there is a great deal of variability in what counts as effective Tier 1 and Tier 2 reading instruction, and conclude that additional research is needed to determine which models and/or combination of models is the most effective.

This assertion is shared by Allington (2009) who declared that the majority of studies on RtI affirm that at-risk students benefit from early and intensive interventions offered in the multi-tiered approach to literacy instruction and that these studies document the success of this approach. The challenge is how to take what we know from research and put it into action in the schools since the interventions that were offered in the research studies are dissimilar to what is available in most schools. Allington emphasized that there is no single, simple solution to the dilemma of how to teach all children to read. No one size of instruction fits all. “We can teach every kid to read, but different kids need different reading instruction at different times” (p.1). He also calls for further research in instructional models that have been proven to be effective when implemented by teachers in the school environment.

The proposed qualitative research study seeks to fill this gap in the research on Response to Intervention by expanding on the research conducted by Menzies, Mahdavi, and Lewis (2008) and the study initiated by Kort (2008). The proposed study will attempt to explore what literacy instructional models and practices are being utilized to deliver Tier 2 instruction to struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model.

Summary

Many researchers maintain that Response to Intervention is a timely, invaluable method to assure that all children acquire adequate literacy skills in the primary grades. This comprehensive early detection and prevention approach identifies and offers early intervention to struggling readers before their academic achievement falls significantly behind their peers (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2006; Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2006; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004; Gresham, 2002; Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006; Marston, 2001; Menzies, Mahdavi, & Lewis, 2008; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007; Vellutino, Scanlon, and Lyon, 2000).

Several studies have investigated the layers of instruction within the multi-tiered service delivery system (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Foorman, Carlson, & Santi, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005, 2006; Greenwood,

Kamps, Terry, & Linebarger, 2007; Simmons, Kame'enui, & Good 2002; Speece & Walker, 2007; Sugai Horner, 1999; Taylor, 2008; Vaughn & Denton, 2008, Lyon, 2004). Numerous reports have shed light on the elements of effective reading instruction (Adams, 1990, 2001; Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Many researchers have revealed instructional approaches to successfully teach children to read (Allington, 2009; Au, 2005; Fountas & Pinnel, 1996; Richgels, Poremba, & McGee, 1996; Sulzby, 1985; Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

However, this current review of the literature on Response to Intervention has left this inquiry unanswered. This proposed study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature regarding specific literacy instructional models and practices educators are utilizing to deliver Tier 2 instruction to K-2 struggling readers within the classroom environment. This study will identify supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program that is delivered within the classroom environment for at-risk struggling readers whose performance is below grade level expectations.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an outline for the research methodology which was used in this qualitative case study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The study will document instructional approaches and pedagogy that educators utilized to deliver reading interventions to kindergarten at-risk struggling readers. The information that follows is organized in the following sections: (1) research design, (2) research questions, (3) pilot exploration, (4) setting/participants, (5) role of the researcher, (6) role of the administrators, (7) role of the teacher participants, (8) projected research timeline, (9) data collection, (10) data analysis, and (11) establishing trustworthiness.

Research Design

This qualitative exploratory collective case study focused on providing an in-depth perspective on specific literacy instructional models and practices kindergarten educators are utilizing to deliver Tier 2 instruction to struggling readers within the classroom environment. In this study, I attempted to identify supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program that is delivered within the classroom environment for kindergarten at-risk struggling readers whose performance was below grade level expectations.

Krathwohl (1998) makes this distinction between the two methods of conducting research- quantitative research is used to test an explanation and to demonstrate a relationship, whereas qualitative research is used most often to collect in-depth information to gain a better understanding of that relationship. Qualitative research is concerned with nonstatistical methods of inquiry and draws its findings from themes and categories which emerge through analysis of data collected by techniques such as observations, interviews, and artifacts. Frequently, qualitative research examines the perspective of the research participants as a means of examining the research topic (Creswell, 2007).

According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), cases are not found, but instead constructed by the decisions researchers make about how to tell a particular story of a human experience. When researchers are interested in exploring, explaining, and describing a phenomenon within a real-life context, a case study method is desirable since it focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon, expresses rich details, and illuminates the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). A case study is appropriate when the researcher is studying change and process and when “how” and “why” questions are being asked (Yin, 2002). Creswell (2007) describes a case study as a methodology well-suited when the researcher wishes to study a group, incident, or phenomenon by using multiple data collection. A case study allows researchers to explore the uniqueness or the commonality of a case that might make it representative of other cases. Yin (2002) recommends using case study methodology when researching a contemporary issue. Furthermore, since case studies are frequently used whenever researching the influence of a particular practice, this

method of inquiry provides a fitting choice for further examination of Response to Intervention (RtI).

This current study examined the implementation of Tier 2 interventions within the RtI model. A qualitative case study is a suitable design for this study since it will seek to explore how Response to Intervention is implemented within small groups of at-risk struggling readers in kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, I am interested in studying the descriptive details of RtI implementation from the perspectives of teachers. The case study research methodology will allow me to triangulate data from multiple sources collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts to create a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

This qualitative case study was both exploratory and collective. An exploratory case study begins with initial assumptions; however, the researcher is aware that the findings might indicate that these notions are incorrect (Yin, 2002). This current research study was exploratory in that it sought to examine the perceptions of kindergarten teachers to better understand and interpret their experiences regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy using the Response to Intervention approach in the classroom setting. This study also was collective; a collective case study or multiple case study entails the researcher exploring two or more cases to investigate one issue (Creswell, 2007). This study investigated the instructional approaches/pedagogies and practices which three kindergarten teachers utilized to deliver Tier 2 instruction to struggling readers within the classroom environment.

Research Questions

Research questions are typically found in qualitative research instead of objectives or hypotheses. This exploratory collective case study was directed by the following research questions, which provided the framework for this study. The overarching research question guiding this study is:

How is Tier 2 literacy instruction delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting?

The following sub-questions guided the research and data analysis for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach within the classroom?
2. What instructional approaches are kindergarten teachers implementing in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?
3. How do kindergarten teachers apply literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?
4. What are the responses of kindergarten struggling readers to the delivery of literacy interventions in Tier 2 instruction?

Pilot Study/Exploration

A pilot study was conducted during May 2009 to provide a brief exploration and insight into this proposed topic focus and research design. To conduct the pilot study, qualitative methodology was used to gain an understanding of how teachers are implementing literacy interventions to students identified for Response to Intervention Tier 2 instruction. The pilot study took place at an elementary school in the school district in which I conducted the current research study. The study involved eight elementary teachers (two males and six females) from a K-5 elementary school of approximately 250 students located in the Midwest. The participants represented a variety of diverse backgrounds with notable differences in years of teaching experience. The interviewees consisted of six general education classroom teachers, one academic coach (reading specialist), and one special education teacher.

All participants met the following criteria: they volunteered to be part of the study; they currently taught students who had been identified for Tier 2 reading interventions; and they provided a representation of K-5 grade levels. All interviewees had also participated in Student Improvement Team (SIT) meetings. It was during a SIT meeting that the academic achievement of a struggling student was accessed to identify and validate academic strengths and difficulties, develop appropriate interventions, determine methods in which to implement and monitor the intervention, and establish the criteria to evaluate whether the plan has been effective.

To conduct the pilot study, I contacted the principal and teachers from an elementary school in the district which had been implementing Response to Intervention for three years. This site was also used for the current study. This school

was also affiliated with a university's Professional Development School Partnership. I then identified eight teachers to contact- six classroom teachers (K, 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5), the academic coach (reading specialist), and a special education teacher. I requested the opportunity to conduct a brief 15 to 30 minute interview with each of them. All of the teachers that I contacted agreed to be part of this pilot study. I scheduled the interviews at the teachers' convenience. I conducted a few of the interviews before school and others during the teacher's planning time. All of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, except for one interview which consisted of two teachers who teach the same grade level- one with 12 years experience, the other is in his second year of teaching. During the pilot study interview sessions, I arrived at the prearranged location early and identified an area where I could conduct the interview privately. I used an audio tape recorder and then transcribed the interviews later that day.

The pilot study helped me to gain a more in-depth understanding of how teachers were delivering instruction to support the learning needs of struggling readers identified for Tier 2 interventions. Specifically, the study provided information about the teachers' perceptions regarding Response to Intervention and the instructional practices being utilized to provide supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program for students whose performance was below grade level expectations. I asked teachers to respond to the following four open-ended interview prompts:

1. What is your understanding of the Response to Intervention approach?
2. How do you implement Response to Intervention in your literacy program to assist students identified for Tier 2 intervention?

3. What specific Tier 2 reading strategies do you use?
4. What perceived impact do you believe Response to Intervention is having on students?

Occasionally, I found it necessary to probe with more detailed questions, but these four open-ended interview prompts served well to generate rich information from the classroom teachers. However, I found that my interview with the academic coach and special education teacher provided me with additional information that led me to further probe with additional questions. Each of the teachers willingly provided me with vivid information regarding their perceptions and current practices in regard to implementing the Response to Intervention approach.

First, I transcribed each teacher's entire interview. Next, I compiled all of the responses to each of the four open-ended interview prompts. Then, I reviewed all responses to each prompt. I noticed the following common themes begin to emerge from the teachers' responses:

- Certainty that early and intensive reading interventions for struggling readers generate gains in reading achievement;
- Sound understanding of the Response to Intervention approach;
- Interventions not being provided within the classroom for Tier 2 students;
- Confidence that pull-out programs are the best method to provide Tier 2 supplemental interventions; and

- Lack of time as the most significant barrier to providing interventions in the classroom.

The pilot study provided a brief exploration and insight into this study. At the conclusion of the pilot study, I perceived that the teachers believed that they had few opportunities to work individually with struggling readers. They identified a need for additional instruction for struggling readers, but labored with how to accommodate individual differences within classroom instruction. The majority of the teachers considered pull-out intervention programs as the only method in which to meet the individual needs of Tier 2 struggling readers. Only one teacher identified ways in which she differentiated instruction to meet the needs of individual students; however, she acknowledged that opportunities to provide support and interventions to struggling readers is limited and considers the pull-out intervention program as vital to support the needs of struggling readers. The teachers also specified the difficulty associated with having only one teacher (academic coach) for 250 students that did not allow for the meeting the needs of all young readers. During the interviews with the eight teachers, it became quite evident that they believed that it was imperative to offer effective, early and intensive intervention in the form of Tier 2 instruction to all young readers who struggle with learning to read.

I gained valuable information from the pilot study which influenced the design of this current research study. At the conclusion of the pilot study I believed that insights from the building principal were missing. Although the principal is not involved in implementing interventions, she occupied the lead role in the decision-

making process for identifying the problem, defining the problem, selecting the setting for implementing the interventions, and determining the period of time. This information is vital to the instructional planning decisions selected by the classroom teacher when implementing of Tier 2 interventions within the classroom.

Additionally, I realized that literacy instructional models and practices to deliver Tier 2 interventions vary within a school. Some of the classroom teachers balanced whole group instruction with differentiated instruction within the classroom. Other classroom teachers relied on individual tutoring when time permitted. However, I found that many classroom teachers struggled with how to accommodate individual differences within the classroom, and thus relied solely on the support of the pull-out program. Therefore, I decided to locate specific classroom teachers who were effectively implementing Tier 2 interventions.

School Setting/Participants

The setting for this study included two K-5 elementary schools in the Midwest that have implemented the Response to Intervention approach for approximately four years. The implementation of the Response to Intervention approach occurred from an outgrowth of district encouragement regarding an improved approach for assisting educators in providing effective instruction, early identification of at-risk readers, providing appropriate interventions and making instructional decisions. This change emerged as a result of revisions outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004.

The schools selected for this study were chosen based on purposeful sampling so that they might provide an informational rich collective case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). The chosen schools have implemented the Response to Intervention model for at least three consecutive school years, have documented an increase in student reading scores on district and state exams, and have achieved a reduction in referrals for special education services since implementing the Response to Intervention approach. The two schools are also affiliated with a university as a Professional Development School, the faculty has a long standing commitment to collaboration and maximizing student learning, and they volunteered to be the first in the district to implement the Response to Intervention approach to assist students who are experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties.

The two school sites are from a school district that services nearly 7,000 students in grades K-12. This district operates 14 elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one alternative education center, and one early childhood center. This district has shared a partnership with the military since 1948. Four of the elementary schools and one middle school are located on the military installation. The student population includes 57% identified as dependents of active duty personnel stationed at this installation. Most students of active duty military spend approximately three years in this district. Based on the 2008 enrollment, the student demographics in this district were 48% White, 25% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 17% Multi-Ethnic.

All elementary schools offer a full-day kindergarten program, feature library programs which are closely integrated with classroom objectives, and offer after-

school programs. The district and community coordinate the following services and programs: alternative & after-school programs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Army School Age Programs in Your Neighborhood (ASPYN), Boys & Girls Clubs, Community Connects, Family Network Learning Center, Healthy Families America, Parents as Teachers Program, and Smart Start.

The settings for the study were two K-5 elementary schools in this district. In the fall of 2009, the enrollment of Elm Valley Elementary School (pseudonym) was 322. The gender ratios were 46% females and 54% males. The student ethnicity was identified as 48% African American, 25% White, 8% Hispanic, and 23% Multi-Ethnic. Eighty-three percent of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, 11% were English Language Learners, and 9% were students with identified learning and/or physical disabilities.

The fall 2009 student enrollment for Oak Hill Elementary (pseudonym) was 248. The gender ratios were 49% females and 51% males. Student ethnicity was identified as 64% White, 14% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 14% Multi-Ethnic. Forty-seven percent of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, 7% were English Language Learners, and 11% were students with identified learning and/or physical disabilities.

At both school sites, there were two classes for each grade level at that time. The participants were three kindergarten teachers: Ms. Laramie, Ms. Cheyenne, and Ms. Douglas (pseudonyms). The participants were selected by the principals and the researcher implementing the following criteria:

- The classroom teachers selected would volunteer to be part of the study.
- The classroom teachers balanced whole group instruction with differentiated instruction within the classroom to meet the needs of identified Tier 2 at-risk readers.

An overall detailed description of the chosen classrooms and classroom teachers are included in Chapter Four. These factors were important for this study which investigated how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting?

Role of the Researcher

The primary role of myself as the researcher in this qualitative study was to be an observer. My intent was to collect data in a natural, educational, classroom setting. Creswell (2007) indicates that an important first step in the process is to determine the type of purposeful sampling to use, find the people/places to study, gain access, and then to establish a rapport with the participants in order to gather trustworthy data.

Another role of myself as the researcher was to conduct interviews of each participant prior to and following completing the observations. Yin (2002) asserted that although interviews may take several forms, case study interviews are most frequently opened-ended prompts. This survey method enabled the researcher to gain information about the topic of study as well as the respondents' perceptions and

opinions about the experience. The researcher should always take into account that data collected through interviews are subject to bias, poor recall, and/or poor or inaccurate information, and thus should be corroborated with the information collected from the observations (Creswell, 2007).

The third role of myself as the researcher was to gather artifacts/documents. Document collection is relevant to the majority of case study research and should be the focus of explicit gathering plans (Yin, 2002). Obtaining permission to use materials, providing reliable instructions to participants prior to journaling, and decisions related to issues of videotaping are customary responsibilities of the qualitative researcher.

The final role of myself as the researcher was to conduct student interviews through small group guided conversations. To engage kindergarten students in conversations, I asked open-ended interview prompts in order to provide students with an opportunity to discuss their experiences with small group instruction.

To gain access to the school sites, I contacted the assistant superintendent by email and telephone to gain approval to conduct this study in their school district. Upon approval, I contacted the two elementary school principals to seek their approval and permission to conduct the study at their sites. With the principals' permission, I contacted the classroom teachers to obtain their voluntary agreement to conduct my study in their classrooms. I taught in the district from 2004-2007, however, I do not have professional or personal acquaintances at the two elementary schools where the study took place.

Prior to entering the classrooms, I obtained approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the Office of Research Compliance of Kansas State University (Appendix A). All appropriate procedures were followed to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Letters of consent were sent to the parents of the kindergarten at-risk struggling readers for permission to be involved in this research study (Appendix B). In addition to obtaining consent and maintaining confidentiality, Creswell (2007) reminds researchers that ethical issues include establishing a supportive and respectful relationship, and avoiding deception.

Role of the Teacher Participants

Teacher participant selection was important in order for the researcher to gain insight and understanding into how Tier 2 literacy instruction was being delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. Foorman, Carlson, and Santi (2007) argue that in spite of the logic of improving classroom reading instruction in the primary grades, few empirical studies exist to show how instruction can be changed to reflect effective classroom reading instruction for at-risk readers. Response to Intervention requires classroom teachers to assume more responsibility for Tier 2 interventions through differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students whose needs are not being met by instruction in the core curriculum alone.

The three classroom teachers allowed myself as the researcher to conduct observations during instructional times when teachers were delivering supplementary

instruction to at-risk readers identified for Tier 2 interventions. The observations took place one to two days a week, for 15-40 minutes over approximately a twelve-week period. The researcher formally interviewed the teachers at the onset of the study (Appendix C) and again at the conclusion of the research (Appendix D) to gather information in regard to their perceptions regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the RtI approach.

Research Timeline

The data collection of this study extended for approximately 12 weeks. This included the researcher’s initial visit, interviews with administrators and teachers, student guided conversations, small group observations, collection of documents/artifacts, and a debriefing visit at the end of the study. Sessions were conducted at least one day a week in each of the three classrooms for approximately 15-40 minutes. The study began during the week of November 16, 2009 and ended on February 26, 2010. Table 3.1 outlines each data collection sessions.

Table 3.1: Projected Research Timeline

Date	Location	Data Collection
M 11/16	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Interviewed administrators Initial prospective teacher participant selection
F 11/20	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Informal interviews with prospective teacher participants Teacher participant selection
W 12/09	Case Study 1	Informal interviews with prospective teacher participants Teacher participant selection
TH 12/10	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Informal classroom observations Reviewed academic records CBM assessment data of Tier 2 struggling readers Formal teacher participant interviews

T 12/15	Case Study 1	Reviewed academic records CBM assessment data of Tier 2 struggling readers Informal classroom observations Formal teacher participant interviews
T 12/22	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #1 Classroom observation #1 Classroom observation #1
W 1/13	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #2 Classroom observation #2
TH 1/14	Case Study 1	Classroom observation #2
TH 1/21	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #3 Classroom observation #3 Classroom observation #3
M 1/25	Case Study 2	Classroom observation #4
W 1/27	Case Study 1	Classroom observation #4
TH 1/28	Case Study 3 Case Study 2	Classroom observation #4 Classroom observation #5
T 2/2	Case Study 1 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #5 Classroom observation #5
W 2/3	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #6 Classroom observation #6
TH 2/4	Case Study 1	Classroom observation #6
W 2/10	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #7 Classroom observation #7 Classroom observation #7
TH 2/11	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #8 Classroom observation #8
F 2/12	Case Study 1	Classroom observation #8
T 2/16	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #9 Classroom observation #9 Classroom observation #9
W 2/17	Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #10 Classroom observation #10
TH 2/18	Case Study 1	Classroom observation #10
M 2/22	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #11 Classroom observation #11 Classroom observation #11
T 2/23	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Classroom observation #12 Classroom observation #12 Classroom observation #12
W 2/24	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Student guided conversations

TH 2/25	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Reviewed academic records CBM assessment data of Tier 2 struggling readers Formal teacher participant interviews Teacher participant out brief
F 2/26	Case Study 1 Case Study 2 Case Study 3	Administrator out brief

Data Collection

Data collection was completed primarily through observational field notes, interviews/student guided conversations, and document review. Yin (2002) states that a case study inquiry must involve the collection of multiple sources of evidence, including observations, interviews, and artifacts. Sometimes different sources of evidence present different perspectives of the study and, as a result, add to the understanding of the case. Multiple sources of data also offer ample sources of evidence that enable triangulation of the data to enhance trustworthiness.

According to Creswell (2007), a case study's data collection entails crafting a detailed description of the case and its setting by gathering sound information to answer emerging research questions. In particular, if the case study represents a chronology of events, then a collection of multiple sources of data should be completed for each step or phase in the progression of the case. For this study, three sources of data were collected: interviews/student guided conversations, observational field notes, and artifacts during three key phases in the implementation of the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model for at-risk readers. Specifically, this study examined each phase that builds on the teacher's knowledge relating to supporting the learning needs of kindergarten struggling readers when utilizing the RtI approach.

During data collection I focused on: 1) the approaches/pedagogies teachers were utilizing, and 2) the elements of reading instruction delivered during the Tier 2 instruction. Table 3.2 summarizes the data collection phases of the study.

Table 3.2: Data Collection Phases of the Study

	<u>Phase I</u>	<u>Phase II</u>	<u>Phase III</u>
Interviews	Administrators - Formal Classroom Teachers - Formal	Classroom Teachers - Informal	Administrators - Informal Classroom Teachers - Formal Student - Informal Guided Conversations
Observation	Field Notes - Informational & Reflective Classroom - Informal	Classroom - Formal & Informal Field Notes - Informational & Reflective	Field Notes - Informational & Reflective
Artifacts/ Documents	Student Records CBM Assessment Data	Student Records CBM Assessment Data	Student Records CBM Assessment Data

Phases of the Study

This study made use of three phases in order to collect multiple sources of data in the progression of research study. Each phase helped to construct an understanding of how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. Each

phase included data collected through interviews/student guided conversations, observational field notes, and artifacts/documents.

The data collection during the first phase of the study consisted of formal interviews with the administrators and teacher participants. These interviews were audio recorded with verbal permission and then transcribed as soon as possible following the interview to maintain accuracy of the information. During Phase I, observational data was gathered through informational and reflective field notes and informal classroom observations. The researcher took handwritten notes while at the research site and then transcribed them on a computer later that day. This process allowed the researcher to review the observational comments and add reflective remarks after leaving the research site. In addition during Phase I, the researcher attempted to review the academic records and the Student Improvement Team documents for the kindergarten students identified for Tier 2 instruction. This allowed the researcher to gain familiarity with the academic strengths and needs of the students identified for Tier 2 interventions.

The second phase of the study included data collection of formal and informal interviews with the classroom teachers to gain insights and understanding regarding what materials, instructional models, and practices were being utilized to deliver Tier 2 instruction to struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model. In addition, the data collected from student interviews regarding their insights and understanding regarding literacy interventions provided during small group instruction were collected. The student interviews were guided conversations that

took place with the members of each Tier 2 instructional group. Phase II of the study also included a collection of formal and informal classroom observations.

The third phase of the study included a collection of informal interviews with the administrators, formal and informal interviews with the classroom teachers, and guided conversations with students. Observational data included informational and reflective field notes. Document collection included student records and Curriculum-Based Measurement data.

Multiple sources of data offered a sufficient quantity of evidence that enabled triangulation of the data to enhance trustworthiness. The study was set up in three phases in order to gather these various sources of data.

Interviews

In this study, interviews with each participant were a primary means of data collection. In order to achieve a complete understanding of the experiences of the interviewees, the researcher used open-ended focused interview prompts and provided probing questions wherever necessary to allow for various perspectives to emerge. Expanded data collection through a series of interviews with greater depth and narrower focus generated a more in-depth understanding with regard to how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting.

Krathwohl (1998) described interviews as either spur-of-the-moment or carefully planned exchanges of information. The researcher utilized information from

both types of interviews in order to collect rich descriptive data. All interviews were recorded using an audio digital recorder. This information was used to develop a description of perceptions, practices, and the kindergarten classroom environments which are included in Chapter Four of the dissertation.

Teacher Interviews

The teachers were first interviewed formally during Phase I of the study to gain insights into their beliefs about literacy, literacy instruction, and Response to Intervention. The researcher acquired knowledge about the teachers' perceptions regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach. A list of open-ended prompts was utilized to allow for flexibility during the interview as teachers discuss literacy, literacy instruction, and Response to Intervention (Appendix C). During Phase II of the study, teachers were interviewed informally to gain insights and understanding regarding what materials, instructional approaches/pedagogies were being utilized to deliver Tier 2 instruction to struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model. The teachers were interviewed again during Phase III (Appendix D) of the research in order to build upon and clarify the information obtained during previous data collection procedures.

Administrator Interviews

The administrators were first interviewed formally during Phase I of the study to gain insights into their beliefs about the school's philosophy on teaching literacy, methods of literacy instruction, and Response to Intervention. The researcher then met informally with the administrators at the conclusion of the research during Phase III of the study. The interviews were conducted as guided conversations, somewhat structured, but the inquiries remained open-ended to allow for the information to unfold and expand. The administrator interview protocol is included in Appendix E.

Student Guided Conversations

The researcher conducted guided conversations with small groups of students during Phase III of the study. The researcher collected information regarding the insights and understanding that students had regarding literacy interventions provided to them during small group instruction. Guided conversations took place with the members of each Tier 2 instructional group. Since these students were used to working in groups with one another, the researcher speculated that the discussion would provide richer details than if the interviews were conducted individually. To engage them in conversations, the researcher asked open-ended interview prompts to provide students with an opportunity to discuss their experiences in small group instruction. The protocol for the guided conversations is included in Appendix F.

Observations

Observations are also an important source of data that was utilized in this research study. Krathwohl (1998) describes observations and interviews as interacting components that provide enhanced understanding of each other. Creswell (2007) warns of the challenges associated with collecting data through observations such as remembering to take field notes, recording quotes accurately, keeping from being overwhelmed at the site with information, and learning how to funnel the observations from the broad picture to a narrower one.

Creswell (2007) reminds researchers that the quality of the observation data is dependent on the skills of the observer and a skillful observer is able to separate important data from insignificant actions. It is also easy for the researcher to overlook an important piece of information during a site visit. Therefore, maintaining field notes took place during all phases of the study. This allowed the researcher to take brief notes and expand upon them immediately after leaving the site, thus lessening the likelihood of forgetting important details or changing first impressions. These notes were both informative as well as reflective that the researcher added to after reviewing the data collected that day. The protocol for the observations is included in Appendix G.

Artifacts/Document Review

The third source of data collection in this study consisted of collecting documents that each school utilized to implement Response to Intervention.

According to Yin (2002), the most important use of documents in a case study is to corroborate and augment evidence gathered from other sources. Documents provided vital information about the criteria by which students were identified for Tier 2 interventions, supplemental instructional planning, and progress monitoring.

Documents that the researcher collected during this study include:

- Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) assessment data
- Tier 2 progress monitoring assessment data collected during Phase II.

The form for the artifact/document checklist is included in Appendix H.

Teacher Reflective Journals

The three teachers participating in the proposed research study were each given a one inch binder to be used as their daily reflective journals. The journals provided them opportunity for each of them to write reflections regarding Tier 2 instructional interventions during Phase II and Phase III of the study. The journals presented the opportunity for the teachers to record any observations about the students such as academic progress and continued struggles, as well as ideas for future instruction. Teachers were able to record thoughts and insights on days when the researcher was not observing in the classroom. The researcher requested that the teachers respond daily in his/her journal to the following prompt: *How did my instruction, approach, materials, and or techniques facilitate the literacy learning of my struggling readers today?*

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) emphasizes that the process of data analysis is making sense out of the collected data. In this study, qualitative methods were utilized to analyze the data gathered from classroom observations and teacher interviews. These data sources were compared to and supplemented by the information gained from field notes, administrator interviews, guided student conversations, and artifacts and documents to record how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting.

Schwandt (1997) defines data analysis as, “working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 157). Creswell (2007) explains that this process presents a challenging task for qualitative researchers and recommends first gaining a general overview of all information gathered by systematically organizing all of the data collected, making sure that field notes are summarized, and transcriptions of interviews are completed.

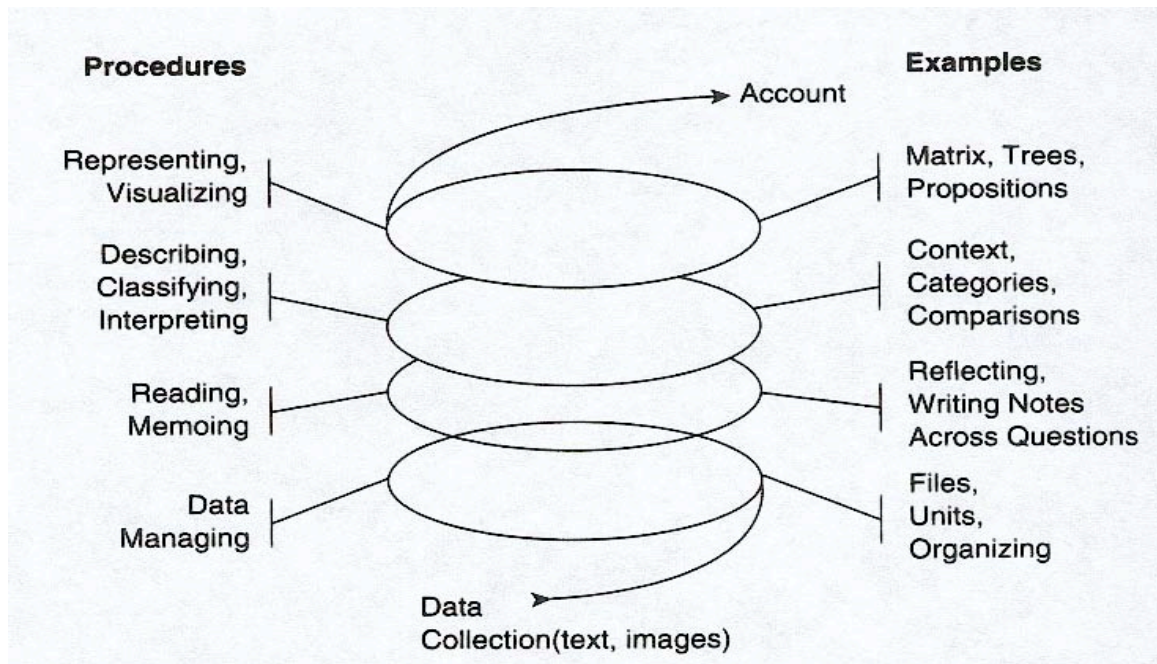
Dyson and Genishi (2005) discuss data analysis as the process by which field notes, interviews, and artifacts are transformed into assertions about a studied phenomenon that answer posed questions. In order to successfully answer the research questions, the data collection were aligned with the questions and the data analysis guidelines. Table 3.3 provides both the data collection and analysis as it related to the research questions.

Table 3.3: Data Collection and Analysis Grid

Research Questions	Data Collection	Methods of Analysis
<p><i>How is Tier 2 literacy instruction delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting?</i></p>		
<p>What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach within the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observational Field Notes • Classroom Observations • Administrator Interviews • Teacher Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding and comparison of interview responses and generated discussion pertaining to literacy instruction • Coding and comparison of classroom observations
<p>What instructional approaches are kindergarten teachers implementing in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding and comparison of classroom observations
<p>How do kindergarten teachers apply literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observational Field Notes • Classroom Observations • Teacher Interviews • Student Guided Conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding and comparison of classroom observations
<p>What are the responses of kindergarten struggling readers to the delivery of literacy interventions in Tier 2 instruction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding and comparison of Student Interviews

The first stage of data analysis begins with the initial data collection and continues until all of the data is collected, coded, and findings are recognized. However, these steps are not independent of one another, but instead a cohesive and simultaneous process that is flexible and evolves through the research process according to the findings of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is complicated by the fact that it does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and that it evolves and changes constantly. This process is best represented as a spiral, moving in analytic circles rather than a fixed linear approach (Creswell 2007, p. 151) as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Creswell’s Data Analysis Spiral



Source: Creswell, (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. p. 151.

Organizing the data began the process and is represented as the first loop in the spiral. The researcher made certain that transcriptions of interviews were complete; handwritten field notes, classroom observations, and the researcher's reflections were transcribed on the computer; and collected documents were organized. Next, the researcher continued analysis by reading through the data several times to get a general impression and sense of wholeness of the information collected. The researcher took notes and reflected on what the information was beginning to reveal.

The next spiral was intended for describing, classifying and interpreting the data. Creswell (2007) explains, "here researchers describe in detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature" (p. 151). For the purpose of this study, the researcher described the data in detail as identified by the information collected through interviews, observations, and documents. Presenting the data, the final spiral, represented the point at which the researcher presented the findings of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Administrator Interviews

Both of the school principals were interviewed individually during Phase I and Phase III of the study. The interviews were conducted as guided conversations, somewhat structured, but the inquiries remained open-ended to allow for the information to unfold and expand. The interviews during Phase I were formal and were audio recorded. The interviews during Phase III of the study were informal

conversations. I did not code the administrator's responses since I used this information purely for background knowledge to identify the school's philosophy on teaching literacy, methods of literacy instruction, and the history of Response to Intervention in the school district and the school. The administrator interview protocol is included in Appendix E.

Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The interviews with each teacher were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy, analyzed, and coded to facilitate the examination for categories and themes. The teacher interview protocols are included in Appendix C (Phase I) and Appendix D (Phase III). A coded transcript of an interview is included in Appendix I. The data enabled the researcher to describe the experiences and perceptions of each teacher regarding literacy, models of literacy instruction, and Response to Intervention. Specifically, the researcher was able to describe how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The teachers' perceptions regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach played a role in the implementation of Tier 2 intervention strategies within the classroom.

Analysis of Student Guided Conversations

Each Tier 2 intervention group of students were interviewed through a guided conversation during Phase III of the study (Appendix F). The guided conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed and coded by designating their insights about learning to read in small groups. After the initial coding, the transcripts were reread in order to discover themes that are emerging. The themes were grouped into categories. The researcher was able to gain insight and understanding from the students' perspectives regarding Tier 2 instruction. A coded transcript from one of the small group guided conversations is included in Appendix J.

Analysis of Classroom Observations

The classroom observations were recorded and then later transcribed to permit the researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of the observation. Transcripts of a classroom observation (Appendix K) were reviewed and coded. The initial coding attempted to recognize the critical elements that occurred in the classroom during the delivery of Tier 2 interventions to struggling readers. After completion of the initial coding, the data were further analyzed, evaluated for emerging themes, and categorized based on those themes.

Analysis of Artifacts/Documents

The artifacts and documents were collected and analyzed with the focus placed on gaining insights into how teachers utilized these documents to plan for the

implementation of Tier 2 interventions. Documents that were collected consisted of student records and assessment data utilized to identify and assist kindergarten struggling readers. Data were collected and photocopied during the research. Although this information helped me to understand how teachers identified struggling readers, this study was conducted over a short period of time; therefore changes in student progress could not be analyzed. In addition, this study sought to understand how teachers were implementing Tier 2 interventions in the classroom, not to document the academic gains made by the students.

Establishing Trustworthiness

A key issue for qualitative research is developing appropriate procedures for assessing its trustworthiness. According to Creswell (2007), trustworthy qualitative research needs to be based on systematic collection of data, using suitable research procedures, and allowing the procedures and findings to be open to the critical analysis from others. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe trustworthiness in the following terms:

- credibility which refers to how truthful particular findings are;
- transferability how closely related the research findings are to another setting or group;
- dependability meaning how we can be sure that our findings are consistent and reproducible; and

- confirmability which relates to how neutral the findings are and not a product of the researcher's biases and prejudices.

In order to increase trustworthiness in qualitative studies, Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers employ techniques such as providing rich, thick description; prolonged engagement in the field; member checks; and the triangulation of multiple sources of data.

Rich, Thick Description

The data generated from multiple sources can be voluminous, but it yields the rich description that is characteristic of sound qualitative research and the basis for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007). Having a rich, thick description of the data and how the researcher arrived at the conclusions can greatly help another researcher replicate the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is descriptive and, therefore, during the reporting of this study, it was my intent to provide a detailed account of the research sites participants, and instructional approaches and pedagogies. With a detailed description of the study and findings, the researcher may enable other investigators to duplicate the study or teachers to apply the findings of the study into Tier 2 of Response to Intervention in the classroom setting.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

Investing sufficient time to learn about the culture to be studied, detecting and minimizing distortions that may slowly shape the data, and building trust with the respondents is essential in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher collected data in the three case study settings for 12 weeks from November 16, 2009 to February 26, 2010. During that time the researcher observed sessions of 15-40 minutes in each of the three kindergarten classrooms in order to identify characteristics and elements relevant to the research study.

Member Checks

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This study included a review of the findings of this research by the teachers involved in this study and by the researcher's major professor. The researcher reviewed the classroom observations with the teachers and the remarks of teachers regarding the Tier 2 instruction were noted. Rough drafts of data collection, data analysis, researcher interpretations, and findings were shared with the teacher participants during the study and in more detail during the week of February 26, 2010 at the conclusion of the study. The researcher shared all information, data analysis results, researcher interpretations, and findings throughout the study with her major professor.

Triangulation/Crystallization

In triangulation, researchers collect data from multiple sources, utilizing different methods, and from various participants to provide substantiate evidence to reveal a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The interpretation of this data can also be described as crystallization. Crystallization is the idea that by observing or investigating various components of the research study, a multi-faceted depiction of the phenomenon under study emerges. The combination of the data collected and ways of analyzing the data yields a multiple-shaded interpretation of the findings distinct from any one source of the data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). For the purpose of this study, crystallization was utilized to corroborate evidence from multiple participants and multiple sources of data. Administrator, teacher, and student interviews, classroom observations, observational field notes, and document review were the sources of data.

Summary

This qualitative, exploratory, collective case study focused on providing an in-depth perspective on how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. This study identified effective supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program that was delivered within the classroom environment for at-risk struggling readers whose performance was below grade level expectations.

The setting for the study was three kindergarten classrooms in two K-5 elementary schools. The teacher participants were three kindergarten teachers. Guided by the research questions, multiple data sources were gathered from interviews with administrators, teachers, and students; classroom observations and field notes; and various documents. Data were collected and analyzed during three phases of the study. The researcher applied a systematic collection of data, utilized suitable research procedures, and provided a rich, detailed description of the observations, results, and findings of the study.

The next chapter focuses on the results of the study by analyzing the data sources of the three case studies. The literacy environment, teacher philosophy, struggling reader Response to Intervention approaches/ pedagogies, and student responses to literacy learning conducted in Ms. Laramie's kindergarten (Case Study One), Ms. Cheyenne's kindergarten (Case Study Two), and Ms. Douglas' kindergarten (Case Study Three) are presented with detailed results of the study. The similarities and differences between these three case studies are also discussed. The results of this study shared in Chapter Four lead toward the ultimate findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS

Schools seeking to make instructional decisions regarding the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) must be informed of how supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program can be delivered to students identified for Tier 2 interventions. The purpose of this study was to discover and describe how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom environment to kindergarten at-risk struggling readers whose performances are below emergent literacy expectations.

This qualitative, exploratory, collective case study was conducted during the fall/spring semesters of the 2009/2010 school year between November 16, 2009 and February 26, 2010. This study investigated how three kindergarten classroom teachers, located in two elementary schools in a midwestern community, delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction to kindergarten struggling readers within the Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The results of this study provided a framework for beginning to answer the first three research subquestions which guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach within the classroom?
2. What instructional approaches are kindergarten teachers implementing in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?

3. How do kindergarten teachers apply literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?

This chapter provides a rich description of three kindergarten classrooms that exhibited dissimilar instructional approaches and pedagogies when delivering Tier 2 literacy instruction to at-risk struggling readers. Examples of how these results are aligned to the International Reading Association's *Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators* and the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International Reading Association's *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* are provided and analyzed to determine the connection between principles of RtI Tier 2 instruction and effective early literacy practices.

In addition to small group observations, interviews provided insight regarding how kindergarten teachers viewed their role and responsibilities teaching literacy to struggling readers and how they analyze and utilize curriculum-based and progress monitoring data to plan and deliver Tier 2 instruction. Guided conversations with small groups of kindergarteners afforded the kindergarten students' perspectives, ideas, and thoughts regarding literacy development and interventions provided to them during small group instructions. These interviews and conversations provided information to answer the last research subquestion:

4. What are the responses of kindergarten struggling readers to the delivery of literacy interventions in Tier 2 instruction?

Finally, the results from the data analysis from the four subquestions will lead to an answer to the overview research question:

How is Tier 2 literacy instruction delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting?

Ms. Laramie's Kindergarten Classroom

The first case study took place in Ms. Laramie's kindergarten classroom at Oak Hill Elementary School. The fall 2009 student enrollment at Oak Hill was 248. The gender ratios were 49% females and 51% males. Student ethnicity was identified as 64% White, 14% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 14% Multi-Ethnic. Forty-seven percent of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, 7% were English Language Learners, and 11% were students with identified learning and/or physical disabilities. At the time of the study Ms. Laramie's classroom included twenty-one students. For the purposes of this study, I observed Ms. Laramie while she provided Tier 2 reading interventions to three students -- Tara, Mira, and Abby -- who were designated as at-risk struggling readers based on their DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment scores, Kindergarten Outcomes Reading Checklist, and formal and informal teacher observations. The Tier 2 intervention sessions were held from 10:00AM to 10:15AM, three days per week.

The Literacy Environment

Oak Hill Elementary School, built in the 1960s, was located in the center of the town next to a community park and the district's administration building. Upon entering the front door, it was evident that notable pride is taken to ensure that

children and families are provided with an excellent educational facility. The building was immaculately clean; the floors were waxed and polished to a gloss that reflected my image as I walked through the front doors. The office echoed a friendly welcome through warm colors, an oak bench, and seasonal decorations. The school personnel were pleasant and helpful as they seemed eager to offer assistance to students, family members, and visitors. Oak Hill Elementary School was one level with two long hallways, with classrooms located on both sides. At the very end of one of the hallways was the location of Ms Laramie's kindergarten classroom.

The classroom was large and brightly decorated. It had a high sweeping ceiling which gave the room a sense of a voluminous and unrestricted environment. A brightly colored rug that adorned numbers identified the whole group meeting site at the front of the room. Various manipulatives for content area learning were neatly stacked in different locations in the classroom. These instructional supplies included puzzles, early literacy games, blocks, tubs of letters and numbers, picture cards, and an ample supply of writing materials. A large assortment of picture books, big books, and classroom authored books were displayed throughout the room. A large chart paper tablet in the front of the room revealed the morning message and the writings of the children decorated the walls. A small alcove with a child sized table and chairs offered a private reading/writing location free from distractions.

In the center of the room were the students' desks. They were arranged in groups of six, which allowed them to sit next to and across from their peers as they focused on their work throughout the day. The students had their personal items in their desks and their coats and backpacks hung neatly on a rack on one wall of the

room. The teacher's desk and a file cabinet were located away from various activities in the back of the classroom.

On my first visit to this classroom children were scattered about the room, journals in hand. Some were conferencing with Ms. Laramie, while others were sharing their writing with peers. Immediately, I sensed that I had entered a stimulating classroom environment that inspired children to learn. This kindergarten classroom embodied children who came from a variety of cultural experiences, family compositions, and socio-economic backgrounds. Ms. Laramie frequently supported the kindergarteners in the process of learning how to be effective communicators. The class often discussed how their actions directly affected other people in their learning community, and focused on the importance of negotiating between their needs and the needs of others.

Ms. Laramie's Teaching Philosophy

I interviewed Ms. Laramie formally during Phase I of the study to gain insights into her beliefs about literacy, reading instruction, and Response to Intervention. I hoped to acquire knowledge about her perceptions regarding her role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach. During Phase II of the study, I interviewed her informally to gain insights and understanding regarding what materials, instructional models, and practices she was utilizing to deliver Tier 2 instruction. I then conducted a formal interview with Ms. Laramie again during Phase III of the research to build upon and clarify the information obtained during previous data collection procedures. The two formal

interviews lasted for approximately thirty minutes each and the informal interviews extended only a few minutes after each small group observation. I interpreted Ms. Laramie's teaching philosophy from these interviews.

Ms. Laramie had five years experience as a classroom teacher. She completed her student teaching in this school and obtained this position, her first teaching position, the semester following the completion of her student internship. Ms. Laramie's preparation for teaching literacy within the framework of the Response to Intervention approach emerged from informal building and district inservices where colleagues shared their knowledge about the three different Tiers in the RtI model. She reported having reading methods and language arts methods classes as an undergraduate, but no specific courses in how to approach the teaching of reading interventions to struggling readers. However, at the time of the study Ms. Laramie reported that she felt prepared to teach reading because of additional training that she received through the Success For All (2007) literacy program and additional training that she received through district workshops and inservices.

Ms. Laramie told me the following philosophical thoughts about her role and responsibility of teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention model. *When I think of RtI, I...in a perfect situation... would see myself teaching small group skills. Maybe during some self-guided whole group activity while I could really hone in on three or four kids that need to work on a specific skill and then a different group would come to me and they might need something completely different -- a differentiated approach where I can meet all of the individual needs within my classroom.*

A major component of Ms. Laramie's whole group literacy instruction was 'Reading Roots,' a ninety-minute beginning-reading curriculum in the Success For All (2007) literacy program. 'Reading Roots' utilizes systematic phonics instruction supported by decodable stories, enhanced by instruction in fluency and comprehension. It also focuses on oral language development and writing instruction. She stated that for the majority of her students, whole group instruction provides all the elements needed for successful early literacy development. However, for a few students, *what they show me in small group is a whole lot different than what they are showing me in whole group*. She explained that a few of her students are able to perform skills in small groups that they are not able to accomplish when they were in the whole group. Ms. Laramie argued that some early readers *just need a little extra practice*. She contended that without small group instruction these students may fail to keep up with their peers and continue to fall farther and farther behind in their literacy development.

In reference to her own high expectations for student achievement, Ms. Laramie shared that she teaches in a school that supports struggling readers at the very first sign that they are having difficulties. She identified this philosophy as the foundation of her approach to literacy instruction because *there is a focus on early struggling readers and I receive building support (support staff) that allows me to work with students as a group based on their needs*. She suggested that *having two sets of adult hands is essential in kindergarten*. She explained that in previous years a member of the support staff had taken the struggling readers out of the classroom in order to provide small group literacy interventions. However, this year she had the

support staff member work with the whole group while she worked with the small group of struggling readers. *We (the kindergarten teachers) just decided that it just makes sense that the most qualified person, the classroom teacher, should be the one working with them because we know what they need.*

Ms. Laramie reasoned, *I don't think that I could ever go back, and it is not that I don't believe that we have a fantastic support staff. It is just we don't really have the time to communicate with them about what it is that I really need them to do.* She continued to explain that if she was not the one executing the small group interventions, she didn't know to what extent the students were progressing in their literacy development. Ms. Laramie also pointed out that it is vital that the person who is delivering interventions to at-risk struggling readers use the same vocabulary that they are already hearing during Tier 1 instruction. She suggested that *if a support staff or even another teacher takes them out they don't know what you have been teaching and if they use different vocabulary with their instruction, then that is just one more barrier to understanding to add to an already struggling student.*

Regardless of their current level of literacy development, Ms. Laramie had faith that each student in her class possessed the ability to become a proficient reader. She did not view her at-risk struggling students as a setback to her goals as a teacher. Instead, she seemed to believe that they just needed something a little different. Ms. Laramie trusted that she was best suited to deliver Tier 2 interventions to her at-risk struggling students because they were her students. She definitely acknowledged their academic strengths and instructional needs.

Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Ms. Laramie's district – like most districts – used research-based curricula and materials for reading instruction. Most of these materials appear to focus on the five areas of reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The primary concentration in kindergarten is focused mainly on phonemic awareness and phonics.

While much of Ms. Laramie's whole group Tier 1 literacy instruction could be attributed to district curriculum and materials, her small group Tier 2 interventions reflected her training and experience as a classroom teacher. Her small group reading instruction appeared to be influenced by her conviction that a firm grasp on phonemic awareness and phonic skills are essential in kindergarten.

During every observation, I noted that Ms. Laramie started the small group session with the "alphabet chant." This activity included the teacher and students singing the alphabet in unison. This chant included a combination of both phoneme manipulation and phonics. The group sang,

The letter A makes the "a" sound, "a/a/a," a is for apple, armadillo and air.

The letter B makes the "b" sound, "b/b/b," b is for book, baseball and bear...

The letter Z makes the "zzz" sound, "zzz/zzz/zzz," z is for zero, zipper and zoo.

Generally, this routine led to a variety of related phonemic awareness and phonics instruction activities. Always presenting a different activity, Ms. Laramie began by modeling the activity, followed by teacher/student group practice, and then observation and support of the students as they performed the skill together as a small group and then independently. During one interview, Ms. Laramie shared, *I try to use engaging and fun activities that incorporate several different skills because it is important to maximize the most that you can do with the least amount of materials and in a small amount of time.*

During one observation, Ms. Laramie explained, *Today we are going to talk about poems, words that rhyme, and words that have opposite meaning.* She reviewed the definition for a rhyme and then gave examples of words that rhyme. She engaged the students in a conversation about what makes words rhyme. Next, Ms. Laramie provided examples of pairs of words that have opposite meanings. She presented the example of 'hot and cold'. Students discussed opposites and generated their own examples of words with reverse meanings. Ms. Laramie explained that they would be looking for words that rhyme in a short poem about opposites. Each student had his/her own copy of the poem. Ms. Laramie read the first line of the poem; students read after her and took turns identifying the words that rhymed. Then they named other words that rhymed with the rhyming words in the poem while Ms. Laramie generated a word list. The students were smiling and giggling and one of them uttered *yee-haw* after she disclosed a word. Ms. Laramie and the students discussed the word parts that make up rhyming words: **-all**, **ball**, **tall**, **fall**. Then the students practiced looking for rhyming words and highlighting the part of the word that was the same.

Next, Ms. Laramie led a discussion about the words in the poem that had opposite meanings. Students produced alternative words and the teacher rewrote lines of the poem.

The students appeared engaged and enthusiastic throughout this lesson. I witnessed a lot of smiles, cheers, and praise. Ms. Laramie and her three students emerged from the lesson relaxed and in high spirits. She stated that she was able to get through the activity exactly as she had planned. She revealed, *I am grateful for this brief period of time to work with my struggling students; I know that they are benefiting from it.*

During the small group observations in Ms. Laramie’s classroom, I observed several Tier 2 instructional approaches and teaching pedagogies. Table 4.1 lists the approach/pedagogy categories, shares a brief description of each, and lists the number of lessons in which each approach/pedagogy was observed in Ms. Laramie’s small group instruction. The information following Table 4.1 seeks to provide a detailed portrait of several of these types of instructional approaches/pedagogies.

Table 4.1: Ms. Laramie’s Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Approach/Pedagogy	Description	# of lessons observed out of 12 observations
Small Group Instruction	The classroom teacher worked with a group of three students	12
Modeled Approach	The teacher demonstrated the skill	10
Shared Approach	The teacher and students performed the skill together	12
Guided Approach	The teacher observed and supported students as they performed the skill	9

<p>Phoneme manipulation</p>	<p>teaches students to notice, think about, and work with sounds that make up words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>isolation</i> – recognize individual sounds in a word ○ <i>identity</i> – recognize the same sound in different words ○ <i>categorization</i> – recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has a different sound ○ <i>blending</i> – combine separate phonemes to form a word ○ <i>segmentation</i> – break a word in its separate sounds ○ <i>deletion</i> – recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word ○ <i>addition</i> – make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word ○ <i>substitution</i> – substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word. 	<p>12</p> <p>9</p> <p>9</p> <p>12</p> <p>12</p> <p>9</p> <p>9</p> <p>9</p>
<p>Phonics instruction</p>	<p>teaches students the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>synthetic</i> - students convert letters to sounds and then blend those sounds to form words ○ <i>analytic</i> – students analyze letter/sound relationships in previously learned words ○ <i>analogy-based</i> – students use word families to identify new words with similar patterns ○ <i>invented spelling</i> – students segment words into phonemes and form words by writing the letters for each phoneme ○ <i>embedded</i> – students learn letter/sound relationships during the reading of text ○ <i>onset-rime</i> – students learn to identify the sound before the first vowel (the onset) and the sound of the remaining part (the rime) 	<p>12</p> <p>4</p> <p>7</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>7</p>

During **small group instruction** the classroom teacher worked with a group of three students. These three students -- Tara, Mira, and Abby -- were the same students who received services through small group instruction during all twelve observations. This instruction took place for approximately fifteen minutes, three times per week. Very engaging and highly energetic, the small group instruction focused on increasing phonemic awareness and phonics proficiency.

A **modeled approach** means that Ms. Laramie demonstrated a specific reading skill. The classroom teacher provided the greatest amount of support when she performed the activity and/or skill while the students observed. For example, during one observation Ms. Laramie placed four cards on the table in front of the students. She explained that each of the cards showed a separate step when building a snowman. One card displayed a completed snowman; another card showed two large snowballs; another revealed two large snowballs with eyes, nose, and a mouth on the top snowball; the last picture illustrated a snowman that appeared to be complete except it was missing arms. Ms. Laramie modeled what to do by “thinking aloud” the strategies that she was using as she was placing the cards in the correct sequence.

A **shared approach** indicates that Ms. Laramie and the three students performed the skill together. The most important way that this approach differed from modeling is that the students actually participated in the activity rather than simply observing the teacher. For example, during one observation Ms. Laramie and the students were creating new words by removing, adding, and/or substituting one phoneme for another to make a new word. Ms. Laramie began the lesson by forming the word “man” out of letter tiles and the students read the word. Then, she took away

the “m” saying *now I take away the “mmm” and replace it with a...* as she showed the students an “f,” the students said, “fff.” Ms. Laramie said, *and now I made the word....and the students said “fan.”*

During the **guided approach**, Ms. Laramie observed and supported Tara, Mira, and Abby as they performed the skill. For example, during one observation Ms. Laramie held up a word card without exposing the word. Slowly she slid open the card to uncover each letter separately. As each letter was exposed, the students articulated the sound and then pronounced the word when it was fully visible.

Phoneme manipulation teaches students to notice, think about, and work with sounds that make up words. Typically, Ms. Laramie taught three types of phoneme manipulations -- isolation, blending, and segmentation -- during each intervention session. For example, during one intervention session the group played a game called “Break it Down.” Ms. Laramie began by saying, *Tell me the sounds that you hear in the word “hat.”* The students closed their eyes and placed their index fingers on their temples. Then Ms. Laramie said, *Okay, now stretch it out.* The students opened their eyes and pretended that they were stretching out a rubber band as they said *h/aaa/t...hat.*

During **phonics instruction**, Ms. Laramie taught the three students to use letter/sound relationships to read and write words. She frequently drew upon stories with rhyming patterns and poetry to teach analogy-based and onset-rime phonics lessons. For example, during one observation Ms. Laramie read lines from a short story while students listened for words that rhymed. When students identified two words that rhymed, Ms. Laramie wrote the words on a small white board. Next, the

students took turns underlining the rime and circling the onset. Then, the students identified additional words with the same rime to create word families.

While Ms. Laramie's small group Tier 2 instruction centered on the five areas of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), the primary focus of her interventions was on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics skills of her at-risk struggling readers. Her training and experience as a kindergarten classroom teacher appeared to influence her certainty that a solid understanding of phonemic awareness and phonics are vital to supporting growth in struggling readers.

Students' Perceptions of Tier 2 Literacy Instruction

Guided conversations were held to determine the students' perceptions regarding small group literacy instruction. During each of my twelve observations there were three students in the group: Mira, Tara, and Abby. However, during the final week of the study, Tara moved; therefore, only Mira and Abby participated in the discussion. The interview was held at a rectangular oak table in the hallway, the same location as small group instruction. The students sat on child-sized chairs at the end of the table. Several thoughts emerged through analysis of the transcription regarding the students' perceptions regarding small group Tier 2 literacy interventions. The students:

- enjoyed practicing their reading skills in small groups;
- retained positive attitudes towards reading and viewed learning to read as the most important focus of school;
- perceived themselves as self-confident and motivated readers; and

- developed an emerging love of reading.

The students gave the impression that they had very positive attitudes towards reading and they did not perceive themselves as struggling readers. When asked about practicing reading in small groups during snack time, they shared these responses:

Mira: *I think that I know that one. I like to read and do grown-up things. I really do know how to paint. I like working with you (the teacher).*

Abby: *Yea, me too. I feel like doing it again right now. Can we do it again?*

Mira: *I like coming out here and reading. I like reading everywhere because then I can show my mom and she is very happy. I like reading with James (her little brother) and my mom. When I don't get it right my mom tells me to "sound it out" and I can do that. Then she helps me with words if I still don't know. I read at home and daycare books.*

Abby: *Um...I read at home to my mom.*

The students appeared to associate small group Tier 2 reading interventions as an opportunity to demonstrate their literacy skills. The last comment made by Mira, a bright, energetic and outgoing student, expressed her confidence in her ability to read and her motivation to try even harder if she had difficulty. She appeared to associate taking risks during reading as avenues to success. The students also seemed to perceive reading as a talent that they could share with others. Abby a cheerful, shy girl provided this insight:

Researcher: *Tell me what you like the most about learning to read.*

Abby: *I like to learn about...um...the...if I was grown up and I had kids...if I got kids I could teach them how to read because I know how to read. I would like to read to my kids.*

Mira: *We got to teach people to read. I can teach them.*

The students were able to articulate how to read and what strategies to use then they encountered an unfamiliar word. They revealed this reflection:

Researcher: *So can you tell me what it is like learning to read. How do we learn to read? What do we do when we read?*

Mira: *I teach her (Mira's little sister)...I tell her to read at the top (top of the page) and to stop and sound out the letters if she don't know the word.*

Abby: *We do that...um...we do letters and red cards (sight words) and green cards (decodable words). We do that out here (in small group).*

Ms. Laramie revealed to me that the reason that she was working with these three particular students was because they were able to perform effectively in a small group environment. They seemed happy and were progressing in their literacy development. However, they were having difficulty learning new concepts and refining their skills in whole group instruction. Ms. Laramie was unsure if this occurred because they struggled with learning to read at the beginning of the year and lacked confidence in their abilities during whole group instruction, if they simply needed the extra practice to learn/refine new skills, or if a small group setting

somehow provided a different means of instruction that these three students needed in order to learn to read.

Response to Intervention Connections

The International Reading Association (IRA) recently presented their *Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators* (IRA, 2010). To assist educators to better understand the complexities of the RtI approach, IRA's Commission on Response to Intervention issued six Guiding Principles for grades K-12. However, for the purposes of this study, Guiding Principle 1: Instruction and Guiding Principle 2: Responsive Teaching and Differentiation were utilized for observational data analysis since these two principles best align with Tier 2 literacy instruction. In addition, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International Reading Association (1998) issued a joint position statement highlighting research-based teaching practices that are appropriate and effective for young children. Even though published in 1998, this information is still regarded as relevant and important, particularly when analyzing appropriate practices to teach beginning readers how to read. Table 4.2 focuses on aligning the principles of Response to Intervention and the developmentally appropriate practices for young children with the observed Tier 2 lessons conducted by Ms. Laramie with her three struggling readers.

Table 4.2: Ms. Laramie’s Tier 2 Literacy Instruction Aligned with the IRA’s Guiding Principles of Response to Intervention and NAEYC’s Literacy Practices

<p>International Reading Association’s <i>Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators</i> (2010)</p>	<p>The National Association for the Education of Young Children and IRA, <i>Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children</i> (1998)</p>	<p>Ms. Laramie’s Classroom Literacy Lessons</p>
<p><i>Principle 1: Instruction</i></p> <p>RtI is first and foremost intended to prevent language and literacy problems by optimizing instruction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction should prevent serious language and literacy problems through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment and instruction. • A successful RTI process begins with the highest quality classroom core instruction and must be provided by an informed, competent classroom teacher. • The success of RTI depends on the classroom teacher's use of research-based practices. 	<p><i>Instruction will need to be adapted to account for children’s differences.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimating where each child is developmentally and building on that base, a key feature of all good teaching, is particularly important for the kindergarten teacher. • For other children with limited prior experiences with print, initiating them to the alphabetic principle, that a limited set of letters comprises the alphabet and that these letters stand for the sounds that make up spoken words, will require direct instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment • small group differentiated instruction for at-risk struggling readers • Teacher modeling • Shared approach • Guided practice • Sight words • Repeated readings • Oral language • Word families, rhymes, rhyming poems/story, • Phoneme manipulation: segmenting, blending, phoneme isolation • Phonics instruction: letter/sound relationships
<p><i>Principle 2: Responsive Teaching and Differentiation</i></p> <p>The RtI process emphasizes increasingly differentiated and intensified instruction/intervention in language and literacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group and individualized instruction are effective in reducing the number of students who are at risk of becoming classified as learning disabled. • Instruction and materials selection must derive from specific student-teacher interactions. • The boundaries between differentiation and intervention are permeable and not clear-cut. Instruction/ intervention must be flexible enough to respond to evidence from student performance and teaching interactions. 	<p><i>Policies that promote children’s continuous learning progress</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When individual children do not make expected progress in literacy development, resources should be available to provide more individualized instruction, focused time, tutoring by trained and qualified tutors, or other individualized intervention strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • Small group differentiated instruction for at-risk struggling readers; • Student created morning message • Daily journal writing • Alphabet chant • Smart Board to practice phonemic awareness and phonics skills • Highlight each letter that makes the identified sound • Identify sounds/ trace the letter with finger

To assist the language and literacy development of her struggling readers, Ms. Laramie functioned as a role model by explaining the purposes for reading and modeling fluency, expression, and inflection using standard English. She saturated her students with language experiences by conducting read alouds and a variety of oral language activities such as repeated readings, creating word families, morning messages, daily journal writing/reading, singing the alphabet chant, storytelling, and the use of DVDs and auditory tapes. These activities provided the students with rich experiences with literature, vocabulary, and additional practice engaging in high-quality dialogue.

In addition, Ms. Laramie focused much of her Tier 2 instruction on phonemic awareness and phonics -- two skills identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as critical to literacy development in kindergarten. When teaching phonemic awareness, she concentrated on recognizing individual sounds in a word, segmenting words into phonemes, and blending individual phonemes to form words. She provided systematic and explicit phonics instruction by directly teaching letter/sound relationships in a clearly defined sequence of both consonants and vowels. She provided extensive practice reading words both in isolation and in connected text. Ms. Laramie focused much of her phonics instruction on blending sounds and word patterns. For example, she provided extensive small group review, games and activities that entailed changing a letter(s) to make a new word, and experiences that focused on specific sounds and blends. Through these lessons, she provided the students with widespread opportunities to practice their decoding skills.

Summary of Case Study One

Ms. Laramie taught three at risk, struggling readers -- Tara, Mira, and Abby. To address the needs of these students, Ms. Laramie focused her Tier 2 small group interventions on several possible causes of their difficulties in order to support the progress of their literacy development. Ms. Laramie's instruction integrated the modeled, shared, and guided approaches to literacy instruction. The majority of her lessons concentrated on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics skills of her struggling readers. Her reading approaches and pedagogy were influenced by the complexity of the literacy tasks, the students' possession of or lack of prior knowledge, and their challenges processing the reading skills and information. Ms. Laramie's knowledge, training, and competence were essential in the effective implementation of her Tier 2 intervention program.

Ms. Cheyenne's Kindergarten Classroom

The second case study took place in Ms. Cheyenne's kindergarten classroom at Elm Valley Elementary School. The fall 2009 enrollment at Elm Valley Elementary School was 322 students. The gender ratios were 46% females and 54% males. The student ethnicity was identified as 48% African American, 25% White, 8% Hispanic, and 23% Multi-Ethnic. Eighty-three percent of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, 11% were English Language Learners, and 9% were students with identified learning and/or physical disabilities. At the time of the study Ms. Cheyenne's classroom contained twenty-four kindergarteners. For the purposes

of this study, I observed Ms. Cheyenne while she delivered Tier 2 literacy interventions to five students – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara – who had been identified as at-risk struggling readers based on their Kindergarten Outcomes Reading Checklist, DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment scores, and formal and informal teacher observations. Ms. Cheyenne scheduled her Tier 2 literacy interventions from 3:00PM to 3:20PM, five days per week.

The Literacy Environment

Elm Valley Elementary School was comprised of 21 K-6th grade classrooms. Located in the northwest area of the community, it was one of six elementary schools situated in the city. The school building resides just a short distance from the road. Its natural limestone exterior, a substantial glass entranceway, and neatly manicured lawn exhibit a warm and respectful setting. Large letters adorned the front of the building proudly displaying the words “Elm Valley Elementary” across the entire span of the entranceway. The ample visitor parking directly in the front of the school made visitors feel valued and welcomed.

However, after passing through the first set of doors, visitors are greeted with a large red, laminated sign that said, “To gain entrance, please contact the office on the phone behind you.” Located on the wall beside the glass door that the visitor just passed through was a black phone with a sign that read, “Dial extension 4150 for office.” After picking up the receiver and dialing 4150, the locks to the next set of doors loudly clanged open. With respect for being invited to collect data in this building, I wondered if I was entering an elementary school or a site of a prison.

However, after passing through the second set of doors I was warmly welcomed by the extremely friendly and smiling faces of the office staff.

The school was bustling with the passing of classes on their way back and forth from their classrooms. A large festival popcorn machine was located next to the office and the warm, sweet smell of buttered popcorn filled the air. A member of the office staff introduced me to the principal, a truly cheery individual who was very eager to offer a tour of her school. The school building was one level with two long hallways with classrooms located on both sides of the passageway. At the end of one of the hallways was a stunted corridor which ran perpendicular to the passageway. At the end of this corridor was the site of my second case study, Ms. Cheyenne's kindergarten classroom.

The classroom was large and airy. Windows filled the south wall, allowing abundant sunlight to permeate the space. The classroom environment appeared to be divided into different learning zones. The east region of the room accommodated the students' tables. Instead of traditional desks, five students sat comfortably at large round tables. Each student had a brightly colored canvas cover which hung from the back of his/her chair and neatly tucked away personal belongings. Large basket organizers which contained paper, pencils, erasers, glue, and scissors were located in the center of each table.

Along the west periphery of the classroom was a long bookshelf which established the boundary between the student work area and the location of the whole group meeting area. A large Smartboard was positioned in the northwest corner of the space and a large brightly colored rug covered the floor. A huge assortment of picture

books and big books were displayed throughout the area. A large chart tablet revealed the morning message and an adjoining pocket chart held word cards arranged to create a sentence.

Along the north wall was the location of the teacher's desk and work area. This space was filled with instructional supplies, resource books and materials, puzzles, games, and an assortment of manipulatives. Adjacent to the teacher's work area, but separated by filing cabinets, was a small table with child sized chairs, an easel, and a stand-up pocket chart. This was the location of Ms. Cheyenne's Tier 2 literacy interventions.

Ms. Cheyenne's Teaching Philosophy

I interviewed Ms. Cheyenne formally during Phase I and Phase III of the study to gain an understanding about her beliefs pertaining to literacy, reading instruction, and her role teaching literacy within the framework of Response to Intervention. In addition, I sought to gain insights into what instructional materials, models, and practices she utilized to deliver Tier 2 instruction to her at-risk struggling readers. The two formal interviews lasted for approximately thirty to forty-five minutes each and were held after school in her classroom. Additionally, I conducted informal interviews with Ms. Cheyenne after each small group observation. These interviews lasted for only a few minutes but furnished valuable data about her teaching philosophy.

Ms. Cheyenne had twenty-eight years of teaching experience which have been in this same Elm Valley Elementary School with thirteen years in first grade and fifteen years in kindergarten. Her knowledge about the Response to Intervention

approach was acquired through faculty meetings and building inservices. She explained, *We were told how to collect our data to come up with the students who would fit into the different tiers.* When I asked her how RtI has changed how she teaches literacy, Ms. Cheyenne revealed, *I'm not sure anything has changed. It has made us (faculty) more aware of struggling students and the different needs of our students, but I'm not sure that my role as a teacher has changed. But Response to Intervention has made me more aware of where my students are because now I maintain close track of their academic progress.*

Ms. Cheyenne told me the following philosophical views about her role and responsibilities as a classroom teacher within the Response to Intervention model. *I'm not sure how to answer that. I'm not sure anything has changed as far as my role and responsibility as a teacher. However, since our school has begun to put MTSS (Response to Intervention) into practice I am more aware of where my students are academically because now I have to keep track, I have to put it down on paper.* When I asked her if the additional monitoring of student progress had been helpful in addressing the needs of her struggling readers, she stated *it has been helpful knowing that it (Tier 2 interventions) is beneficial. This has helped me to continue taking the extra time to do the interventions, even if I don't have the time. I have seen positive results from spending just a few extra minutes a day or even every other day providing support to my struggling readers.*

Like the classroom teacher in my first case study, the key element of Ms. Cheyenne's Tier 1 core curriculum is 'Reading Roots,' the beginning state of reading curriculum in the Success For All (2007) literacy program. 'Reading Roots' is a

beginning-reading curriculum that focuses on instruction in phonemic awareness and systematic phonics lessons. There is also a component that concentrates on oral language, writing, fluency, and comprehension. Ms. Cheyenne asserted that the Success For All (2007) program was very effective in teaching her kindergarten students to read. However, a few students *just need extra help in addition to what the others are getting*. She explained that formal and informal assessments provided her with the information that she used to structure her Tier 2 interventions. *I don't have difficulty thinking up activities/games to practice skills and who needs what intervention once I analyze my assessment data*. Ms. Cheyenne revealed that she experienced frustration when she doesn't have an additional staff member in her classroom during the implementation of small group interventions. *I know that once I get started, I will have an interruption and sometimes this frustration makes me want to say 'forget it' but I stay committed to it (providing Tier 2 interventions) because my assessment data tells me that the extra interventions are effective*.

I asked Ms. Cheyenne how this program balanced whole group instruction with differentiated instruction within her classroom to meet the needs of her five students— Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara --- who were identified as qualifying for Tier 2 instruction. She concluded that meeting the needs of these Tier 2 students occurred *in a lot of different ways*. *The biggest asset has been having an extra person in the room*. She pointed out that she has a foster grandmother who comes into the classroom everyday to assist where needed. Ms. Cheyenne explained that she sometimes asks the volunteer to listen to the students read. However, most of her Tier 2 instruction is at the end of the day during 'learning labs.' *I have a*

paraeducator in my room this year because I have two students with IEPs (special education students with Individual Education Plans). It works well to have her supervise them while I pull individual students or small groups of students aside for interventions. Ms. Cheyenne continued to describe how she designates herself as a learning lab activity. *If I make myself part of the learning labs, they (her struggling readers) get to come to me just like going to a location within 'learning labs.'* They come to me and play a game and then they go on to their next choice of a learning lab activity. Ms. Cheyenne explained that she doesn't serve all five of her identified Tier 2 students together every day. She revealed that *I try not to make them feel like they are being singled out so I take one or a couple and they work with me for a little while and then I take someone else.*

Ms. Cheyenne considers Tier 2 interventions a method to increase the support for students demonstrating difficulty in their early literacy development. She perceives the best method to deliver this extra support is during whole group learning labs. Ms. Cheyenne regards the support of an extra staff member as vital to her ability to provide Tier 2 support to her at-risk struggling kindergarten students – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara. She trusts that Response to Intervention has helped to bring about a greater awareness of the importance of providing extra support to struggling students early in their kindergarten education.

Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Since Ms. Cheyenne teaches in the same school district as Ms Laramie -- the teacher in my first case study -- she also used research-based curricula and materials for reading instruction. Her instructional materials and resources also

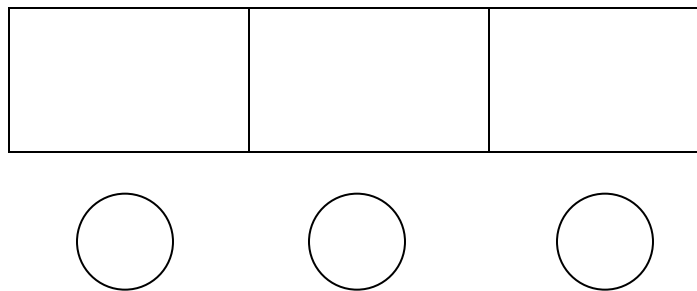
appeared as if they focused on the five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000), with the primary concentration in kindergarten on phonemic awareness and phonics.

While much of Ms. Cheyenne’s whole group instruction focused on all five areas of reading instruction, the majority of her small group, Tier 2 instruction, concentrated on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics competence of her at-risk struggling readers. Many small group lessons centered on both phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

During one unique observation, Bryson, Sara, and Jamal played a game called “Break it Down.” To play this game, each student had Elkonin Boxes (Clay, 1985) and small markers.

Figure 4.1 and 4.2 reveal the process of this phonemic awareness game.

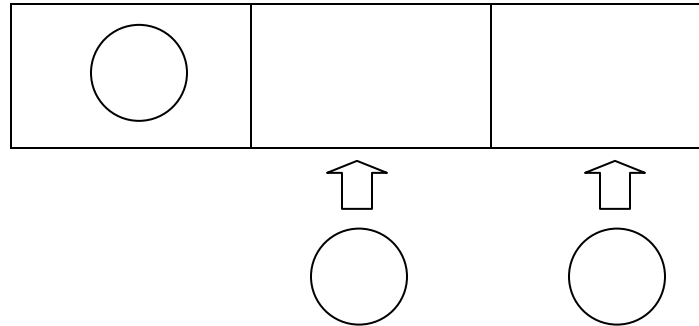
Figure 4.1: Elkonin Boxes for Phonemic Awareness



Ms. Cheyenne modeled this activity by first saying *cat*. She verbally segmented and blended the word, *c / a / t...cat*. Next, she verbalized what she was thinking *I hear three sounds in the word cat...c/a/t...cat*. Then, she said the word again and slowly

moved a marker into each box as she pronounced the individual sound *c / a / t...c/a/t*. Finally, she touched under each box as she said each sound *c / a / t...* then she ran her finger across the bottom of the letters as she repeated *cat*.

Figure 4.2: Elkonin Boxes Phonemic Awareness Process



The students repeated this practice with a few more words. After the students were familiar with this activity, Ms. Cheyenne placed some letter tiles on the middle of the table. She instructed the students to replace the markers with the letter tile that made that sound. From the example above, students would replace the three markers with three letter tiles: c, a, t.

During the small group observations in Ms. Cheyenne’s classroom, I observed the following Tier 2 instructional approaches and teaching pedagogies. Table 4.3 lists the approach/pedagogy categories, a brief description of each category, and the number of lessons I observed during my classroom visits. Following the table is a detailed portrait of several of these types of instructional approaches/pedagogies.

Table 4.3: Ms. Cheyenne’s Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Approach/Pedagogy	Description	# of lessons observed out of 12 observations
Small Group Instruction	The classroom teacher worked with a group of three students	12
Modeled Approach	The teacher demonstrated the skill	12
Shared Approach	The teacher and students performed the skill together	12
Guided Approach	The teacher observed and supported students as they performed the skill	9
Phoneme manipulation	<p>Teaches students to notice, think about, and work with sounds that make up words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>isolation</i> – recognize individual sounds in a word ○ <i>identity</i> – recognize the same sound in different words ○ <i>categorization</i> – recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has a different sound ○ <i>blending</i> – combine separate phonemes to form a word ○ <i>segmentation</i> – break a word in its separate sounds ○ <i>deletion</i> – recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word ○ <i>addition</i> – make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word ○ <i>substitution</i> – substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word. 	<p>12</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p> <p>12</p> <p>12</p> <p>8</p> <p>8</p> <p>8</p>
Phonics instruction	<p>Teaches students the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>synthetic</i> - students convert letters to sounds and then blend those sounds to form words ○ <i>analytic</i> – students analyze letter/sound relationships in previously learned words 	<p>12</p> <p>0</p>

	○ <i>analogy-based</i> – students use word families to identify new words with similar patterns	10
	○ <i>invented spelling</i> – students segment words into phonemes and form words by writing the letters for each phoneme	3
	○ <i>embedded</i> – students learn letter/sound relationships during the reading of text	0
	○ <i>onset-rime</i> – students learn to identify the sound before the first vowel (the onset) and the sound of the remaining part (the rime)	8

During **small group instruction** Ms. Cheyenne worked with a group of two or three students. Typically, she would work with a small group for a period of ten to fifteen minutes and then meet with another small group for the same amount of time. Her five at-risk struggling readers – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara – were the students who received services through small group instruction. However, not every at-risk student received Tier 2 interventions every day. Ms. Cheyenne explained that *it is important at this age that they don't feel as though they are being singled out.*

A **modeled approach** means that Ms. Cheyenne demonstrated the reading skill/activity that she wanted the students to perform. She utilized this approach to provide the greatest amount of support when she introduced students to a new skill/activity or one in which they had pronounced difficulty carrying out. For example, during one observation Ms. Cheyenne placed letter magnets on the file cabinet. She placed the vowels in a horizontal row: a, e, i, o, u. Next, to the tune of “Old McDonald Has a Farm” she sang, *Ms. Cheyenne had a book, and in her book she had an “a,” with an /a/a/a/ here and an /a/a/a/ there, here an /a/, there an /a/, everywhere an /a/, /a/...*

Next, utilizing the **shared approach**, Bryson selected a different vowel by sliding in down from the top of the filing cabinet. Ms. Cheyenne asked him to identify the letter and sound that he had selected. He had difficulty remembering the sound for the letter “e.” Ms. Cheyenne assisted him and together they sang the tune using the letter “e.” They continued singing this melody using each of the remainder of the vowels. Then, applying the guided approach, Ms. Cheyenne observed and supported Bryson as he placed the vowels in a vertical row and practiced blending the vowels with different consonants.

The **guided approach** indicates that the teacher observed and supported the students as they performed the skill. Ms. Cheyenne used the guided approach to provide instruction and assistance as the students were carrying out the task. For example, during one observation Ms. Cheyenne provided Kendra and Sara with a standup pocket chart and letter cards. She showed them a picture of our sun and pronounced the word. Kendra and Sara repeated the word in unison. Ms. Cheyenne replied, *Now, break it down the ‘slow way.’* The students said it again, slowly /s/ u/ /n/. Ms. Cheyenne observed as each student used word cards to form the word in their pocket chart and then compared their word with their partner’s word.

Phoneme manipulation teaches students to notice, think about, and work with sounds that make up words. The greater part of Ms. Cheyenne’s Tier 2 intervention lessons focused on three types of phoneme manipulation – isolation, blending, and segmentation. For example, during one observation Taylor was using a “whisper phone” – a hollow phone receiver. Ms. Cheyenne said the word “hat.” Taylor segmented the sounds /h/ /a/ /t/ by speaking into the whisper phone and then used the

letter cards to create the word. Ms. Cheyenne explained that she liked to use the whisper phone with Taylor because it seemed to help her to hear the individual sounds that make up words.

Her lessons also incorporated **phonics** instruction, the relationships between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language. During each of the twelve observations, I observed a variety of lessons which included both phoneme manipulation and phonics instruction. During one observation she provided Jamal with Elkonin Boxes that included the words beginning, middle, and end at the top of each of the three boxes. Ms. Cheyenne enunciated various three syllable words. Jamal segmented each of the words and located the letter cards that represented the sounds that he heard. Next, he placed the letter cards in the box which designated the position of that letter's sound: beginning, middle, or ending sound.

While Ms. Cheyenne incorporated elements of the five areas of reading instruction – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension – the majority of her small group Tier 2 instruction centered on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics abilities of her at-risk struggling readers. Her education, training, and twenty-eight years of experience as a primary level teacher appeared to shape her conviction that phonemic awareness and phonics skills are critical to early literacy development.

Students' Perceptions of Tier 2 Literacy Instruction

Guided conversations were held with the five students – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara – who participated in at-risk, struggling reader, small group

instruction. The interview was held in the hallway since I was meeting with all five of the students at the same time. Ms. Cheyenne assisted me with the interview with the rationale that the five students were hesitant to communicate without her presence. Two reoccurring and noteworthy thoughts emerged through careful analysis of the transcripts of the interview. The students:

- took pleasure in reading activities; and
- enjoyed the lessons that they viewed as games.

Although the students were uncertain as to how to answer my questions, it was clear that they perceived the Tier 2 interventions as enjoyable games instead of learning activities. When asked what they liked most about reading in small groups, they shared these responses:

Bryson: *I like playing games.*

Teacher: *Do you mean word games?*

Bryson: *Yea, games making words.*

Jamal: *I like making words from letters.*

The students gave the impression that they had positive opinions about reading. When asked what they liked most about learning to read, the students shared these responses:

Taylor: *I like to read books now that I can read.*

Bryson: *I like reading about doctors.*

Jamal: *I like reading about cops.*

Sara: *I like reading my journal.*

Kendra: *At home.*

Sara: *At grandma's...my brother...at home.*

Although the students were not eager to share extensive information about their views about learning to read, they seemed content and motivated to learn when they participated in small group instruction. Ms. Cheyenne reported, *They like anything that is a game or a race – if they think that there is competition going on, they are very motivated to perfect the skill.*

Ms. Cheyenne shared with me that three of the five students -- Bryson, Kendra, and Sara - who she included in her Tier 2 intervention group had earlier been identified with a learning disability. Although these students receive special education services, she believed that she could best assist all of her at-risk struggling readers by providing intervention services to all five students during learning centers. Therefore, she employed the assistance of the paraeducator to supervise the whole group and focus on supporting the needs of the three identified students when they were not participating in Tier 2 small group instruction.

Response to Intervention Connections

Following the analytical process of my first case study, I aligned Ms. Cheyenne's classroom literacy lessons to the International Reading Association's *Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators* (IRA, 2010) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International

Reading Association’s (1998) joint position statement highlighting research-based teaching practices that are appropriate and effective for young children. Table 4.4 focuses on aligning the principles of Response to Intervention and developmentally appropriate literacy practices for emergent readers with the observed Tier 2 lessons conducted by Ms. Cheyenne with her five at-risk struggling readers.

Table 4.4: Ms. Cheyenne’s Tier 2 Literacy Instruction Aligned with the IRA’s Guiding Principles of Response to Intervention and NAEYC’s Literacy Practices

International Reading Association’s <i>Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators</i> (2010)	The National Association for the Education of Young Children and IRA, <i>Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children</i> (1998)	Ms. Cheyenne’s Classroom Literacy Lessons
<p><i>Principle 1: Instruction</i></p> <p>RTI is first and foremost intended to prevent language and literacy problems by optimizing instruction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction should prevent serious language and literacy problems through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment and instruction. • A successful RTI process begins with the highest quality classroom core instruction and must be provided by an informed, competent classroom teacher. • The success of RTI depends on the classroom teacher's use of research-based practices. 	<p><i>Instruction will need to be adapted to account for children’s differences.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimating where each child is developmentally and building on that base, a key feature of all good teaching, is particularly important for the kindergarten teacher. • For other children with limited prior experiences with print, initiating them to the alphabetic principle, that a limited set of letters comprises the alphabet and that these letters stand for the sounds that make up spoken words, will require direct instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment • small group differentiated instruction for at-risk struggling readers • Teacher modeling • Shared approach • Guided practice • Oral language • Phoneme manipulation: segmenting, blending, phoneme isolation • Phonics instruction: letter/sound relationships

<p><i>Principle 2: Responsive Teaching and Differentiation</i></p> <p>The RtI process emphasizes increasingly differentiated and intensified instruction/ intervention in language and literacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group and individualized instruction are effective in reducing the number of students who are at risk of becoming classified as learning disabled. • Instruction and materials selection must derive from specific student-teacher interactions. • The boundaries between differentiation and intervention are permeable and not clear-cut. Instruction/ intervention must be flexible enough to respond to evidence from student performance. 	<p><i>Policies that promote children’s continuous learning progress</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When individual children do not make expected progress in literacy development, resources should be available to provide more individualized instruction, focused time, tutoring by trained and qualified tutors, or other individualized intervention strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • Small group differentiated instruction for at-risk struggling readers; • Daily journal writing • Smart Board to practice phonemic awareness and phonics skills • Create “real” words and “nonsense” words
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At-risk struggling readers like Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara learn from different approaches to instruction. Therefore, Ms. Cheyenne provided both Tier 1 whole group instruction and Tier 2 small group interventions to further support their literacy development as recommended by both the IRA (2010) and the NAEYC (1998). She focused the majority of her Tier 2 interventions on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics abilities – two skills identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as critical to early literacy development. Ms. Cheyenne inundated them with learning activities such as word games that made use of visual and tactile objects to further stimulate cognitive processing and motivation.

In addition, Ms. Cheyenne recognized that her at-risk struggling readers -- Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara -- achieved greater improvements in their skills when they deemed small group instruction an additional center during learning

labs. *My struggling readers can and will continue to make progress in their reading abilities as long as I can keep it fun and engaging.*

Summary of Case Study Two

Ms. Cheyenne had five kindergarten students – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara – who were identified as at-risk struggling readers. To attend to the needs of these students, she focused her Tier 2 interventions on improving two of the five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness and phonics. Ms. Cheyenne’s instruction included the modeled, shared, and guided approaches to literacy instruction. Her education, training, and twenty-eight years as a primary classroom teacher had unquestionably influenced her confidence in her ability to assist kindergarten struggling readers with additional interventions. By infusing Response to Intervention into her reading program, Ms. Cheyenne was certain that she could improve these students’ early literacy development.

Ms. Douglas’ Kindergarten Classroom

The third case study took place in Ms. Douglas’ kindergarten classroom. This case study, like the second case study, occurred at Elm Valley Elementary. The fall 2009 enrollment at Elm Valley Elementary School was 322 students. The student ethnicity was identified as 48% African American, 25% White, 8% Hispanic, and 23% Multi-Ethnic. The gender ratios were 54% males and 46% females. Eighty-three percent of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, 11%

were English Language Learners, and 9% were students with identified learning and/or physical disabilities. At the time of the study Ms. Douglas' classroom contained 21 kindergarteners. During the study, I observed Ms. Douglas while she delivered Tier 2 literacy interventions to four students – John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena – who had been identified as at-risk struggling readers based on their Kindergarten Outcomes Reading Checklist, DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment scores, and formal and informal teacher observations. Different from the classroom teachers in the first two case studies, Ms. Douglas carried out her Tier 2 literacy interventions five days per week, during whole group activities.

The Literacy Environment

The site of my third case study, Ms. Douglas's kindergarten classroom, was next door to Ms. Cheyenne's kindergarten classroom. This classroom was not as large as the other two classrooms in this study; however, the smaller size suggested a comfortable, informal environment. At the front of the classroom was a large whiteboard which, upon close inspection, revealed many traces from various colored markers that frequently filled this space with letters, words, sentences, and numbers. The students sat at four large round student tables located adjacent to the whiteboard. Brightly colored baskets – hot pink, deep purple, bright lime-green, and vivid blue -- which contained writing supplies were located at the center of each table.

A large row of windows accompanied by a two-foot high bookshelf extended along the entire length of the south wall. Teacher resource materials and various manipulatives for content area learning were neatly arranged on the shelves. Sunlight

streaming through the windows was bejeweled by the rich, vibrant colors of the café curtains that adorned the glass. The teacher's desk, positioned sideways to fill a small area in the southeast corner of the room, proudly displayed family pictures and keepsakes.

Located at the back of the room along the west wall was a large Smartboard with a laptop computer securely attached ready for frequent daily use. A brightly colored rug, large enough for whole group meetings, covered the floor space in front of the Smartboard. Adjoining the whole group meeting area was a child sized table and chairs which offered students a private location for reading/writing activities free from distractions. A large rack along the north wall provided students with a place to neatly hold their coats, backpacks, and personal items.

On my first visit to this classroom students were abuzz conferencing with the teacher and sharing their latest journal entry with each other. Ms. Douglas, sitting in a chair and reading a journal with the student author standing next to her, briefly looked up to welcome me into their classroom.

Ms. Douglas' Teaching Philosophy

I interviewed Ms. Douglas during all three phases of this study. I interviewed her formally during Phase I of the study to obtain information about her teaching experience in addition to her perceptions about literacy, reading instruction, and Response to Intervention. During Phase II, I spoke with her informally for brief periods of time to gain insights and understanding about materials, interventions, groupings, and/or individual students. I then conducted another formal interview with

Ms. Douglas during Phase III of this study in order to collect data regarding her perceptions about her implementation of Tier 2 intervention strategies and if Response to Intervention has been helpful in addressing the needs of her struggling readers. The two formal interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes each and were conducted during her planning time. The informal interviews occurred arbitrarily and extended only a few minutes before or after an observation. I interpreted Ms. Douglas' teaching philosophy from these interviews.

This was Ms. Douglas' first year as a classroom teacher. She retired from her previous civil service position of 18 years and decided to follow her long-time passion to teach. Therefore, she enrolled at the local university and recently obtained a B.S. degree in Elementary Education with an emphasis in English Language Learners. After completing her teaching degree, she accepted a position as reading aid for half of a school year in a neighboring school district. She obtained her position as a kindergarten teacher in this district the following school year. Ms. Douglas was knowledgeable about the multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention. She easily explained the purpose of the tiers and gave a very descriptive portrait of the model and how her school was implementing it. She described her training emerging from faculty and Student Improvement Team meetings. *We are required to show what interventions we have already tried and have been unsuccessful with before the SIT (Student Improvement Team) process begins.* When I asked her specifically what training she has received in preparation for teaching literacy within the framework of the Response to intervention approach, she responded, *Well, that is pretty limited...more on the lines of peer discussion and collaboration.*

Ms. Douglas shared with me the following philosophical thoughts about her role and responsibility of teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention model. *My responsibility is to meet the needs of all of my students. I truly believe that all students can learn and it's my responsibility to find the best way to teach them; to find the best way for them to learn.* She explained that individualized and differentiation instruction takes place in her classroom every day.

Like the other two kindergarten teachers in this study, Ms. Douglas also utilized the Success For All (2007) literacy program for whole group literacy instruction. Specifically, the kindergarten beginning-reading curriculum is called 'Reading Roots.' It is designed to integrate systematic phonics instruction which is supported by decodable short stories, and also incorporates selected instruction in vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Ms. Douglas revealed that although most of her students do well in whole group instruction, some students needed a small group setting. *It builds the students' confidence because in a smaller group setting they don't feel as threatened by their peers. They feel as though they don't always need to have the correct answer. Therefore, in small group I am able to get them to participate so that I know where they are academically.* Ms. Douglas explained that for a few of her students close proximity worked well during their writing time. *Some of my students need to know that I am next to them and I care. It makes a difference if I am able to sit close to them so that intervention works well.*

In regard to her own expectations for student achievement, utilizing the Response to Intervention approach, Ms. Douglas stated, *it is difficult because I don't have a paraeducator or a teacher's aide in my classroom.* When asked if there was

anything that she would like to add that I didn't ask, she revealed, *In kindergarten I always hesitate because my goal for my kids is to look at them developmentally and socially. To say that a kindergarten student isn't getting it now and to keep pushing and pushing them – I don't always think that it is the right thing. I don't think they always need Response to Intervention.* Ms. Douglas explained that she believes that sometimes teachers should focus on nurturing a student developmentally and socially. *So, when I look at doing RtI with a student, I try to decide if they are ready for it developmentally and socially.*

Ms. Douglas viewed her students' literacy progress as part of their comprehensive development. She perceived small group interventions as a means to provide her struggling students with differentiated instruction and the opportunity to gain confidence in a small group environment. Ms. Douglas believes that Response to Intervention should include an evaluation as to whether the student is developmentally and socially ready to perform the task.

Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Since Ms. Douglas teaches in the same school district as the classroom teachers in case study one and case study two, she also used research-based curricula and materials for Tier 1 core reading instruction. These materials focus on the five areas of reading instruction as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The emphasis of this school district's kindergarten literacy program is primarily on phonemic awareness and phonics.

Ms. Douglas' small group Tier 2 literacy interventions exhibited her confidence that literacy development is a process that can best be supported by working attentively with the individual student to further advance their all-inclusive development. For the most part, in the course of my observations, Tier 2 small group interventions were conducted during whole group journal writing. Ms. Douglas explained that she wrote each student's daily individual goals in his/her journal. For example, she frequently instructed at-risk struggling students to focus on proper use of capital/lowercase letters, letter formation, punctuation, and/or invented spelling. During journal writing, the whole class was instructed to write on a particular topic. The at-risk struggling students were grouped together at the same table and worked on their individual goals within the context of the whole group assignment. While the students were working on their assignment, Ms. Douglas rolled her wheeled teacher's chair around the table conferencing and supporting each individual student.

Ms. Douglas asserted that *each goal is fluid and usually changes daily based on their journal entry from the previous day and informal observations*. She moved among all of the student tables but focused the majority of her time at the table with the at-risk struggling readers. Ms. Douglas encouraged students to assist each other when they have different goals. For example, during one observation John's goal was to 'tap out sounds' while Abe's goal was to 'improve letter spacing.' Both students worked independently on their journal entry while supporting each other's achievement of individual goals.

John: *How do you spell Wal-Mart?*

Abe: (with his left arm extended out and tapping the sounds with his right hand) */www/ /lll/ /mmm/ /rrr/ /t/, Wal-Mart.*

John returned back to his writing. Abe watched him for a brief period of time and then went back to his own writing.

During another observation, the whole group was completing an art project to accompany the story that they had been reading in the course of their Tier 1 core curriculum instruction. Ms. Douglas instructed the whole group and then turned her attention to her small group of at-risk readers. She explained, *Today I will be helping students who have difficulty with oral language expression and shapes.* Ms. Douglas asked questions about their art projects, encouraged discussion among peers, modeled oral language expression, directed students to use complete sentences, and supported students as they present oral narratives of their project. *Tell me about your picture. How did you decide what shapes to use? What would happen if...? Please explain why....*

During the 12 observations in Ms. Douglas' classroom, I observed and designated several Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches and Teaching Pedagogies. Table 4.5 lists the approaches/pedagogy, shares a brief description of each, and lists the number of lessons in which the approach/pedagogy was observed during Tier 2 instruction. The information in Table 4.5 seeks to provide a detailed description of several of these approaches/pedagogies.

Table 4.5: Ms. Douglas’ Tier 2 Literacy Instructional Approaches/ Pedagogy

Approach/Pedagogy	Description	# of lessons observed out of 12 observations
Small Group Instruction	The classroom teacher worked with a group of three to five students	0
Modeled Approach	The teacher demonstrated the skill	0
Shared Approach	The teacher and students performed the skill together	10
Guided Approach	The teacher observed and supported students as they performed the skill	12
Phoneme manipulation	Teaches students to notice, think about, and work with sounds that make up words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>isolation</i> – recognize individual sounds in a word ○ <i>blending</i> – combine separate phonemes to form a word ○ <i>segmentation</i> – break a word in its separate sounds 	9 9 9
Phonics instruction	Teaches students the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>synthetic</i> - students convert letters to sounds and then blend those sounds to form words ○ <i>invented spelling</i> – students segment words into phonemes and form words by writing the letters for each phoneme 	9 9

During **small group instruction** the classroom teacher worked with a group of four students. These students – John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena –were the same students who received Tier 2 interventions during my twelve observations. This instruction took place for approximately thirty to forty-five minutes, three to five days per week.

Although the focus of Ms. Douglas' instruction varied, the greater part of her Tier 2 small group instruction occurred during journal writing.

The **shared approach** means that Ms. Douglas and the student(s) performed the skill together. For example, during one observation Ms. Douglas and the students were focusing on creating stories with extensive details. Ms. Douglas verbally read each student's story as the student listened for errors in his/her writing, word choice, and quality of details. During one observation, Chelsi was writing about her trip to a salon to get her hair cut. Ms. Douglas orally read her story while Chelsi listened for errors. Next, Ms. Douglas asked Chelsi questions about her trip to the salon. *Did your sister go with you? What did your hair look like before the hair stylist gave you a new hair style? Did you like your new hair style? Why or why not?* Chelsi discussed the answers to these questions by adding additional details in her writing.

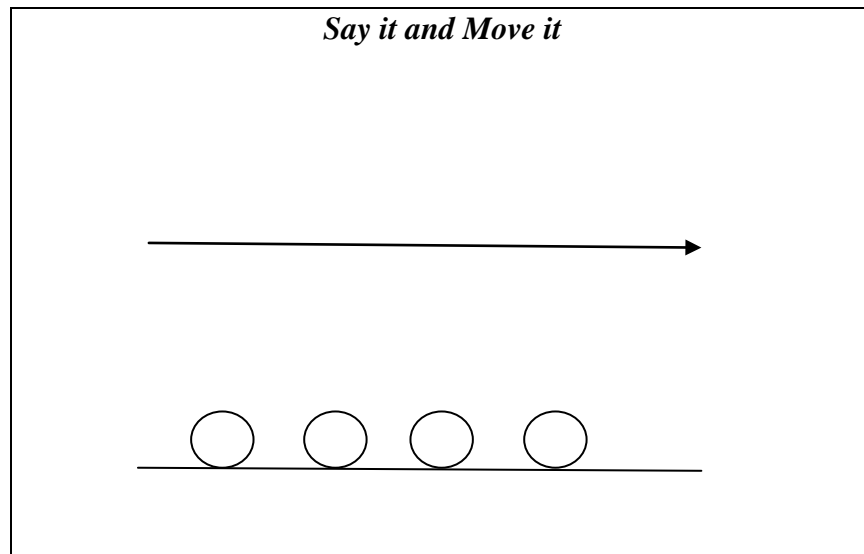
While using the **guided approach**, Ms. Douglas observed and supported John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena as they completed the skill. During one observation, Ms. Douglas had created Elkonin Boxes on the floor with masking tape. She gave each student a letter sound. Next, Ms. Douglas produced a three-syllable word. The students were challenged to determine if their sound was a beginning, middle, or ending sound and then stood in the correct box. After the three students had agreed on the location of their individual sound, they articulated their sound and then blended their sounds together to form the word.

During one observation Ms. Douglas whispered the word *pan*. Xena, Abe, and John quickly searched out their positions within the Elkonin Boxes. They shared their individual sound with each other. After they had agreed that they were correctly

positioned within the boxes, they verbalized their sound while stepping out their box /p/ / a/ /n/. They then blended the sounds together to form *pan*.

Phoneme manipulation teaches students to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds that make up words. When Ms. Douglas taught phoneme manipulation she focused on three types: isolation, blending, and segmentation. For example, during one observation the four students played a game called ‘Say it and Move it.’ Each student had a laminated game card and small markers. Students positioned the markers on the bottom line of the card. A representation of the game card is shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Say it and Move it Card



Ms. Douglas revealed a word and the students moved a marker for each sound they heard to the line above. For example, Ms. Douglas said, *Give yourself a marker for every sound that you hear in the word ‘black.’* The students said /b/ /lll/ /aaa/ /k/

as they each moved four markers to the line above. They then blended the word *black* as they swept their finger quickly along the line.

During **phonics instruction** the teacher instructs in applying letter/sound relationships to read and write words. Ms. Douglas frequently utilized journal writing to teach invented spelling. Often during my observations, for example, Ms. Douglas assisted students as they engaged in writing to themselves and to their classmates. They shared news, discussed their learning in content area subjects, and explored topics of special interest. In the course of writing, students segmented sounds in words and applied their knowledge of letter/sound relationships to spell unfamiliar words.

Students' Perceptions of Tier 2 Literacy Instruction

During the course of my twelve observations there were four students who participated in Ms. Douglas' Tier 2 instruction -- John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena. I conducted guided conversations with these students to determine their perceptions regarding small group literacy instruction. The interview was held in the whole group meeting area at the back of the room. We sat on the floor in a circle with the audio recorder in the middle of our small group. Several thoughts emerged through careful analysis of the transcripts of the students' verbal perceptions regarding small group instruction. The students:

- perceived reading as an enjoyable experience;
- appreciated their skills as readers; and

- discovered satisfaction when engaged in reading activities with family and friends.

The students indicated that they perceived reading as an enjoyable experience and gave numerous examples. When asked to tell me about learning to read and what they liked most about reading, they shared these responses:

John: *It helps you with your words. It helps you to read to people you know.*

Abe: *I like to practice reading.*

Chelsi: *I like to tap (sound) out words.*

John: *I like to tap out words that I don't know.*

Xena: *Ms. Douglas is helping me...teaching me how to read.*

The students were able to explain their appreciation for their skills as readers and the satisfaction they received from engaging in reading activities with family and friends. They individually revealed:

John: *I like to read to the whole class.*

Abe: *In the author's chair.*

Xena: *Me too. I like to read my journal to the class.*

John: *I like to read on weekends...on Sundays.*

Chelsi: *I can read to my family at home.*

Ms. Douglas pointed out that these students need small group instruction to build their confidence as readers. She explained that in small groups, students feel free to take risks because they do not feel threatened by the responses of their peers.

Ms. Douglas revealed to me that small group instruction also provided her with assessment data so that she was able to informally evaluate the skills of her at-risk struggling students. With the challenge of a kindergarten teacher, Ms. Douglas shared, *Assessment is difficult because there is no historical data except for what we do when they come in.*

Response to Intervention Connections

For the purposes of this study, I have focused on two of the six principles identified in the IRA's *Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators* (IRA, 2010). These two principles are Guiding Principle 1: Instruction and Guiding Principle 2: Responsive Teaching and Differentiation were utilized for observational data analysis since these two principles best align with Tier 2 literacy instruction. In addition, I have aligned the NAEYC and the IRA's joint position statement *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (1998). These two statements were utilized for observational data analysis. Table 4.6 focuses on aligning the two principles of Response to Intervention, developmentally appropriate practices for young children, and the observed Tier 2 literacy practices conducted by Ms. Douglas.

Table 4.6: Ms. Douglas’ Tier 2 Literacy Instruction Aligned with the IRA’s Guiding Principles of Response to Intervention and NAEYC’s Literacy Practices

<p>International Reading Association’s <i>Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators (2010)</i></p>	<p>The National Association for the Education of Young Children and IRA, <i>Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children (1998)</i></p>	<p>Ms. Douglas’ Classroom Literacy Lessons</p>
<p><i>Principle 1: Instruction</i></p> <p>RtI is first and foremost intended to prevent language and literacy problems by optimizing instruction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction should prevent serious language and literacy problems through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment and instruction. • A successful RTI process begins with the highest quality classroom core instruction and must be provided by an informed, competent classroom teacher. • The success of RTI depends on the classroom teacher's use of research-based practices. 	<p><i>Instruction will need to be adapted to account for children’s differences.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimating where each child is developmentally and building on that base, a key feature of all good teaching, is particularly important for the kindergarten teacher. • For other children with limited prior experiences with print, initiating them to the alphabetic principle, that a limited set of letters comprises the alphabet and that these letters stand for the sounds that make up spoken words, will require direct instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • DIBELS Kindergarten Benchmark Assessment • Shared approach • Guided practice • Sight words • Oral language • Phoneme manipulation: segmenting, blending, phoneme isolation • Phonics instruction: letter/sound relationships
<p><i>Principle 2: Responsive Teaching and Differentiation</i></p> <p>The RtI process emphasizes increasingly differentiated and intensified instruction/ intervention in language and literacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group and individualized instruction are effective in reducing the number of students who are at risk of becoming classified as learning disabled. • Instruction and materials selection must derive from specific student-teacher interactions. • The boundaries between differentiation and intervention are permeable and not clear-cut. Instruction/ intervention must be flexible enough to respond to evidence from student performance and teaching interactions. 	<p><i>Policies that promote children’s continuous learning progress</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When individual children do not make expected progress in literacy development, resources should be available to provide more individualized instruction, focused time, tutoring by trained and qualified tutors, or other individualized intervention strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group instruction of core curriculum • Daily journal writing

To support the literacy development of her at-risk struggling readers, Ms. Douglas focused on the comprehensive development of each child. Her intention was to improve the language and literacy development of her struggling readers by selecting individual literacy lessons which were appropriate for the developmental level of that student. To achieve this goal, Ms. Douglas conducted the majority of her Tier 2 literacy interventions during whole group journal writing activities.

This instructional time of the day, journal writing, allowed Ms. Douglas additional time for her to focus her Tier 2 interventions on improving phonemic awareness and phonics proficiency – two skills identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as critical to literacy development in kindergarten. She provided extensive practice in segmenting and blending, and in letter/sound relationships within the context of journal writing activities.

Summary of Case Study Three

Ms. Douglas taught four students – John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena – who have been identified for Tier 2 literacy interventions. When developing interventions to support the literacy development of her at-risk struggling readers, Ms. Douglas also took into account their social and developmental level. Her instruction integrated the shared and guided approaches to literacy instruction and focused on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics skills of her struggling readers. Ms. Douglas' Tier 2

instructional approaches and pedagogy were influenced by her evaluation of the individual student's academic, social, and developmental requirements.

Similarities/Differences within the Three Case Studies

A qualitative, exploratory, collective case study was conducted to investigate how three kindergarten classroom teachers delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction to kindergarten struggling readers within the Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The purpose of the final section of this chapter is to compare and contrast the literacy learning environments, the Tier 2 teaching philosophies, and the approaches/pedagogies of RtI reading instruction of each of the three teachers. The similarities and differences within the three case study teachers are showcased through these three literacy perspectives. Table 4.7 provides a depiction of the similarities and differences between the three case studies. Following the table is a detailed portrait of this information.

Table 4.7: Similarities/Differences within the Three Case Studies

Approach/Pedagogy	Ms. Laramie Case Study One # of lessons out of 12	Ms. Cheyenne Case Study Two # of lessons out of 12	Ms. Douglas Case Study Three # of lessons out of 12
Small Group Instruction	12	12	0
Modeled Approach	10	12	0
Guided Approach	9	9	12
Phoneme Manipulation			
Isolation	12	12	9
Identity	9	0	0
Categorization	9	0	0
Blending	12	12	9
Segmentation	12	12	9
Deletion	9	8	0
Addition	9	8	0
Substitution	9	8	0
Phonics Instruction			
Synthetic	12	12	9
Analytic	4	0	0
Analogy-based	7	10	0
Invented spelling	3	3	9
Embedded	3	0	0
Onset-rime	7	8	0

The Tier 2 Literacy Instruction Environments

Literacy learning is often facilitated by the context of the instructional environment in which it takes place. The data collected during this study of three classrooms revealed that all three kindergarten teachers provided similar environments for whole group, Tier 1 instruction. However, the three classroom teachers provided their Tier 2 intervention instruction in dissimilar settings.

Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) afforded her identified at-risk struggling readers with Tier 2 instruction in a small group setting. They met three times a week, from 10:00AM to 10:15AM, immediately outside the classroom at a large rectangular oak table in the hallway. Ms. Laramie had the assistance of a teacher's aide who read the whole group a story during snack time so that she could carry out her Tier 2 interventions without interruptions. She stated I am very lucky to work in a school where there is a focus on early struggling readers and I receive building support that allows me to work with students. She argued that support staff are essential in kindergarten during Tier 2 instruction because it is too difficult for kindergarten students to be independent enough to allow the classroom teacher to provide effective small group instruction.

Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) provided her struggling readers Tier 2 instruction three to five times a week from 3:00PM to 3:20PM in a corner of the classroom, while the whole group was taking part in learning centers. During that time when she had a paraeducator in her classroom, she revealed, It works well to have her supervise them (whole group) while I pull individual students or small groups of students aside for interventions. Ms. Cheyenne explains that she utilizes the corner of the classroom for Tier 2 instruction because it is fairly private, yet still allowed her to know what was going on with the whole group. She admitted sometimes I will have interruptions and this frustration makes me want to quit. However, she explained that she remains committed to providing her at-risk struggling readers with interventions because she knows that they are beneficial.

When I asked Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) to give me details about how she provides Tier 2 small group interventions to her identified struggling readers, she said *it is difficult because I don't have a paraeducator or a teacher's aide in my classroom.* In general, during my observations, Ms. Douglas provided literacy interventions during whole group journal writing. By grouping her identified Tier 2

students at the same table, she assisted each with his/her individual goals within the context of the whole group writing assignment. In addition, she circulated around the table conferencing and supporting each at-risk struggling reader.

Ms. Laramie, Ms. Cheyenne, and Ms. Douglas all provided Tier 2 literacy interventions to their kindergarten at-risk struggling readers. However, various times of the day, contrasting settings, and different amounts of assistance from support staff documented the contrasted differences between the learning environments for the three case studies.

Tier 2 Teaching Philosophies

Teachers' perceptions regarding their roles and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach within the classroom varied. Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) told me that RtI provided her with the means to meet the needs of all of her students through differentiated instruction. She explained that for the majority of her students, whole group instruction provided all the elements needed for successful early literacy development. However, she argued that for a few of her students, small group instruction afforded them the extra practice to become skilled at those necessary early literacy skills. In one interview Ms. Laramie revealed, *When I think of RtI, I think, I hope to meet the needs of every learner – A differentiated approach where I can meet all of those different needs within my class.* Through careful analysis of the data collected during formal and informal interviews and during observations, it is apparent that Ms. Laramie perceived Response to Intervention as a framework in which to meet the need of all of her

students through differentiated instruction. Ms. Laramie viewed Tier 2 instruction as a necessary component of her literacy instruction – equivalent to her Tier 1 core curriculum instruction.

Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) explained that she viewed Response to Intervention as an approach in which to evaluate the academic needs of her students. During one interview she stated that although she does not believe that her role teaching literacy has changed; however, she revealed *since the implementation of RtI I am more aware of where my students are academically because I am required to keep close track of their progress*. Ms. Cheyenne clarified that she considered the best method to provide extra academic support to her at-risk struggling students was through an extra activity during learning centers. She pointed out that she likes to make herself an activity station during learning centers. She explained that this allows her to work with at-risk students without them suspecting that they are being singled out for interventions. By way of analysis of the data collected, I perceive Ms. Cheyenne’s teaching philosophy within the framework of RtI as a means in which to evaluate each student’s current academic strengths and needs. Then, if needed, she would provide extra support by way of learning games/activities.

When asked about her expectations for student achievement through utilizing the Response to Intervention approach, Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) argued, *In kindergarten sometimes I think that we need to stand back and let the little guy or gal develop and nurture that development*. She explained that her goal is to look at each student’s complete development; *I try to decide if they are ready for it (RtI) developmentally and socially*. Ms. Douglas stated that she perceived literacy

development as part of a student's comprehensive development and that small group instruction provided a method in which to support both their academic and social maturity.

Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) perceived Response to Intervention's (RtI) Tier 2 small group instruction as a permanent element in her literacy instruction, equally important as Tier 1 whole group instruction. Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) recognized RtI as a means by which to monitor student progress and if necessary, address those needs in a way which was fun and engaging without making them aware that they were being singled out for interventions. Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) sensed that Response to Intervention may not be appropriate if the student is not developmentally ready for literacy interventions.

Approaches/Pedagogies of Instruction within Tier 2 Interventions

Since the focus of kindergarten literacy education is to develop foundational skills, research suggests identifiable elements of reading instruction associated with improved outcomes for at-risk struggling readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). These recommended elements parallel the instructional approaches/pedagogies identified and discussed within each of the three case studies. Vaughn and Denton (2008) explain that the relative importance of each element of Tier 2 reading intervention varies based on grade level and individual student performance.

Kindergarten students enter school with varying degrees of literacy development; therefore, it is imperative that they all have opportunities to acquire

skills in phonological awareness and phonics (Vaughn & Denton, 2008). Students with limited reading experiences and at-risk struggling readers will benefit from 15-20 minutes of supplementary daily instruction in addition to whole group instruction (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Table 4.8 provides a summary of the two recommended elements of instruction— Phonological Awareness and Phonics and Word Study – associated with improved outcomes for kindergarten at-risk struggling readers and indicates which lesson components were present during the 12 observations during this study.

Table 4.8: Kindergarten Reading Intervention Priorities

Kindergarten Reading Intervention Priorities				
Instructional Component	Lesson Components	Case Study One	Case Study Two	Case Study Three
Phonological Awareness	• Focus on one or two types of manipulation (e.g., blending and segmenting)	Yes	Yes	Yes
	• Start with activities that are oral initially, then link to print	Yes	Yes	No
	• Allow students to respond individually and as a group	Yes	Yes	No
	• Can use manipulatives	Yes	Yes	No

Phonics and Word Study	• Introduce letters and sounds systematically	Yes	Yes	No
	• Students combine sounds to form words	Yes	Yes	Yes
	• Allow students to practice writing the letters and words they are learning	Yes	Yes	Yes

Data collected during this study identified that the three classroom teachers' Tier 2 intervention lessons included several activities that focused on Phonological Awareness. One or two types of manipulation in the form of blending and segmenting of individual sounds in spoken words were included. For example, during one observation, Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) used Elkonin Boxes in which the students segmented the individual sounds and then blended those sounds to form words.

However, only Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) started with activities that were oral initially, and then linked those activities to print and occasionally used manipulatives. For example, both teachers frequently provided students with activities in which they used manipulatives in the form of small markers to symbolize each sound in a word and then replace the marker with the letter that represents that sound. Also, only Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) allowed students to respond both individually and as a group. For example, during one observation, Ms. Laramie provided students with a lesson in which students took turns creating words that rhymed and then the group discussed what makes them rhyming words.

In addition, the kindergarten teachers in Case Study One and Case Study Two provided Phonics and Word Study lessons that introduced letters and sounds systematically. For example, during one observation Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) began by introducing one vowel and three or four consonants, adding new letters as students mastered them. She then used magnetic letters to form words from those letters and students practiced decoding the words. In contrast, Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) provided instruction in phonics and word study in authentic writing activities which did not result in introducing letters and sounds systematically during Tier 2 instruction.

The kindergarten teachers in all three case studies provided opportunities for students to combine sounds to form words, and allowed students to practice writing the letters and words that they were learning. For example, during the majority of my observations in Ms. Douglas' kindergarten classroom (Case Study Three) the students were engaged in multiple writing opportunities. Through journal writing, students experienced practice writing sight words and decodable words that they were learning in their Tier 1 core curriculum.

Summary

The first case study took place in Ms. Laramie's kindergarten classroom at Oak Hill Elementary School. I observed Ms. Laramie as she provided Tier 2 literacy interventions to three students – Tara, Mira, and Abby – who were identified as at-risk struggling readers. Ms. Laramie carried out Tier 2 literacy instruction three days a week at a large table in the hallway just outside the classroom, from 10:00AM to

10:15AM with the assistance of a teacher's aide who was supervising her whole group. She regarded Response to Intervention as a method in which to provide differentiated instruction which she considered a necessary component to an effective kindergarten literacy program. Her Tier 2 instruction focused on providing her at-risk readers with intervention in phonemic awareness and phonic skills which she regarded as essential in kindergarten.

Case Study Two took place in Ms. Cheyenne's classroom at Elm Valley Elementary School. Ms. Cheyenne provided Tier 2 interventions to five students – Bryson, Taylor, Kendra, Jamal, and Sara. She afforded her at-risk readers with Tier 2 literacy interventions three to five days a week at a small table in the corner of the classroom, from 3:00PM to 3:20PM during whole group learning centers. For the duration of this time, she had the assistance of a paraeducator who supervised the whole group activities. Ms. Cheyenne focused her instruction primarily on improving the phonemic awareness and phonics skills of her struggling readers.

Ms. Douglas' kindergarten classroom was the site of the third case study. Ms. Douglas had four identified at-risk readers – John, Chelsi, Abe, and Xena. She did not have the assistance of an additional staff member; therefore, Ms. Douglas offered her struggling readers Tier 2 interventions by grouping them at the same table during whole group writing activities. Typically, journal writing occurred from 2:30PM to 3:00PM five days a week. During this time she circulated around the table of at-risk struggling readers while also addressing the needs of her whole class.

Ms. Laramie, Ms. Cheyenne, and Ms. Douglas all provided Tier 2 literacy interventions within the framework of Response to Intervention. Their students were

kindergarten students who had been identified as at-risk struggling readers. However, contrasting teaching philosophies, dissimilar instructional approaches/pedagogies, and different quantities of support marked contrasted differences in how they delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction to their kindergarten struggling readers.

The following chapter will discuss the findings related to the Tier 2 case study results described in this chapter. The Tier 2 approaches/pedagogies of the kindergarten teachers will be examined through the research subquestions and the overall research question that provided the framework for the study. Implications for classroom practice will be discussed as they relate to Tier 2 interventions to support the literacy learning of kindergarten students. Suggestions for further research will be provided to explore the implementation of Tier 2 literacy interventions within the classroom setting.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the findings related to how Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. Discussion of the findings which emerged through analysis of interviews, observations, and artifacts and documents identified: 1) the teachers' perceptions regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach; 2) instructional approaches utilized in relationship to Tier 2 interventions; 3) literacy pedagogy in relationship to Tier 2 interventions; 4) students' responses to literacy interventions; and 5) the delivery of Tier 2 literacy instruction to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. Conclusions following the research study findings are also included. Implications for teaching and recommendations for future research studies beyond this grade level are also addressed. Final Thoughts summarize the overall issues of Response to Intervention and literacy instruction for kindergarten at-risk struggling readers.

Summary of the Study

With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), Response to Intervention (RtI) has become known as an important approach to prevent unnecessary student placement in special education. The intent of RtI is to provide early and effective classroom instruction for all students and then

progress toward increasingly intensive interventions based on the student's response to those interventions. Although there is information available in regard to the effectiveness of the multi-tiered model of the Response to Intervention approach, minimal research has addressed how RtI is being implemented at the classroom level. This study explored how teachers were able to apply literacy instructional approaches and pedagogy based on their teaching philosophy to address the needs of at-risk struggling readers within the kindergarten classroom environment.

This qualitative exploratory collective case study was conducted during the fall/spring semesters of the 2009/2010 school year between November 16, 2009 and February 26, 2010. This study investigated how three kindergarten classroom teachers, located in two elementary schools, delivered Tier 2 literacy instruction to at-risk struggling readers in the classroom setting. Multiple data sources were gathered from interviews, observations, and artifacts and documents. These data were collected and analyzed during three phases of the study.

Data analysis revealed dissimilar perceptions of the three case study teachers regarding their roles and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach. The three classroom teachers utilized the modeled, shared, and guided approaches to literacy instruction and they provided more incidences of lessons coded as phonemic awareness and phonics instruction during Tier 2 small group literacy interventions. Data analysis also revealed the student participant benefits included positive attitudes towards reading, students' perception of themselves as self-confident and motivated readers, development of an emerging love of reading, and enjoyment of practicing their reading skills in small groups.

Findings

The focus of this study was to investigate how kindergarten teachers are delivering Tier 2 literacy instruction to at-risk struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The data collection included interviews with teachers, observations of Tier 2 Response to Intervention literacy lessons, and guided conversations with at-risk struggling kindergarten readers. These data sources were collected in an effort to determine the perceived roles and responsibilities of the teachers, the specific approaches/pedagogy of instruction, and the student perceptions of literacy learning through small group instruction.

The data analysis of teacher philosophies, teacher literacy practices, field observations, and student responses to researcher inquiries helped identify the types of instruction being utilized as part of Tier 2 Response to Intervention literacy instruction. The findings revealed that teacher perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in delivery of Tier 2 literacy instruction included: 1) an integral part of a complete literacy program (Case Study One); 2) a method to evaluate the academic needs of students (Case Study Two); and 3) beneficial outcome only if the student is developmentally and socially ready (Case Study Three). The approaches of reading included modeled, guided, and shared instruction with an emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonics. The pedagogies implemented in emergent literacy lessons included: 1) monitoring of learning; 2) encouraging and supportive literacy environment; and 3) feedback and reinforcement. The students' perceived benefits of engaging in Tier 2 small group instruction included: 1) retained positive attitudes towards reading and viewed learning to read as the most important focus of school; 2)

perceived themselves as self-confident and motivated readers; and 3) developed an emerging love of reading. These data analyses were incorporated in addressing the four research subquestions and the overarching research question that directed this research study. Each subquestion includes findings from the study and relates them to the theoretical foundations and related research studies that framed the current study. Following the answers to the subquestions, the broader, overarching question that undermined the study is addressed.

1. What are the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach within the classroom?

The teaching practices observed in this study are supported by the International Reading Association. They maintain that by individualizing and differentiating reading instruction, teachers can ensure the best possible outcome for each student's success. Also, effective reading teachers understand that sometimes large group instruction does not benefit all children and, therefore, small group or individual instruction is more appropriate (International Reading Association, 2000).

Fundamentally, Tier 2 (intervention) small group instruction delivered within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model is designed to meet the needs of at-risk readers who have not made adequate progress through Tier 1 (core curriculum) whole group instruction (Vaughn & Denton, 2008).

The teachers in this study had dissimilar perceptions of their role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach. Ms.

Laramie (Case Study One) perceived her role and responsibility as a classroom teacher to include Tier 2 small group instruction as an integral part of her complete literacy program. Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) both provided Tier 2 intervention curriculum that is compatible with their school's core reading program and provided systematic and explicit intensive small group instruction in the three foundational kindergarten skills: phoneme segmentation, blending, and letter/sound identification.

Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) perceived her role and responsibilities teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach as an element of the student's comprehensive development. She believed that small group instruction helped to support the student's academic and social development. Ms. Douglas argued that RtI may not be appropriate if the student is *not developmentally and/or socially ready for it*. I am not aware of any research which supports this opinion. In fact, the current research counters this statement.

Kindergarten Tier 2 instruction should be implemented for 20 to 40 minutes, three to five times a week in small groups of three to four students. Research shows that providing kindergarten students with daily Tier 2 focused and intensive instruction has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on their acquisition of early reading skills, especially phonemic awareness and phonics (Vaughn & Denton, 2008).

Generally, all three teachers provided Tier 2 interventions 15 to 30 minutes three to five times a week. Sometimes Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) provided one on one instruction for 10 to 15 minutes for highly specialized and individualized

instruction for students who were experiencing considerable difficulty mastering a specific skill. Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) continually provided focused and intensive phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) afforded phonemic awareness and phonics practice by way of journal writing activities.

Because Response to Intervention is not a program or a curriculum, there are many different ways to approach the multi-tiered framework of leveled instruction. Tier 1 is practically standard in every school; it consists of the district chosen core curriculum. Typically, Tier 3 is synonymous with special education; it is reserved for those students requiring more intensive, specialized interventions. However, in the middle is a varied menu of what counts as Tier 2 instruction. This creates a situation in which schools and teachers are asked to interpret what they think Tier 2 instruction should include. Therefore, each of the three teachers in this study have different views about their role and responsibility because of their lack of background information and training that informs what teachers need to do in order to effectively meet Tier 2 standards.

2. What instructional approaches are kindergarten teachers implementing in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?

According to Vygotsky (1986), there are both skills that the child can accomplish alone and skills that he/she cannot perform even with assistance. In the middle of the learning curve, lie the skills that the child can achieve with adult

assistance; this is what Vygotsky termed the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*.

The zone of proximal development is the point at which a child can learn a new skill in cooperation with adult assistance, enabling him/her to perform the skill independently at a later time. Vygotsky (1986) also stated that the teacher assumes a critical role in the student's ability to successfully acquire new skills.

Guidelines for implementing effective Tier 2 interventions presented by Vaughn and Denton (2008) concluded that students benefit for interventions that provide daily, targeted instruction that is explicit, systematic, and that provides ample practice opportunities with immediate feedback. In addition, students benefit from approaches to instruction that:

- Provide modeled examples before student practice (*modeled approach*).
- Maximize student engagement, including many opportunities for students to respond (*shared approach*).
- Provide immediate positive and corrective feedback (*shared approach*).
- Provide ample opportunities for supported practice before independent practice (*shared & guided approach*).
- Scaffold instruction and make adaptations to instruction in response to students' needs and to how quickly or slowly students are learning (*shared approach*).

These Tier 2 instructional guidelines align with Tompkins' (2007) continuum of instructional reading approaches: *modeled*, *shared*, and *guided*. These approaches

move from the greatest amount of teacher support (modeled approach) to the least amount of assistance (guided approach).

Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) used the *shared approach* in the course of all of my observations in their classroom. During these observations they utilized the shared approach as a way to engage and instruct their students with various types of phonemic manipulation lessons (matching, isolation, substitution, blending, segmentation, and deletion) for syllables, onset-rime, and phonemes. In particular, Ms. Laramie used short poems and stories that alerted her students to speech sounds through rhyme, alliteration, and phonemic manipulation to improve their awareness to detect sounds in words. Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) also used the shared approach; however, she applied this approach when assisting individual students to build their oral and written language development while they applied their skills in the context of writing activities.

In addition, Ms. Douglas frequently applied the *guided approach* during Tier 2 instruction. She grouped the Tier 2 at-risk readers together at one table so that she could deliver individualized interventions to meet their varying needs. The majority of the duration of the intervention session involved the guided approach. During my data collection observations, Ms. Laramie and Ms. Cheyenne used the guided approach; however, only for short periods of time after practicing the skill during the shared approach.

Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) applied the *modeled approach* in the course of all 12 of my observation in her classroom. Typically, she demonstrated the literacy skill/activity that she wanted the students to perform. She suggested that a few of her

students in small group instruction are students with identified learning disabilities and they benefit from an approach that provides a substantial amount of support. Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) also utilized the modeled approach; however, she employed this approach specifically to introduce a new skill or to reinforce a newly learned skill. Ms. Douglas did not utilize the modeled approach during the course of my 12 observations in her classroom.

The *shared approach* was most widely used by all three teachers that I observed in this study. The shared approach works well in Tier 2 instruction because it allows teachers and students to take part in the learning process together, thus ensuring successful practice of the skill. The *guided approach* was also used as a method to support and observe students as they performed the skill independently. The *modeled approach* was frequently used in Case Study One and in Case Study Two. However, it was not used in Case Study Three since Tier 2 instruction occurred during whole group activities.

3. How do kindergarten teachers apply literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom?

Within the framework of Response to Intervention, Tier 2 instruction focuses on providing effective supplemental instruction for students who are experiencing reading difficulties in the Tier 1 core curriculum instruction. Therefore, classroom teachers need to understand a considerable amount about effective instruction in order to achieve successful outcomes for at-risk struggling readers. When classroom

teachers make good pedagogical decisions in their instruction to effectively meet individual student needs, the students will benefit (Taylor, 2008).

Danielson (2007) refers to instruction as the “heart of the framework of teaching.” She describes instruction as a complex interactive work that teachers undertake to promote learning. Therefore, I selected several instructional components in relation to my study from Danielson’s description of instruction: 1) monitoring of learning; 2) encouraging and supportive learning environments; and 3) feedback and reinforcement. These three components best align with Tier 2 pedagogical choices in intervention instruction.

Although all three teachers monitored student learning, their instructional settings differed and so did the extent to which each teacher was able to supervise student understanding. Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) provided explicit small group instruction. This explicit reading instruction involved a high level of teacher-student interaction which included frequent opportunities for the teachers to monitor progress while the students practiced the literacy skill. Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) also monitored student learning; however, since she provided Tier 2 interventions during whole group instruction, she was unable to closely evaluate student understanding.

The data collected from all three case studies revealed encouraging and supportive learning environments. They reflected the importance of the literacy work undertaken by both students and teachers. I observed numerous teacher-student interactions, student-student exchanges, the format of the classroom environment, and the general atmosphere of the class to conclude that in all three classrooms were the

site of encouraging and supportive learning environments. Both teachers and students took obvious pride in their successes. The students' work was displayed throughout the classroom, and both teachers and students were very eager to share information about their accomplishments with me.

Danielson (2007) concluded that to be effective, "feedback should be accurate, constructive, substantive, specific, and timely." Feedback and reinforcement of learning must draw the student's attention to errors immediately for effective learning to occur. Effective and timely feedback and reinforcement is highly related to the student's level of learning and confidence.

Although all three kindergarten teachers continuously provided feedback and reinforcement during Tier 2 interventions, Ms. Laramie (Case Study One) and Ms. Cheyenne (Case Study Two) provided explicit small group instruction; thus, they were able to immediately provide feedback and reinforcement. Since this feedback and reinforcement was immediate, these two teachers were able to spontaneously correct student errors and/or misunderstandings, therefore enabling the students to achieve valuable learning outcomes. Ms. Douglas (Case Study Three) also provided feedback and reinforcement to her at-risk struggling readers. However, since she provided interventions during whole group activities, this response was not always timely and likely not as valuable to learning outcomes.

The kindergarten teachers in this study demonstrated effective literacy pedagogy in relationship to the Tier 2 interventions within the classroom by incorporating three elements of effective instruction. Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2007) identified three components which aligned with the

data collected in this study: 1) monitoring of learning; 2) encouraging and supportive learning environments; and 3) feedback and reinforcement. No instructional strategy, style, and/or technique used by a teacher has been documented to be absolutely effective in teaching literacy. However, successful implementation of Tier 2 interventions to at-risk struggling readers requires teachers to make sound pedagogical choices.

4. What are the responses of kindergarten struggling readers to the delivery of literacy interventions in Tier 2 instruction?

Data analysis of student guided conversations revealed that each group of kindergarten at-risk struggling readers developed an emerging love of reading. They retained positive attitudes towards reading and perceived themselves as self-confident and motivated readers. Interestingly, none of the at-risk struggling readers that I spoke with gave me any indication that they experienced difficulty with learning to read. The kindergarteners reported that they enjoyed practicing literacy skills with their teachers in small reading groups and that it provided them with the opportunity to demonstrate their reading competence.

When asked about learning to read, they overwhelmingly stated that they viewed learning to read as the most important focus of school. Engaging in reading related activities incorporated into their lives during and beyond the school day. The students reported that they took pleasure in reading related activities at school and expressed appreciation for their ability to engage in reading activities with family and friends. Many of them reported that they utilized their knowledge about reading strategies to

teach younger siblings a few basic reading skills. Overwhelmingly, they reported that reading with “mom” was at the top of the list of the best thing about learning to read. The kindergarteners shared their understanding that the reason that they attended school was in order to learn to read. They articulated that learning to read was enjoyable and they expressed their conviction that school was a great place to be.

The acquisition of the kindergarten students’ thoughts on reading was a challenge and their responses varied between these three case studies. In Ms. Laramie’s class (Case Study One), the children were very verbal and articulate, likely because their teacher continuously encouraged them to share individual thought and ideas. In Ms. Cheyenne’s class (Case Study Two) and in Ms. Douglas’s class (Case Study Three), the students may not have had extensive prior oral experience at their homes. Therefore, their thoughts were limited verbally and they only shared a brief series of words to reflect their thoughts.

Overarching Question: *How is Tier 2 literacy instruction delivered to kindergarten struggling readers in the classroom setting?*

Three major theories - cognitive constructivism, social constructivism, and transactional perspective on reading difficulties - provided support to this study. These theories view reading difficulties and interventions as situated within variable social and cognitive contexts. In relationship to these theories, the results of this current case study provided documentation of dissimilar systems in which Tier 2 literacy instruction was delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. These differences in

systems of delivery may have influenced the effectiveness of the Tier 2 interventions. This variance in the practices of the three kindergarten teachers supports and encourages the future of teacher training in the area of the literacy instruction area within the Response to Intervention Tier 2 model.

A study conducted by Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) found that in kindergarten classrooms the teacher was the most important factor in student achievement. They concluded:

The finding that teacher effects are larger than school effects has interesting implications for improving student achievement. Many policies attempted to improve achievement by substitution one school for another (e.g., school choice) or changing the schools themselves (e.g., whole school reform). The rationale for these policies is based on the fact that there is variation in school effects. If teacher effects are larger than school effects, then policies focusing on teacher effects as a larger source of variation in achievement may be more promising than policies focusing on school effects (pp. 253-253).

Allington (2009) made this same argument by suggesting that it would be beneficial for schools to allocate more money and resources on teacher training and support rather than on the purchase of commercial products to teach literacy. The three kindergarten classroom teacher participants in this study varied in their perceptions of their role and responsibility delivering Tier 2 literacy instruction to at-risk struggling readers. The results of the study identified three unrelated teacher

philosophies. These different perspectives about Tier 2 intervention instruction included: 1) Tier 2 instruction is an integral part of a complete literacy program, equally as important as Tier 1 instruction; 2) Tier 2 instruction requires a method to evaluate and keep records on the academic needs of students; and 3) Tier 2 instruction is only beneficial if the student is developmentally and socially ready to learn.

These varying perspectives may have led to differences in the instructional settings for their Tier 2 interventions. The settings included small groups of at-risk struggling kindergarteners: 1) isolated from whole group activity; 2) considered a component of learning centers; and 3) integrated as an actual section of whole group instruction. These differences in instructional settings also influenced the extent to which each kindergarten teacher utilized the modeled, shared, and/or guided approaches to literacy instruction. The two kindergarten teachers (Case Study 1 & 2), who provided small group instruction, frequently utilized the modeled and shared approaches. Whereas, the kindergarten teacher (Case Study 3) who provided Tier 2 interventions as function of whole group instruction, frequently employed the guided approach to literacy instruction. These kindergarten classroom teachers taught all they could to assist at-risk struggling readers, but they must have more Response to Intervention Tier 2 information presented to them through professional development, RtI “book clubs,” and district workshops.

If Response to Intervention is destined to positively impact the future of at-risk struggling kindergarten readers, school districts must provide professional development to inform teachers of the instructional groupings, environmental settings, and approaches/ pedagogies in order to ensure that every teacher becomes an expert in

literacy instruction for at-risk struggling readers within the Response to Intervention Tier 2 model.

Conclusions

The relationship between special education and general education has changed substantially since the reauthorization of the Individual With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). IDEA allows states to move from the discrepancy approach to Response to Intervention when identifying students as having a learning disability. With the discrepancy approach, the identification of a learning disability frequently occurred in the third grade. This process meant that most children must “wait to fail” before they were afforded the additional services to help them to be successful. This reason, along with uncertainty over the accuracy of the discrepancy model, has led to the introduction of Response to Intervention (RtI).

Response to Intervention is a comprehensive early detection and prevention approach that identifies at-risk struggling students and assists them before they fall behind. Foremost, RtI is a framework that combines universal screening and high quality instruction for all students with targeted intervention instruction for those students who are experiencing difficulties. Most schools across the nation now implement RtI. However, many teachers are still unaware of the Tier 2 instructional implications of Response to Intervention at the classroom level

According to Allington (2009), the classroom teachers, the experts on reading instruction, should deliver the Tier 2 intervention lessons. He goes on to say that the impact of the classroom teacher is the single-most powerful variable in accelerating

the reading development of at-risk struggling readers. Therefore, schools must provide classroom teachers with the training necessary to implement effective Tier 2 intervention instruction.

First, **small group instruction is essential for the delivery of Tier 2 intervention.** Allington (2009) contended that research studies using a very small group intervention design, with groups no larger than three students, produced the most consistently reliable accelerated reading growth. My study supports the opinion that schools must provide support staff for brief periods of time within the school day in order for classroom teachers to provide recommended interventions for Tier 2 small group instruction to kindergarten at-risk struggling readers. My research found that when the classroom teachers were able to provide Tier 2 instruction in small groups away from whole class activities, they were able to provide intensive, explicit instruction in the two identified elements of reading instruction - phonemic awareness and phonics – which are associated with improved outcomes for kindergarten at-risk struggling readers. In addition, both teacher and students exhibited enthusiasm and possessed high expectations for success when small group instruction was utilized when delivering Tier 2 interventions.

Second, **the instructional approaches utilized to deliver Tier 2 intervention are critical in addressing the needs of at-risk struggling readers.** Kindergarten students who have been identified as at-risk struggling readers need intensive, systematic, and explicit instruction provided by the classroom teacher using an approach which can raise their skills to grade level. The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that the critical skill for kindergarteners to master is the ability to segment

phonemes, letter/sound identification, and beginning decoding skills. Instruction in these early literacy skills must follow a defined sequence of approaches beginning with the highest level of teacher support to the least as students perfect the skill. Within this case study, these skills were introduced by the teacher using the modeled approach. Then using the shared approach, the teacher and students practiced the skill together. Lastly, after the skill was acquired, the guided approach could be used to monitor the student while he/she performed the task independently. However, my research also documented that when small group instruction was not utilized to deliver Tier 2 interventions, the teacher did not follow the defined sequence of leveled approaches to assist students to refine their beginning literacy skills.

Third, **pedagogies can vary within Tier 2 instruction; however, the teachers in this study applied: 1) monitoring of learning; 2) encouraging and supportive learning environments; and 3) immediate feedback and reinforcement while delivering interventions.** Danielson (2007) explains that instructional decisions are at the heart of student learning. It is the manner in which teachers undertake bringing “complex content to life for their students.” In this study, when the kindergarten classroom teachers made pedagogical decisions that included ways in which they were able to closely monitor student learning, they provided corrective feedback immediately. Since this feedback occurred during the time the student was learning the skill, misunderstanding did not continue to exist. In addition, this practice resulted in establishing a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

Fourth, **the benefits to the kindergarten at-risk struggling readers focused on how they perceived the small group Tier 2 intervention instruction.** Allington

(2009) pointed out that when students are motivated learners, they learn much more. Accordingly, to improve reading achievement, the three case study teachers made an effort to establish settings in which the Tier 2 students were motivated to learn to read. The three kindergarten classroom teachers reported that they attempt to create situations in which the students perceived the Tier 2 lessons as enjoyable and an exclusive opportunity to work with them. My research found that when intervention instruction was fun and engaging to the emergent readers and provided the kindergarten students with opportunities to feel special and successful, both the classroom teachers and the students reported that the Tier 2 instruction was enjoyable. The teachers reported that the students' motivation contributed to positive instructional outcomes.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Response to Intervention has arrived in our schools. It has filtered down from federal legislation to state guidelines to district/school implementation. What seems to be left out is the most important factor: How can classroom teachers implement Tier 2 Response to Intervention instruction in a way that promotes the literacy learning of at-risk struggling students? The findings reflect the need for the consideration of the following instructional recommendations for teachers and administrators:

- **Screen all students to identify potential reading problems.** It is critical that all kindergarten students are screened at the beginning of the school year to help identify those students who may be at risk for experiencing reading difficulties. This screening also may identify not only who might need

additional literacy instruction, but also what critical early literacy skills must be addressed to improve individual reading ability.

- **Incorporate systematic progress monitoring regularly to ensure that the instructional interventions are effective.** Teachers must assess Tier 2 kindergarten students at least monthly, and even twice a month if possible. This ongoing assessment provides teachers with the necessary information to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions. It allows reassignment of students for whom interventions have been successful and provides necessary information to regroup students who need continued instructional support.
- **Establish effective Tier 2 instructional environments.** In order for Tier 2 interventions to be effective, kindergarten classroom teachers must create instructional settings which are advantageous to learning. This setting must include a small group of at-risk struggling readers consisting of no more than three kindergarteners. Interventions must be provided in an area that is free from distractions for both the teacher and the students. The kindergarten students in the proper setting are motivated and enthusiastic as they spend quality time with their teacher practicing critical early literacy skills.
- **Focus the content of Response to Intervention instructional lessons on phonemic awareness and phonics in kindergarten.** The National Reading Panel (2000) identified the ability to segment phonemes, letter/sound relationships, and beginning decoding skills as critical to early literacy development. Therefore, kindergarten teachers need a repertory of methods/activities that emphasize these vital reading skills. These skills must

be taught systematically and explicitly and provide students with substantial practice in applying knowledge of these skills as they read and write.

- **Utilize instructional approaches of guided, shared, and modeled venues in order to present lessons in meaningful ways.** Systematic and explicit instruction requires teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches. However, these approaches must follow a defined sequence in order to maximize learning outcomes. Skills should be introduced utilizing the modeled approach, practiced employing the shared approach, and then monitored for understanding while making use of the guided approach.
- **Provide school district training for teachers on how to match literacy instruction within the framework of Response to Intervention.** Districts must provide training in classroom literacy practices as they relate to RtI and effective Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. In particular, Tier 1 provides the foundation for successful reading instruction, without which too many students would need Tier 2 interventions. Within Tier 1 core curriculum, differentiated reading instruction should occur in the form of brief individualized instruction, peer tutors, or cooperative learning groups. Teachers must be provided with specific training on how to provide effective Tier 2 instruction. They need training on using assessment data and intervention strategies/techniques that address the components of early literacy instruction.
- **Provide additional administrative support for classroom teachers for brief periods of time each day in order for them to provide students with Tier 2 intervention instruction.** Kindergarten classroom teachers cannot effectively

provide Tier 2 instruction in early literacy interventions while also supervising whole group activities. Therefore, school administrators must provide a member of the school staff daily for 20 minutes to supervise the kindergarten classroom. This can simply be an individual to supervise students during snack time, to read them a story, to monitor them during learning centers, to field student questions, or to offer personal or academic assistance.

- **Include Response to Intervention in elementary teacher education undergraduate courses in both special education and literacy methods.**

The basis of RtI is to improve and intensify the education provided to students who have trouble learning. Therefore, the teachers who are helping guide the decisions for how to accomplish this must possess a great deal of knowledge about the framework of Response to Intervention as well as the teaching of reading. Elementary teacher education programs must prepare their undergraduate students for the important role that they will play in many aspects of RtI.

Recommendations for Future Research

The intent of this research study was to explore how Tier 2 literacy instruction is delivered to kindergarten struggling readers within the multi-tiered Response to Intervention model in the classroom setting. The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings; however, the findings may provide an avenue for more effective implementation of Tier 2 intervention instruction within the classroom setting. Several suggestions for future research are proposed.

- **Conducting a study with a larger number of teachers.** This study was limited to three kindergarten classroom teachers within a district of 26 kindergarten teachers. These teachers were part of my study because they felt comfortable sharing with me their approaches and pedagogies in regard to Tier 2 instruction. It would be beneficial to explore how *all* kindergarten classroom teachers in an entire school district execute Tier 2 intervention instruction to at-risk struggling readers.
- **Conducting a parallel study with first and second grade teachers.** Since Response to Intervention is implemented school wide, it would be beneficial to explore how first and second grade classroom teachers are implementing Tier 2 instruction in literacy in their classrooms. Because instructional methods and content focus may be different in first and second grades, it would be interesting to explore how these classroom teachers provide intervention instruction to their at-risk struggling readers.
- **Conducting a longitudinal study.** Extending this study over a three to five year period would provide interesting and extensive results. Following the teacher participants over an extended period of time beginning with their current Tier 2 instruction and continuing data collection of instructional methods over an extended period of time with additional training and support would provide insight into long term RtI instruction. Additional time, training, and support may promote effective Tier 2 intervention instruction.
- **Extending research studies to include approaches/pedagogies of both Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction.** Extending this study to include teaching practices

for both Tier 1 and Tier 2 would provide evidence as it relates to effective Tier 1 practices such as the delivery of whole group instruction and differentiated instruction as it relates to all students. Extending this study to include Tier 1 instruction would then allow researchers to evaluate how differentiated instruction should permeate all of the tiers of a comprehensive literacy program.

Final Thoughts

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a comprehensive early detection and prevention approach to meet the needs of students who are experiencing academic difficulties and assists them before they fall behind. RtI relies on frequent, brief assessments of students and subsequent regular adjustments of instruction based on how the student is responding to instruction. Schools across the nation are embracing Response to Intervention as a method to transform how they approach educating all students.

Much of this attention comes from the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) which now allows states to utilize RtI as one instrument to identify students with learning disabilities and blends a renewed focus through No Child Behind which calls for accountability of student progress. Along with these changes in federal legislation, states have used the Response to Intervention approach to implement the Reading First Initiative. Filtering down from federal legislation and state initiatives, school districts and individual schools are left to implement Response to Intervention, to a large extent, in any manner in which they

desire. Therefore, in practice, Response to Intervention can appear quite different from district to district and even from school to school.

Although RtI is a framework, subject to variations, a few key components are necessary for successful implementation. First, all students must be screened for potential reading problems at the beginning of the school year and again in the middle of the year. Then, students who have been identified as not meeting grade level benchmarks are provided with increasingly intensive scientifically-based reading interventions in order to advance their literacy development, referred to as Tier 2 instruction. Progress monitoring continues for those students receiving Tier 2 instruction in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Next, Tier 2 student groupings and types and duration of interventions are adjusted to meet the needs of the students based on their response to the interventions. Finally, if a student continues to experience learning difficulty, he/she may need further evaluation which may include special education services.

Since Response to Intervention is included in federal special education law, it may seem like a special education initiative to educators. However, this is not the premise of RtI. Response to Intervention is an approach to change the nature of instruction for all students. The potential benefits for special education students, including effective methods of identification, is just one component in the array of positive effects RtI can have on the literacy education of all students. That is not why it was created and that is not its purpose.

The best method in which to introduce schools/teachers to Response to Intervention is by providing them with assistance in order to help them to restructure

their literacy program. This assistance may come in the way of support from an individual from the district level, such as the district's literacy coach and/or curriculum coordinator. However, the most beneficial assistance would come from training and assistance provided to classroom teachers by a well-qualified professional who is experienced in the implementation of Response to Intervention and who specializes in literacy development.

This professional could help teachers to ensure that their core curriculum instruction, Tier 1, is effective. Tier 1 instruction is the foundation for successful reading instruction, thereby lessening the number of students who will need Tier 2 intervention instruction. Also, teachers need to understand how to determine which students need Tier 2 instruction. Most importantly, classroom teachers need preparation to select interventions/strategies in order to effectively implement Tier 2 instruction. In addition, teachers need to know how to monitor the effectiveness of their delivery of instructional interventions and what to do if they are not effective.

Response to Intervention is not a program; it is an instructional decision-making approach which currently is in desperate need of assistance. However, by providing classroom teachers with training and support, the goals and purpose of Response to Intervention may be accomplished and at-risk struggling readers may succeed as lifelong literate citizens.

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Appendix A – IRB Approval Letter



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TO: Marjorie Hancock
Elementary Education
261 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 5234

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: November 16, 2009

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Literacy Models and Practices Delivered Through Tier 2 Response to Intervention to K-2 Struggling Readers within the Classroom Environment.."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: November 16, 2009

EXPIRATION DATE: November 16, 2010

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix B – Parent Consent Form

I have read the foregoing letter from Valerie Zelenka and understand the research study in which she will be investigating specific literacy approaches and pedagogies educators are utilizing to deliver additional instruction and interventions within the kindergarten classroom environment.

I voluntarily agree to allow my child, _____, to participate in this study. It is my understanding that the purpose of the research is to identify effective supplemental instruction beyond the core reading program that is delivered within the classroom environment for kindergarten readers. This study will be conducted during the normal school day. I understand that my child may be a member of a group of kindergarten students who discuss their perceptions about learning to read. I also understand that some class sessions may be audio taped in order for literacy instructional activities to be accurately documented. All documents and audio tapes will remain the property of Valerie Zelenka and will not be published, presented, or released for public viewing. If I have any questions or concerns, I may contact Valerie Zelenka at her office (532-5550), cell (564-7183), home (539-8192), or e-mail at vlz@ksu.edu. I may also contact Dr. Marjorie Hancock by e-mail at mrhanc@ksu.edu. Further questions may be addressed to Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66502, (785) 532-3224.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM IN THE STAMPED ENVELOPE PROVIDED

Appendix C – Phase I: Teacher Participant Interview Prompts

1. How long have you taught in this district/ this school?
2. How many years of total teaching experience do you have?
3. What do you know about Response to Intervention?
4. What type of training did you receive about implementing Response to Intervention in your classroom?
5. What is your role and responsibility teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach?
6. How do you balance whole group instruction with differentiated instruction within your classroom to meet the needs of identified Tier 2 at-risk readers.
7. How do you analyze and utilize curriculum-based and progress monitoring data to assist Tier 2 struggling readers?

Appendix D – Phase III: Teacher Participant Interview Prompts

1. Has Response to Intervention been helpful in addressing the needs of your struggling readers? Why/Why not?
2. What work works well in implementing Tier 2 intervention strategies in your classroom?
3. What challenges do you face in implementing Tier 2 intervention strategies in your classroom? How do you overcome those challenges?
4. What recommendations do you have for classroom teachers who feel burdened by a lack of time in which to implement Tier 2 interventions to struggling readers?

Appendix E – Administrator Interview Prompts

1. How long has your school been implementing Response to Intervention?
2. Please define Response to Intervention within the context of your school setting.
3. Tell me about your Student Improvement Team decision-making process.
4. Typically, who provides Tier 2 interventions? How is the setting for implementing the interventions determined?

Appendix F – Student Guided Conversations Prompts

1. Tell me about learning to read.
2. Tell me what you like the most about learning to read.
3. What do you like about reading in small groups?
4. What don't you like about reading in small groups?
5. Tell me about other times that you enjoy reading.

Appendix G– Classroom Observation Form

Date: _____ Time _____ Teacher: _____

Setting: _____ Literacy Lesson _____

<u>Observations:</u>	<u>Reflective Thoughts:</u>

Appendix H – Artifact/Document Form

Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) assessment data:

Student Improvement Team meeting reports:

Lesson plans:

Tier 2 progress monitoring assessment data:

Appendix I – Teacher Participants Interviews

Ms. Douglas (Phase I)

11/20/09

(The boxes represent the researcher's interpretation)

How long have you taught in this school?

This is my first full year as a classroom teacher. This is a second career for me I worked for the post office for 18 years and then decided to go back to school to get my teaching degree. *What do you*

know about Response to Intervention (MTSS)?

MTSS – goes on in this classroom all the time. It is individualized/differentiated instruction, meeting the needs of all students. The Tier 1 is whole group, Tier 2 is extra help for those students who are having difficulties, and Tier 3 is usually special education.

We are asked to fill out paperwork with at least 15 different interventions to take students to the SIT process. The teachers are required to show what interventions they have already tried and have been unsuccessful with before the SIT process starts. *What type of training did you receive about*

implementing Response to Intervention in your classroom? **We have staffings where we talk about these things. Do you mean, actual training on the interventions themselves? Yes. Well, that is pretty limited. More on the lines of peer discussion/ collaboration, whatever we can come up with and however we can come up with it.** *What is your role and responsibility teaching literacy within the Response to Intervention approach?* **To meet the needs of all of**

She indicates that she provides individualized/differentiated instruction.

She has a basic understanding of the RtI approach and the tiered model.

She has not received training about providing Tier 2 intervention instruction within her classroom.

my students. I do believe that all students can learn. I believe that my responsibility is to find that way to teach them, find the best way for them to learn. *How do you balance whole group instruction with differentiated instruction within your classroom to meet the needs of identified Tier 2 at-risk readers.* It is not easy (she nervously laughs) more often than not, we have to stretch those things across the curriculum. In SFA we are pretty structured in what we have to cover so what needs to be done is left how to connect these literacy skills into other lessons so I do a lot of higher level thinking...ah...on my own part just to try to accomplish that. *What do you do if you have two kids who are just not getting segmenting? What do you do for those students? How do you incorporate differentiated instruction for those kids?* A lot of times differentiated instruction is coming from a different source or at a different time of the day. I have arranged for the tutor to come every other day and pull those students to work with them. Because it is so difficult because I don't have a para or a TA in my classroom so I try to pull in other resources. I also have a fifth grader who comes in and works with a little girl in my class. I also pull from center time, but SFA is very against pulling from center time; however, I look at center time as something that they need to be developmentally ready for and some of them are not. *What do you do during center time?* Well...the students...usually the centers are predetermined...ah...it says in the SFA book what the students should be doing. So for example, there may be a teacher directed center with blending activities for that

She does not have an understanding of how to provide Tier 2 interventions within her classroom

She is relying on unsystematic and random pullout to offer interventions

particular day that goes along with the thematic unit.

How do you analyze and utilize curriculum-based and progress monitoring data to assist Tier 2 struggling readers? **That is difficult for me because first of all**

there is no historical data except for what we do when they come in, which is DIBELS. And ...um...we talk about this a lot...I mean I have to measure them against what the school and state standards are, so I do that a lot.

But it is not until this next report card in general that I can really go back and monitor progress. *Is there anything that you would like to add?* **I do have something else to say.**

In kindergarten I always hesitate because my goal for my kids is to look at them developmentally and socially and to say that a student isn't getting it now and to keep pushing and pushing them I don't always think that it is the right thing, I don't think they always need MTSS. Sometimes I think that we need to stand back and let the little guy or gal develop and nurture that development. Sometimes it think that we try to put the cart before the horse. So when I look at doing MTSS with a student I try to decide if they are ready for it developmentally and socially.

She is not progress monitoring.

She expresses her concern that RtI is not always necessary for all at-risk struggling readers. She believes that some students may not be developmentally and socially ready.

Ms. Cheyenne (Phase III)

11/20/09

(The boxes represent the researcher's interpretation)

Has Response to Intervention been helpful in addressing the needs of your struggling readers?

Why/Why not? **Yes, it has been helpful knowing that it works has make me more likely to make the time, even if I don't have the time, because I know that it is good for them. I have seen the results even from spending just a few extra minutes a day or every other day with the struggling students.**

What work works well in implementing Tier 2 intervention strategies in your classroom? **Well, if you are referring**

to the types of activities- they like anything that is a game or a race, any type of manipulative. Visuals will keep them on track and focused, if they think that there is competition going on with their partner. I noticed that

during one of my observations the students were competing for points but they seemed happy and motivated to try and they didn't seem to get frustrated or upset if they didn't get the point. **Well, I give them a point for getting the correct**

answer and an extra point if they were the first one to get it correct. They still feel successful because they get a point.

I also switch back and forth with who got the answer first, especially if it is close. *What works well as far as being able*

to give those students the extra time away from the group for additional instruction/interventions? **Several times during the**

day seems to work well—I have a little extra time after reading, after lunch recess I usually have an activity where I can pull students one at a time. Also, when I

She perceives RtI Tier 2 interventions as beneficial. She believes that interventions must be fun and engaging.

She wants to ensure that students feel successful. She tries to find ways to keep students motivated to learn.

have my TA, or para support- she can help out. Also, my foster grandparent can help to monitor things. I even have her pull students to read to. That is one of the things they love to do, read to grandma. *What challenges do you face in implementing Tier 2 intervention strategies in your classroom? How do you overcome those challenges?*

The most challenging thing is the time. I don't have difficulty thinking up activities/games to try and what to do- I get that from formal and informal assessment. The biggest challenge is having the time and sticking to the commitment of do the interventions because I could always find something else to do. There is always something else that I have to do or could be working on. I know that once I get started I will have an interruption and sometimes the frustration makes me want to say "forget it" but I stay committed to it because I know that it is good for them. *What recommendations do you have for classroom teachers who feel burdened by a lack of time in which to implement Tier 2 interventions to struggling readers?* The biggest asset has been having an extra person in the room.

When I have my para support or my TA or my foster grandparent, they can help out. A lot of times when I am doing whole group and I can't leave the group the para can pull in other students while she is working with the student with the IEP, I can give her the activities to do. If they have any type of learning centers that works well, I can cycle the kids through. If I make it like part of the learning labs, then

Provides Tier 2 interventions daily. She may be relying on unsystematic methods to offer interventions.

Her experience helps her plan for Tier 2 literacy instruction. However, a lack of RtI training leaves her struggling with how to effectively implement the interventions.

She feels that an additional staff member is necessary in order to provide Tier 2 interventions.

they get to come to me just like going to a location within learning labs. They come to me and play a game and then they go on to their next choice of a learning lab activity. *How do you know what to do with your struggling students? Do you progress monitor those who are not meeting benchmark?* **Well, sometimes I pull a student aside and ask them to count by 5s. But I kind of tell informally on the carpet I give each child their own word so I can see. But usually it is the same students who I can tell from the grade card that they are still having difficulty, but I kind of have my ear open to those particular students.**

She provides Tier 2 interventions as part of learning centers.

She does not progress monitor.

Appendix J – Student Guided Conversations Prompts

Ms Laramie's Students

2/24/10

(The boxes represent the researcher's interpretation)

Tell me about learning to read.

We have been learning to read for two weeks.

For two weeks we have been learning to read?

No, two years. (Abby)

Tell me what you like the most about learning to read.

I like to learn to read. (Mira)

I like to learn about..um...the ...if I was grown up and

I had kids..if got kids I could teach them how to read

because I know how to read. I would like to read to

my kids. (Abby)

But what do you like about learning to read?

Um...sometimes I like to read to my kids. (Mira)

I like to read to myself. (Abby)

Me too, me too...even if it is hard I can read it. I know

how to read the top one and to sound out words that

I don't know. (Mira)

So can you tell me what it is like learning to read.

How do we learn to read? What do we do when we read?

We do...er...we do. We got to teach people to read.

I can teach them. (Mira)

They could come to school to learn to read (Abby)

We learn to read here. (Mira)

Okay, if you were the teacher, what would you do to

teach someone to read?

If he was a little kid and he didn't know...like my

Perceive themselves as successful readers.

They enjoy reading.

They appreciate their skills and understand that reading has a purpose.

They have positive attitudes towards reading and learning to read.

They are confident in their skills as readers.

They can articulate how to decode words.

They see school as a place to learn to read.

little sister, she don't know how to read because she is a little kid. (Mira)

How would you teach her to read?

I would teach her (Mira's sister) like a little kid just like a little baby. I teach her to read at the top and stop and sound out the letters if she don't know the word. (Mira)

What do you like most about learning to read?

I like to read with every single teacher and every single kid. (Mira)

(I directed the question to the student who had not yet answered the question)

I like learning to read. (Abby)

Do you have a favorite part about learning to read?

Abby shakes her head no.

What do you like about reading in small groups?

I think that I know that one. I like to read and do grown-up things. I really do know how to paint. I like working with you (Mira points to Ms. Laramie)

But we are talking about when you come out here to practice learning how to read.

We do that...um...we do letters and red cards and green cards. We do that all out here (Abby)

I like working with you (the teacher). (Mira)

Yea, me too, I feel like doing it again right now. Can we do it again? (Abby)

I'm sure you will practice some more later.

What don't you like about reading in small groups?

Both shake their heads no.

I like coming out here and reading. I like reading everywhere because then I can show my mom and she is very happy. (Mira)

Can express how to decode words.

States pleasure in reading.

Perceives reading as an important skill to share with others.

Enjoys small group reading interventions.

Tell me about other times that you enjoy reading.

I like reading with James and my mom. When I don't get it right my mom tells me to 'sound it out' and I can do that. Then she helps me with the words if I still don't know. I read at home and daycare books. (Mira)

(to Abby) *When do you enjoy reading?*

Um...I read at home to my mom. (Abby)

Self-confident
reader who knows
that an adult will
help her to be
successful.

<p><i>/nnn/, man.</i> Next, they repeat segmenting the word, but this time they place game markers in each box to represent the individual sounds heard. Following her lead, the students and Ms. Cheyenne each run his/her finger along the bottom of the boxes and blend the sounds into the word.</p> <p>-Ms. Cheyenne praises the students. The students are giggling and smiling. One student repeats his actions and smiles with pride after completing it for the second time.</p> <p>-Ms. Cheyenne informs the students that now they will do it on their own. This time she holds up a picture card of a baseball bat. She says, <i>This is a picture of a bat. Bat, how many sounds do you hear in the word bat?</i> The students independently segment the word verbally while using their fingers to represent each sound that they hear. Next, they place three markers in each box. Then they blend the sounds together to form the word. Ms. Cheyenne smiles and gives verbal praise. The students are smiling and giggling. The students independently complete this process for four more words. Lots of praise.</p> <p>-Then, Ms. Cheyenne gives each student a piece of paper and a pencil. She explains, <i>Now I want you to write the letter for each sound that you hear.</i> Students watch as she models this procedure. She says the word pan. Then she segments the sounds verbally and with her fingers. Next, she places three markers in the Elkonin Boxes. Lastly, she slides each marker out of a box and writes the letter for that sound on the piece of paper.</p>	<p>Shared approach</p> <p>Phoneme manipulation (isolation, segmentation, blending)</p> <p>Feedback, reinforcement, positive encouragement</p> <p>Phoneme manipulation (isolation, segmentation, blending)</p> <p>Positive learning environment</p> <p>Guided approach</p> <p>Phonics (synthetic, invented spelling)</p> <p>Modeled approach</p> <p>Phoneme manipulation (isolation, segmentation, blending)</p>
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<p>-The students and Ms. Cheyenne complete this process together two more times. The students now complete the process independently for three more three phoneme words while Ms. Cheyenne monitors.</p> <p>During the independent work, one student attempts to write the word without segmenting it. Ms. Cheyenne reminds him that today they are practicing hearing sounds so she wants him to listen for the sounds first.</p> <p>-Ms. Cheyenne reminds the students to use this strategy when they are writing in their journals. She tells them that they may go back to their seats and complete their journal entry.</p>	<p>Shared approach</p> <p>Guided approach</p> <p>Teacher monitoring</p> <p>She told me later that this student has difficulty with invented spelling.</p> <p>Positive, encouraging interactions</p> <p>Connects intervention lesson to whole group instruction</p>
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