Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions About Reading Instruction of Students Identified with a Reading Disability in the Context of Making Adequate Yearly Progress

By

Cheryl G W Orcutt

Bachelor of Arts, University of New Hampshire, 1970

Master of Education, University of Massachusetts, 1975

Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study, Plymouth State University, 2009

Dissertation

Submitted to New England College in Partial Fulfillment of

Requirements for the Degree of

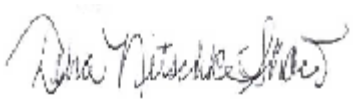
Doctorate of Education

May, 2014

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Dissertation Chair

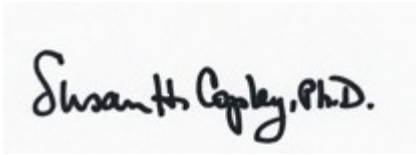


Debra Nitschke-Shaw, Ph.D., Professor of Education

NEC Reader

Susan Redditt, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Education

Outside Reader



Susan Copley, Ph.D., Executive Director of New Hampshire Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NHASCD)

Date May 17, 2014

Table of Contents

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, whose philosophy of life was instilled in me from birth. Work your hardest, do your best, and if it's meant to be it will turn out. In a time when women were not "allowed" or "encouraged" to invade the bastions of the professional world held primarily by the male gender, my mother never acknowledged the glass ceiling. She gave me the strength and innate confidence to know that I could succeed.

My father made my degree possible. I still miss hearing his messages on my answering machine: "It's just your old faaaaather checkin' in. I know you're working and I don't want to disturb you. I just wanted to tell you I'm thinking about you and I'm so proud of you. Love ya." And now, I just wish I had picked up the phone the last time I heard him leave that message.

My Dad's encouragement and help have meant everything to me. I know he and Mom will be there looking down (and not up, I hope) on Graduation Day. When I finally found my calling in life, they were so proud of my work with children with dyslexia. How could I miss- the child of two natural-born teachers albeit from different walks of life. My parents' pictures have hung across from my computer all during this long journey, and I am certain they know that this is a chapter that is ending in my life just as another is beginning.

Acknowledgements

The journey to a doctoral degree is very long and hard. There are many twists and turns, sometimes life intervenes, and unless there is someone who is there to guide you to the end, it is easy to lose your way. My chairman, Dr. Nitschke-Shaw, has been that steadfast guide for me, always demanding more of me than I thought I had to give. In the end you were right Debra.

To Dr. Susan Copley, my long time mentor and friend, who has probably read and assimilated every worthwhile book or article in the field of education. Thank you for your support, for being a member of my committee, and for opening my thinking up to wider pathways and new horizons.

To Betty and Frank, my oldest friends, who always had a suggestion and an ear to lend when I needed it the most. Your depth and breadth of experience as lifetime educators and your willingness to dialogue with me often helped me think out of the box, but always with that sense of humor that kept everything in perspective.

To Sarah, my partner in crime who was always up for an unorthodox class presentation. If we had not been making this journey together, I would surely have fallen by the wayside. Over the mountains and down into the valleys, our trials and tribulations along the way were assuaged by their sharing, our laughter, and reminding each other that the process will work.

List Of Tables

Abstract

This mixed method study examines teachers' and administrators' perceptions of what contributes to the growth of the students in the educational disabilities subgroup in reading within the context of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandated by NCLB in New Hampshire until June, 2013. This study researches effective reading instruction for students identified with reading disabilities, and the factors within a school that support it, that help that group become proficient in reading. Using the New England Common Assessment Program and AYP data as criteria, four schools that had made AYP in 2011 and 2012 were selected. Participants were 68 special education and regular education teachers and five administrators. Data were collected by 15 initial interviews with special educators, administrators, and reading specialists. Fifty-three classroom teachers were then surveyed. QSR NVivo analyzed qualitative data while quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS software. Analysis yielded six key factors: highly trained teachers, high expectations of success, what the district provides both in resources and organization, collaboration/communication, what to do when students don't make progress, and delivery of instruction. The study yielded a list of the most used direct instruction programs, while small group instruction in the classroom or resource room was the preferred method of instructional delivery. A framework for decision-making was suggested, which included core curriculum, programs, time x intensity, progress monitoring, and tuning-up (CPTPT).

Key Words: reading instruction, students with disabilities, elementary education, Response to Intervention.

Introduction

Based on my experience as a teacher, I believe that at this very moment in almost every classroom and surely in every school and every district across our great land, there are students who will never receive the key to the golden door of opportunity. Just picture a five-year-old boy, perhaps your child or grandchild, all fresh-faced and eager to start school, hanging on his kindergarten teacher's every word, and almost caressing those beautiful books with the enticing purple dinosaurs and big red trucks. Danny is anxious to learn what all those squiggly black lines mean and how his teacher can make sense of them as she magically transforms them into a story.

Now let's turn the clock forward, and the same child sits in a second grade classroom, but now his eagerness is less apparent, as he looks around at his classmates who are able to work independently on the math assignment. But not Danny; he has to wait for someone to read the directions and the problems to him. As the clock spins rapidly, Danny is in fourth grade, and it is now silent reading time. While his classmates read anything from Magic Tree House books to Harry Potter, he is relegated to little phonics readers. He sees the difference and even worse feels the difference, and in an effort to hide it becomes either the class clown or the class disrupter. As Danny goes through middle school, he has long given up the idea that he too will learn to read and be able to participate in the kind of literature and opportunities available to his friends. He becomes more isolated from his peer group, and in a need to feel good about himself, experiments with high risk behavior and illegal substances. The more he says he doesn't care, the more we know his bravado is a façade born of frustration and disappointment, and he begins to take on the persona of a forlorn figure. Danny will probably attend high

school under protest but by then the soul destroying failure is deeply ingrained, and by the time Danny reaches the age of 18, his public school career will probably come to a checkered end. If we dare to spin the clock forward one last time, we could very well see Danny in an orange jumpsuit behind cold gray steel bars, where he joins a population that is 85% functionally illiterate if he is still a juvenile and more than 60% if he is an adult (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). For a select few like Winston Churchill or Henry Winkler, there are other paths. But for some like Danny there are not.

Our hearts break for him, and we wonder why all of this could have gone so terribly wrong. If Danny is your child, or grandchild, or sibling, should you be saddened by the fact that it could have been avoided or saddened by the limitation of his options? I personally wonder where it all went wrong, and where the cumulative failure at least partially on public education's part finally tipped the scales against the possibility of the golden key inscribed with "Danny."

If you were Danny's parent and he had been identified by the school system as having an educational disability and was in need of specialized instruction in reading, you would have a reasonable expectation that Danny would learn to read (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2009). This is the reason in part for the existence of special education. Somehow Danny slipped through the cracks, along with tens of thousands of other students.

The Problem

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) represents the notion of accountability for all students to make reasonable progress in public education. Accountability to the American people is a concept that is over 150 years old (Kober, 2007). It is one of the

most important issues in education today, and the debate around how to ensure a high level of educational outcomes for all students shapes federal legislation, policies at all levels, curriculum, and schools (Kober, 2007). "However, the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 has most surely and markedly changed the direction of educational accountability for the nation's public school districts, public schools, and states" (ASR-CAS Joint Study Group on Adequate Yearly Progress, 2002). The intent and purpose of Title I of The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is as follows:

> The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to attain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. This purpose can be accomplished by... holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education. (P.L. 107-110 "No Child Left behind Act of 2001," Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Section 1001, Statement of Purpose)

While NCLB demands accountability for all students, it is also important to consider The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. Students with disabilities must meet the requirements of both of these laws to make AYP. Not only do these students need to meet the same expectations as their nondisabled peers, they also need to learn the same academic content (Roach & Elliott, 2009).

Fuchs and Fuchs (2009) suggest that the average student with learning disabilities, upon reaching the secondary level, is three and four tenths years below grade level in reading (p. 60). Using data from the United States Department of Education, Samuels (2014) discusses the disparities in high school graduation rates. In New Hampshire in the class of 2011-2012, 86% of regular education students graduated, while 70% of students with disabilities graduated. In Mississippi, the case is even stronger, with 75% of regular education students graduating and 32% of students with disabilities graduating (Samuels, 2014). In *Education Week*, May, 2011, Michelle McNeill stated that the number of schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress nationally rose from 33% in 2009 to 38% in 2010, according to data from the Center on Education Policy. In 2012 in New Hampshire, according to Commissioner of Education Virginia Barry, 70% of schools and 65% of districts failed to make AYP (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2012). This also brought the number of schools designated as a School in Need of Improvement (SINI) to 71% in this state, while 63% of districts have been designated a District in Need of Improvement (DINI) *loc. cit*. Had it not been for the granting of a waiver discussed below, Governor Hassan stated the number of failing schools would have increased to 75% (Hassan, 2013).

The requirements for a school to make AYP are clear. All subgroups, including the educational disability subgroup, must make AYP in order for the entire school to make AYP. However, in June of 2013, the State of New Hampshire received a flexibility waiver under the No Child Left Behind Law, which is operative through the end of the 2014-2015 school year, at which time the state may apply for an extension. Even though schools will no longer be designated as SINI and the term AYP will not be used, there

will continue to be "rigorous and comprehensive plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction" (Duncan, 2013). It would thus seem worthwhile to examine the instruction provided to students with reading disabilities in schools where these students have indeed consistently made AYP through the last year, 2012, in which it was calculated.

Purpose and Methodology of the Study

This study examines teachers' and administrators' perceptions of reading instruction which has allowed schools to make AYP, meaning that students became proficient readers, in their educational disability subgroups. Participants included regular education teachers, special educators, reading specialists, and administrators in four schools in New Hampshire. Three of the schools were chosen on the basis of achieving AYP in 2011 and 2012. The fourth school was chosen as a school that had been designated a SINI school and was able to successfully exit that status, subsequently being named in 2013 to the Commissioner's Circle of Excellence. Schools receiving this honor are recognized as schools that aspire to excellence by being innovative in service to children. Administrators, special educators, and reading specialists in the first three schools participated in structured interviews. Interviews were coded using QSR NVivo (see Appendix I Glossary) qualitative software to inform a survey to which regular education teachers in those three buildings responded. The same survey was then completed by regular education teachers, reading specialists, and special education teachers in the fourth school where interviews were not conducted. Survey data were analyzed using SPSS quantitative software.

Through case study and cross-case analysis methods, this researcher studied those groups' perceptions about reading instruction in the hopes of finding specific links between a particular constellation of instructional practices and students with reading disabilities who have become proficient readers. The results of this study will advance our knowledge in this area by suggesting how other educators may be able to make decisions and changes in the instruction of reading for students with disabilities so that these students may become proficient and continue to make consistent progress.

Significance of the Study

While there are existing studies about factors that contribute to progress in reading in the educational disability subgroup (Fuchs, Fuchs, Craddock, Hollenbeck, Hamlett, & Schatschneider, 2008 in Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; Torgeson, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1998; Blachman, Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Clonan, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004), very little information exists which directly focuses on the kinds of reading instruction provided by regular education as well as special education teachers to students with reading disabilities who become proficient readers. Under the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the classroom teacher is the default setting, which places more responsibility on regular education. This is consistent with the current emphasis on inclusion, and even more reason to include classroom as well as special education teachers and administrators in examining perceptions of best practices.

Additionally, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), along with the push for inclusion, will change reading instruction in the classroom for students with disabilities. According to Gallimore and Hiebert (2014), "CCSS seeks to transform the way teachers and students interact in the classroom" (p.2). Gallimore and Hiebert

(2014) add that the pace of instruction may leave some students behind, or at the very least lack deep mastery. This study examines practices that work in helping students with disabilities become proficient in reading, and this information will be important as we move forward implementing the CCSS.

This research was conducted in a very select group of New Hampshire schools that had achieved AYP in reading for 2011 and 2012. McLaughlin, Malmgren, and Nolet (2006) discuss the disaggregation of data for the subgroup of students with disabilities agreeing that it has made information public that was not available prior to NCLB. However, they also state "exactly what the increases in performance are tied to is the critical question" (p. 54). McLaughlin et al. (2006) hope researchers can demonstrate that, over time, increases in performance are due to access to the curriculum and better interventions (p. 55).

The findings of a 2002 study by Caron and McLaughlin suggest capacity-building themes of high performing schools would include "formal communication methods, shared leadership, and collaborative decision making" (p. 308). Caron and McLaughlin also suggest that further research on teacher preparation and successful schools might help to identify excellent collaborative practices that can become measurable indicators (2002, p. 311). Additionally, Caron and McLaughlin believe that the link between collaborative practices and student outcomes should be confirmed in order to transform them into school improvement strategies (p. 311). In support of this theme, Waldron and McLeskey (2010) suggest that research should explore a number of issues to enact comprehensive school reform, including the manner in which collaborative school cultures develop and how this affects overall school improvement.

Researchers believe the previously discussed constructs will ultimately translate to what makes a difference for children with reading disabilities. While on one hand this study addresses the challenges of achieving proficiency in reading for children in the educational disability subgroup, its implications reach much deeper than that. I believe this study has the potential to benefit all teachers and students by using the findings to improve teaching and learning for all children, and to significantly improve the life and career opportunities for children with reading disabilities, in part because they have become proficient readers.

Literature Review

Accountability and Adequate Yearly Progress

The ongoing discussion about accountability has brought about a significant change in the landscape of education in general and has extended to the question of equity. Scheurich, Skrla, and Johnson (2003) state "... educational accountability has become the primary public space in which most of the discussion about ... inequities in public education is now occurring" (p. 15). This statement came about largely due to the 2002 reauthorization of Title I of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), or The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB, 2002). NCLB's goal is that every child in public education, kindergarten through grade 12, will attain proficiency in reading, science, and mathematics by 2014. Ravitch (2012) suggests that legislators wished to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and disabled students and their peers, hence the creation of NCLB. Although the federal government established the goal, individual states were to "establish challenging standards, implement assessments that measure student performance against the standards, and hold schools and school systems accountable for achievement of all students in the US public education system" (McLaughlin & Rhim, 2007, p. 27). This was addressed in a paper authored by the ASR-CAS Joint Study Group on Adequate Yearly Progress (2002), reiterating AYP's essential components:

- an aligned system of academic content standards, academic student achievement standards, and assessments of student performance;
- annual assessments of student progress in attaining the student academic achievement standards;

- school, district, and state accountability decisions based on the performance of specific subgroups of students designed to ensure that all students are proficient in reading or language arts and mathematics by 2013-14; and
- a system of rewards and required, progressive sanctions to encourage and support high and low-performing schools. (p. 11)

Schools were required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward goals established by each state for all students including subgroups such as those with educational disabilities, economic disadvantages, or limited English proficiency. These subgroups were created by NCLB in response to a demand from the public for equal rights, opportunities, and accountability for students with special education needs. However, Forte (2010) says that the very nature of NCLB will keep low performing students from progressing. Darling-Hammond (2007) states it succinctly when she writes "In Alice in Wonderland fashion, the law assigns the students to special subgroups because they do not meet the proficiency standard, and they are removed from the subgroup as they catch up so it is impossible for the subgroups ever to be 100% proficient" (p. 14).

NCLB, unlike its predecessors such as ESEA, has enforceable, mandatory aversive consequences if schools do not make AYP for two consecutive years. At that point they are designated a School in Need of Improvement (SINI), and sanctions are implemented including school choice, which allows parents to enroll their child in a school in the same district not designated as SINI. Other sanctions include supplemental education services paid for through Title I funds, and eventually school reorganization.

A school becomes a SINI school when it does not meet the target score in either mathematics or reading for two consecutive years. Exiting from this designation requires the school to make AYP in the failed area for two consecutive years. Additionally, a district becomes a District in Need of Improvement (DINI) when it misses AYP in the same area at both elementary and high school levels for two consecutive years (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2012).

The target index score, or the required percent proficiency, has remained the same for the last three years at 91, but in 2012-2013 it will advance four points to 95 instead of the previous increase of two points. In 2013-2014, it will be 100, meaning that the federal government expects 100% of students to test as at least proficient in Reading and Mathematics (see Table 1: New Hampshire Index Targets)

Table 1.1: New Hampshire Index Targets

New Hampshire Index Targets
Starting Points and Intermediate Targets

Grades 3-8 Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)
Based on 2005-2006 baseline data

Grades 3-8	Index Targets	
	Reading	Mathematics
Starting Point (2005-2006)	82	76
2006-2007	82	76
2007-2008	86	82
2008-2009	86	82
2009-2010	91	88
2010-2011	91	88
2011-2012	91	88
2012-2013	95	94
2013-2014	100	100

(New Hampshire Department of Education, 2012, para. 1)

There are differing opinions, however, including Duran (2005) who believes that interpretations and results of assessments selected by the states "may be invalid, unreliable, ungeneralizable, and of little value or utility in providing the type of information that is needed in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and achievement" (p. 76). Forte (2010) agrees with Duran (2005), but goes further to add that the AYP algorithm calculates the proficiency level in reference to the indexed target score each year. However, it does not indicate "whether a school is effective in supporting student learning and progress at an appropriate rate or if it is becoming more effective in supporting student learning and progress over time" (p. 77). Others such as Darling-Hammond (2012) and Ravitch (2010) say that NCLB is looking at the wrong constructs to improve education. Instead of looking at test scores, we should be looking at how teachers teach and how students learn. The punitive measures of NCLB are only making matters worse for underachieving schools and students (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ravitch, 2010).

The law provides that every two years the percentage of proficient students in a school must increase to federally determined levels, and that students in all five subgroups, i.e. educational disability, economically disadvantaged, non or limited English proficient, non-Hispanic/Latino, or Hispanic/Latino, must meet the specified index target. Because the educational disability subgroup is now disaggregated from the whole group, educators can view students' levels of proficiency in reference to AYP for that group as well as the entire school.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) Waiver

In the fall of 2011, the United States Department of Education offered all states the opportunity to request flexibility from certain requirements of ESEA, more commonly referred to as NCLB. Since the US Congress has been unable to agree on a reauthorization of NCLB, which is long overdue, states have been offered a possibility of a waiver for certain provisions of NCLB such as the necessity of making AYP and the contingent corrective measures. Granting of a waiver would be based on innovative thinking and a strong commitment to improving achievement for all students. In the application for a waiver, districts must articulate four principles:

1. Demonstrate that it has college and career ready expectations for all students;
2. Develop and demonstrate that it has a high quality plan to implement a system differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for all title I districts and schools in the state;
3. Commitment to developing, adopting, piloting, and implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that support student achievement; and
4. Provide an assurance that it will evaluate and revise its administrative requirements to reduce duplication and unnecessary burden on districts and schools. (Duncan, 2013, par. 3)

With the specter of an overwhelming majority of New Hampshire schools, perhaps 75% (Hassan, 2013), being named SINI schools looming on the horizon, the State of New Hampshire applied for and eventually received a waiver in June, 2013. "New Hampshire has created a system of measuring and documenting the performance of

student subgroups that maximizes the validity of the accountability system by holding more schools accountable for subgroup performance than would be the case under a traditional NCLB definition of subgroups" (ESEA Waiver, 2013, p. 59). Page 57 of the waiver also states “The state will put in place Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) by which the state will increase targets in annual equal increments toward a goal of reducing by half the percentage of students in the ‘all students’ group and in each subgroup who are not proficient within six years” (ESEA Waiver, 2013, p. 57). New Hampshire will add the new AMO results to this report by the spring of 2014 so that educators and families will have all of their data in one place and indicate “Priority,” “Focus,” or “Reward” status in lieu of AYP requirements.

Under NCLB every school in the United States must attain a single arbitrary score without regard for actual individual school conditions. New Hampshire's new system will allow the state to calculate AMOs for each subgroup in each school based on the 2011-2012 achievement of the student groups in each school. The ESEA Waiver explains that this new system also allows for the establishment of three categories of schools based on meeting the growth criteria in each of four quartiles of average achievement. It goes on to present the three new identifications for schools:

- Reward schools are those schools that meet the growth criteria in all four quartiles.
- Priority schools are identified as the lowest 5% in overall mathematics in reading achievement of Title I participating schools. Schools already identified as School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools are also labeled as Priority Schools.

- Focus Schools are identified as having the largest achievement gap using an "equity index" (ESEA Waiver, 2013, pp. 66-80).

Regular Education Students and AYP

The importance and ramifications of accountability for all students, discussed above, lead us to the importance of reading and its acquisition. Reading as a predictor of future success can be seen in a study done by Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynn at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (2010) using a focus group in Chicago Public schools. Lesnick et al. (2010) found that 45% of students reading below grade level in third grade graduated from high school, as opposed to 60% on grade level readers and 80% of above grade level readers (p. 19). The study also determined that third grade reading scores are a strong predictor of eighth grade reading success, in turn a predictor for ninth-grade academic success, and this in turn for high school graduation and college attendance (Lesnick et al., 2010, p. 21).

In the State of New Hampshire, 53.6%, or 17,945, of the students in elementary/middle schools who are not proficient are not assigned to the educational disability subgroup (State of New Hampshire, 2012). They may, however, be assigned to one or more other subgroups such as Economically Disadvantaged (45.9%), Non-Hispanic/ Latino (90.7%), Non- or Limited English Proficiency (7.5%), or White (84.5%) (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2012). Krieg and Storer (2006) suggest that the differences in students' test scores "may be due to factors beyond the control of school policies such as race, migrant status, native language, presence of a computer at home, and gender" (p. 566). These factors cannot be easily ignored and schools may not be able to change them, but it is the responsibility of schools to teach all children to read

nonetheless. This is one of the factors that the New Hampshire Department of Education addressed in its waiver application when it stated it "… is committed to improving educational outcomes for all students…These (AMOs) will allow the state to differentiate levels of support for schools by building networks of technical assistance, knowledge sharing, and innovation" (ESEA Waiver, 2013, p. 56).

Typical Reading Acquisition and Instruction Recommendations

While the previous discussion demonstrates the necessity for all students to make growth in reading, the following paragraphs will address reading more specifically. Researchers such as Shaywitz, Galaburda, and Fischer (cited in Sousa, 2011) have shown that there are three neural systems that must work together for success in reading. These systems are the visual processing system, the auditory processing system, and the frontal lobe, which provides meaning (Sousa, 2011). In order for these neural systems to integrate, specific skills or areas must be developed. The skills that are proposed by Sousa (2011) are identical to those proposed by The Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP). In 2000 the NRP recommended five primary areas of reading instruction as the foundation of any reading program. These areas include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency using research-based methods for teaching reading. This is confirmed by the update of the Put Reading First report in 2010, which also included not only information drawn from the NRP report, but in each section "defines the skill, reviews the evidence for research, suggests implications for classroom instruction, describes proven strategies for teaching reading skills, and addresses frequently asked questions" (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2010, p. 2).

The NRP recommends direct systematic instruction in the alphabetic system in order to learn how to apply this for reading and spelling, as well as multiple means of presenting vocabulary and comprehension instruction at least until grade two or as needed. The 2000 NRP report helped to bring the emphasis on decoding and structured direct instruction of reading back into popularity. Starting in the 1980s whole language, which "constructs meaning through the written word and then expresses the meaning through writing" (Marshall, 2012, p. 2), was a widespread philosophy. With the growing body of knowledge on how the brain learns, educators are beginning to understand that one single approach is insufficient (Marshall, 2012, p. 2.). Since 2000, balanced literacy instruction which embraces both phonics and whole language has been encouraged. This means that "excellent literacy instruction is balanced with respect to skills and holistic components" (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002, p. 1). There are five components within the balanced literacy philosophy, which include the read-aloud, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and word study (Marshall, 2012, p. 2.). Balanced literacy addresses the NRP recommendations, the work of researchers such as Pinnell and Fountas (2009), and increasingly the Common Core State Standards (2009).

The K-12 Common Core State Standards for literacy and mathematics were developed through a joint project of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The [NH] State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards at their July 8, 2010 meeting. The Board stated they were … "committing to a thoughtful, orderly transition process for implementation and assessment to ensure that all New Hampshire

students experience a successful and productive future…" (NHDOE webpage, 2012, para 1).

Many of the largest textbook publishers have created core reading programs that encompass the NRP's recommendations to meet the requirement for research-based instruction. Core reading programs are also described by publishers as increasingly based on the Common Core State Standards (2009). The NRP suggests that students should begin school by being exposed to research-based programs appropriate to meet individuals' needs. Moats (1997) suggests that "most reading failure is preventable and most high-risk students can improve their reading and writing achievement with expert instruction… teachers who use proven methods and who are given high-quality professional development can teach all but 2 to 5% of children to read" (p. 1).

Reading Acquisition of Students with Disabilities and Instructional Recommendations

Much of the above discussion can be applied to students with disabilities. Literacy acquisition can begin in the home through exposure to print and read-alouds, and in pre-school programs for those who attend one. Sousa (2011) states "the degree to which children experienced literacy at home determines whether they begin school not just able to learn to read, but are also ready to learn to read" (p. 195). All children, unless they already have an Individualized Education Plan that states otherwise, either continue or start formal reading instruction in kindergarten. Depending on the district and teacher, a phonics-based, a whole language, or a balanced approach to reading instruction may be used. Studies have been conducted with first graders measuring "Child x Instruction interactions for individualizing instruction" (McDonald et al., 2009). McDonald et al.

suggest that their research demonstrates that the amount of instructional time is a significant factor in a child's success in reading (p. 78). Torgeson, Wagner, & Rashotte (1997) agree with McDonald et al. that when children receive the appropriate type and amount of instruction, the larger their literacy skill growth becomes.

Foorman and Moats (2004) indicate that as research-based practices become more embedded in early reading instruction, local, state, and national reading initiatives are focusing on prevention and early intervention. The National Research Council's *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) concluded that reading difficulties are best prevented by ensuring that children receive phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency in reading and writing in the regular classroom. In 2000, the NRP report laid down the basis for beginning reading instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction (National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Foorman & Moats, 2004). These two concepts are the first two of a total of five, but unlike the NRC report, writing is not addressed in the NRP report.

We can examine the reading component skill profile of struggling readers. Moats and Foorman (1997) suggest that reading "is not natural for many individuals" and students are dependent on skilled, knowledgeable teachers to become proficient readers (p. 187). Sousa (2011) states that "there are no areas of the brain that specialize in reading" (p. 193). Hock, Brasseur, Deshler, Catts, Marquis, Mark, & Stribling (2009) describe several studies with struggling readers where the characteristics of these readers were revealed including the inability to use sound-letter correspondence to decode words, problems with phonological representations, and lack of automaticity in recognizing

individual words. Studies also revealed difficulties with comprehension, partially due to weaknesses in word identification and vocabulary. Weak skills in comprehension and vocabulary became particularly evident as students went from elementary to middle school (Hock et al., 2009).

As a teacher trained and experienced in the special education process, I have observed that once students begin to encounter difficulties in the process of learning to read, have received remediation, and undergo evaluation and subsequent identification with a specific learning disability in reading, their needs become more specifically delineated. Dehaene (2009) states "one must try to picture the state in which it [the brain] is stuck, in order to understand how it interprets the incoming signals and identify which interventions will bring it back to the desired state" (p. 232). This example provides us with a brain-based research explanation of Sousa's integration of neural systems. The reading instruction of students with learning disabilities particularly should still be grounded in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency from the NRP. Torgeson et al. suggests that when these constructs are consistently applied to the reading instruction of students with reading disabilities, particularly phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in the beginning, the rate of reading growth for these students can significantly improve (Torgeson et al., 1997).

In contrast to the NRP report, Newkirk (2009 & 2011) offers a dissenting voice and takes issue with the report for not including independent reading or writing. Additionally, Newkirk feels the report is "an incomplete set of parts that does not add up to a coherent cultural practice" (2009, p. 1). He is concerned that reading cannot be reduced to a set of variables in reading and science… literacy is a meaningful invested

activity" (Newkirk, 2009, p. 2). In his 2011 book, *The Art of Slow Reading: Six Time-Honored Practices for Engagement*, Newkirk's six practices include performing, memorizing, centering, problem finding, reading like a writer, and elaborating. Holding a position more in the middle between Newkirk and the NRP report are the authors Fountas and Pinnell (2009), who do not necessarily disagree with the NRP's five constructs, but lean in Newkirk's direction. "The intervention lesson structure should include phonics principles, built systematically, as well as emphasis on reading texts and writing about reading" (p. 499). In their 15 keys to successful intervention design, the authors emphasize students' connections to classroom instruction and homes in addition to using high-quality texts and embedded professional development.

For students with reading disabilities, the most common form of disability is caused by difficulties in phonological processing which may also affect the ability to retrieve phonological information from long-term memory in a rapid fashion (Wolf, 1996; Torgeson, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1997). Research hasn't yet suggested what level of development of phonetic reading ability, or reading by decoding sounds, will lead to orthographic reading ability, which is automatic visual recognition. Dehaene (2009) suggests that it is known that word length becomes less important as the number of times a word is encountered becomes more important (p. 204). Visual recognition must be accurate and fluent so that mental energy and processing is freed up to construct meaning from the text (Pressley et al., 2002, p. 9). One of the dangers for lower performing students is that they could spend their entire school careers learning to decode and perhaps answer low-level questions, but never get to that higher-level thinking. In practice this means lowered expectations and limited instructional focus which then leads

to lower achievement (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael in Morrow & Gambrell, Ed., p. 43).

Studies indicate evidence that one-to-one, individualized instruction, beginning with phonological processing with the proper time and intensity, is a significant factor in helping struggling readers become proficient (Foorman & Moats, 2004; Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Moats, 2009; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011; Allington, 2012). This is also echoed by Adlof, Perfetti, and Catts (2011), who say that research has proven that "high-quality instruction in word reading explicitly and systematically teaches phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and letter-sound correspondence" (in Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., 2011, p. 206). Research also shows that automatic word recognition is facilitated by abundant practice (Adlof et al., 2011, p.206).

Identification for Specific Learning Disability

When students receive the kind of instruction discussed above but still do not learn to read, an educational disability may be suspected. In 2004 the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) was reauthorized to be the Individuals With Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA). Although IDEIA provides federal guidelines for the identification of disabilities effective in 2005, each state has additional guidelines and individual interpretations of federal statutes for how a student becomes eligible for special education services. These differ from state to state; however, there is agreement that one important criterion for identification has changed. As of 2004, the federal statutes now forbid use of a severe discrepancy between students' intellectual ability and their academic achievement. They also decree that the state must ensure that "underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due

to lack of appropriate instruction…and that…the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings delivered by qualified personnel"(34 CFR 300.309).

Once students are designated as eligible for special education services, they become members of the educational disability subgroup in the accountability system created by NCLB. In the State of New Hampshire, 45.9% of students failing to make AYP are members of the Educational Disability subgroup (New Hampshire State Department of Education, 2012). Using a single measure of accountability, New Hampshire scores for the last three years have shown a loss of one point on the index target score, and is now 19.5 points from the desired index score of 91 (New Hampshire State Department of Education, 2012). Although these scores will be recalculated in a different way with the granting of the ESEA Waiver, progress by students with disabilities will be even more closely scrutinized albeit individualized from school to school in the state.

School Characteristics That Promote Success for All Students

In 2006, the Florida Center for Reading Research (fcrr.org) published a summary of qualities of ten schools whose students' rate of growth in reading and mathematics surpassed similar schools. The seven characteristics include the following: "Strong leadership; positive belief in teacher dedication; data utilization and analysis; effective scheduling; professional development; scientifically-based intervention programs; parent involvement" (Moats, 2009, p. 382). Kober (2007) would seem to agree on several points when she suggests reasons for failure: poor leadership, ineffective teaching,

misplaced priorities, inadequate funding, lack of community support, or communities strained by poverty and social dysfunction (p. 15).

Prior to 2000 researchers added high expectations, strong accountability, and a safe, orderly, positive environment to the above list (Hoffman, as cited in Foorman & Moats, 2004; Puma, Darwen, Price, Ricciuti, Thompson, & Vaden-Kieman as cited in Foorman & Moats, 2004). Studies also agree that methods, materials, environment, content, collaboration, and assessment involved in instruction are major factors (Voltz & Collins, 2010; Strahan, 2003). Although all of these constructs are contributing factors in general, this study investigates effective instructional interventions for students with learning disabilities in particular, through utilizing a multiple-case study.

Instructional Needs for Students with Reading Disabilities

Because IDEIA requires the same academic content to be taught to students with disabilities as their non-disabled peers, students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum via instruction which has been aligned to the curriculum. This is complex and challenging when you consider the wide range of students' abilities as well as the diversity of students' prior knowledge and experience. Roach and Elliott (2009) propose that access can be facilitated by using Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The Center for Applied Special Technology (www.cast.org) states that curriculum designed with UDL framework would include multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. According to a study by Burk, Hall, Banerjee, Chun, and Strangman (2005), designing curriculum and instructional materials using UDL principles demonstrates improved performance in students with disabilities (Roach & Elliott, 2009, p. 64). UDL focuses on creating instructional goals, methods,

materials, and assessments that are appropriate for every learner and approaches teaching and learning with flexibility to make optimal differentiation possible. It is based in neuroscience so the emphasis is on information processing, organizing and expressing information, and motivation for learning (http://www.udlcenter.org/), in contrast to the Common Core State Standards which include emphasis on subject matter and process skills, but not delivery of instruction.

Adlof, Perfetti, & Catts (2011) discuss the need for evidence-based practices to concentrate on decoding and code-based skills in primary grades, particularly in special education classrooms and in high poverty schools, since this is where the knowledge gap is the greatest (Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., p. 206). However, they also discuss the importance of language comprehension early on. This would coincide with Perfetti's Lexical Quality Hypothesis (LQH), which proposes that "word meanings can be considered the interface between word identification and comprehension" (Perfetti, 2007, p. 380). His underlying principle is that reading occurs as an integrative process going forward word by word. It is a task of combining the orthographic, phonological, and semantic representations of words. Further, Perfetti suggests that skilled readers have high-quality representations of words, whereas struggling readers have low-quality representations (Perfetti, 2007, p. 381).

Hattie (2009) takes this further and refers to a deeper level of learning, proposing that teachers can lead students to build conceptual understanding of the learning, which can then be utilized in subsequent learning. He creates the concept of three worlds of achievement modeled after Bereiter (2002), "Surface knowledge of the physical world, the thinking strategies and deeper understanding of the subjective world, and the ways in

which students construct knowledge and reality for themselves as a consequence of this surface and deep knowing and understanding" (Hattie, 2009, p. 26).

Pursuant to thinking strategies, Ritchart, Church, & Morrison (2011) suggest that "surface learning focuses on memorization of knowledge and facts, often through rote practices, whereas deep learning has a focus on developing understanding through more active and constructive processes" (p. 7). These authors promote the idea of making thinking visible. In order to facilitate this, the authors have developed a number of thinking strategies/routines for teachers to use to support students' ongoing learning across a unit, i.e. "build an arc of learning rather than to craft a single episode" (p. 50).

Additionally, Sousa & Tomlinson (2011) discuss processing of information in the brain in terms of the learning environment. When the classroom climate is relatively free of stress and fear of failure and/or humiliation, endorphins are released into the bloodstream that stimulates the frontal lobe to pass on information and engender a feeling of euphoria (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, p. 21). A negative environment, however, encourages cortisol to be released which increases anxiety and shuts down the processing of low-priority information (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, p. 22). Willis (2006) believes that it is important to present material, such as vocabulary, in such a way that the frontal lobe is not alerted to feel fear of making mistakes. This would raise the students' stress level thereby alerting the amygdala to block information from being transferred from the frontal lobe. Given a low-stress learning climate, students can and must become deeply engaged. In order for this to happen they must be motivated by a desire to delve into the power of words to communicate their message (National Research Council, 2004; Pressley, Dolezal, Raphael, Mohan, Roehrig, & Bogner, 2003). No longer are we just

dealing with the cognitive domain, but also with the affective domain (Willis, 2006, p. 58). Graves (2006) suggests that a student's investment in the learning process will be driven by how he/she feels about the usefulness of the information (p. 119). Guthrie agrees and names three powerful motivations that drive students' reading: interest, dedication, and competence (in Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 178). The following quote addresses the use of language in reading, writing, and speaking, and speaks eloquently to student investment:

> Word consciousness - and especially understanding the power of word choice-is essential for sustained vocabulary growth. Words are the currency of written language. Learning new words is an investment, and students will make the required investment to the extent that they believe the investment is worthwhile. (Judith Scott and William Nagy as cited in Graves, 2006, p. 119)

If we take note of the basic premises of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), one of these is to study less breadth of subject matter in each grade, but to study it in more depth through anchor standards across kindergarten through grade 12. In this way true understanding can be constructed by the learner (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 11). This is true for all learners, but especially true for those at risk. Allington (2012) states, "Without differentiation all day long, struggling readers have little chance of ever catching up with their more proficient peers" (p. vi). Through differentiation, we can ensure that struggling readers do not reach a roadblock with decoding problems, but are supported to engage with rich ideas as well as "continue to develop their capacity to think and reason with language" (Kamil, Pearson, Moje, & Afflerbach, Eds., 2011, p. 354).

Inclusion

The provision of all day differentiation leads us to the discussion of inclusion. There are many best practices that are used in the instruction of reading. Differentiated instruction provides an overarching concept whose goal is to provide maximized student success and growth. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) suggest that teachers who truly understand differentiated instruction will become "confident and effective leaders for and in student-focused/responsive/ differentiated classrooms" (p. 10). The objective is to present instruction in such a way that every learner's needs are met (Allyn & Goddard, 2010). Chapman (2010) designates these strategies as "student centered, based on readiness and planned with flexible grouping designs" (p. 22). This can be accomplished in scores of different ways, from delivery of instructional models to teaching to specific areas of the brain. Jensen (1995) suggested that the brain seeks to find and form patterns, and with the overabundance of new information on how the brain learns, we can target certain areas of the brain to activate it to process information in a way that it is useable and retrievable (Dehaene, 2009).

It is increasingly important that classroom instruction is grounded in research-based programs and instruction. Differentiation stems from the research-based perspective that "students will engage more fully with learning and will learn more robustly when teachers proactively plan with their differences - as well as their similarities - in mind" (Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, & Brimijoin, 2003, p. 121). The teacher attempts to create the best learning experience possible and can differentiate numerous elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile. Content, process, products, and the learning environment are areas where a

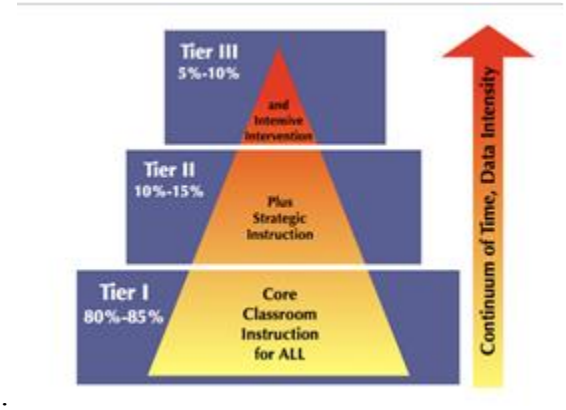
teacher may differentiate (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011) fully support this saying "there is strong evidence to suggest that struggling readers need the instructional intensity of excellent, differentiated classroom instruction and intervention instruction" (p. 29).

Response to Intervention

While differentiated instruction is important for all students, it cannot be overemphasized how particularly crucial it is for students at risk (Overturf et. al, 2013, p. 11). The legislative initiative, Response to Intervention (RTI), was initiated in 2004 with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Although RTI was brought about by special education legislation, it was meant to address learning needs and access to education for all students. It provides for systematic, focused, intensive research-based interventions within the responsibility of the regular education program (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009, p. 19).

The RTI model for interventions is a tiered system originally designed in 1970 as a continuum of environments for the delivery of special education. However, over the decades it became a means of delivering services to students before going through the special education process. Today it is generally a three-tiered pyramid, Tier I general education at the base, Tier II targeted supplemental interventions in the middle, and Tier III most intensive interventions at the top. The three-tiered model is illustrated in the figure below, Response to Intervention Continuum of Instruction (see Figure 1). This model is meant to create a unified system of intervention for all students, including regular education, at-risk, and those identified with educational disabilities (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 19).

Figure 1. Response to Intervention Continuum of Instruction



(http://learn.shorelineschools.org/spec/rti)

However, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker (2010) indicate that the situation has become more complex than initially intended by legislators. In those authors' view, there is no consensus "on basic questions about the nature or essence of RTI and its general purpose" (p. 301). Fuchs et al. maintain that there are two groups, the IDEA group and the NCLB group, who vastly differ "about the nature and purpose of RTI…and special education" (p. 301).

On the one hand, it would appear that the IDEA group sees RTI as a continuum that would promote early intervention and would lead to more valid methods of disability identification. Children move from Tier 1 to Tier II as regular progress monitoring has demonstrated that they are nonresponsive to evidence-based and generally effective instruction. Tier II is designed to promote the acquisition of new skills and building-based personnel must have specialized training. It is characterized by small homogeneous grouping, explicit instruction, and greater frequency and duration of tutoring sessions. The IDEA group proposes that if students are not ready to return to

Tier I instruction, these unresponsive students should be evaluated by multi-disciplinary teams (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 303).

On the other hand, the NCLB group sees RTI through the lens of standards-driven general education reform, whereby uniformly challenging standards are established across the board. Standards driven reform is designed to close the achievement gap between "enfranchised and disenfranchised groups" (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 303). The law in fact states that one of its goals is "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, sec. 1001).

Because the playing field will be more or less leveled by using the same standards, it is anticipated by some researchers that high incidence disabilities will disappear (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 308). McLaughlin (2006) feels children diagnosed with these are not qualitatively different from nondisabled students and do not "require vastly different and highly specialized curriculum or instruction … they differ only in the degree of underachievement and/or behavior problems" (p. 20). This same opinion is shared by Adlof, Perfetti, and Catts (2011) who state that children with word reading difficulties just "... need longer, more explicit, and more intensive instruction to increase their skills"(in Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., 2011, p. 206). The NCLB group wishes to serve all students equally in a unified system, eliminating the separateness that has traditionally existed. The following statement is made in a white paper on RTI from 2006: "General and special education, according to the NCLB group, are too often separate and …disconnected silos" (NADSE & CASE, 2006, p. 4).

The focus of this research is instruction for students with reading disabilities who will primarily be included in the 15% in Tier II and Tier III combined in the RTI pyramid. For these learners it is especially important for teachers to adjust their educational practices and "differentiate for curriculum content, instructional approaches, and assessments … (and) provide rich, stimulating, brain-friendly, productive classroom environments" (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, p. 15). However, when students don't respond in the differentiated classroom, there are additional layers, or tiers, of intervention that provide "increasing levels of intensity and specificity" (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 42).

Those increasing levels will include instruction by special educators as children fail to respond to instruction, although at which level that occurs will depend on which RTI model is being implemented. Moats (2009) emphasizes that the high-risk population, which includes students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students living in poverty, is the most dependent on excellent instruction in order to make adequate progress. The special educator will require "expertise in phonology, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, morphology, semantic organization, syntax discourse, and pragmatics" (Moats, 2009, p. 380). All teachers need to understand how and why their students are responding to instruction in order to provide appropriate interventions and supports. Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (in Gambrell & Morrow, Eds., 2011) support Moats stating "Optimal literacy teaching and learning can only be achieved when skillful, knowledgeable, and dedicated teachers are given the freedom and latitude to use their professional judgment to make instructional decisions that enable students to achieve their full literacy potential" (p. 29). Allington (in Gambrell & Morrow, Eds.,

2011) confirms this and emphasizes the importance of high-quality reading instruction as well as effective intervention for students with reading disabilities. Teachers must have specialized expertise in programs and learning theory in addition to the general education curriculum (Moats, 2009). This is echoed by Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2011), who write that researchers have identified teacher quality, not the program, as the critical factor in successful reading instruction (in Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., 2011, p. 359). "For students to learn at higher levels they will need good teaching, a strong curriculum and adequate resources" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 18).

Best Practices

Gambrell et al. (2011) refer to teachers as "visionary decision makers" (p. 19) with the ability to design instruction, an opinion that was previously expressed by Allington (2005). Allington puts forth a view of evidence-based instruction, which involves teachers making decisions using "professional wisdom integrated with the best available empirical evidence" (p. 16). This again refers to highly trained, high quality teachers who can ask questions about why a particular practice would support or change literacy instruction and increase reading achievement for students. These are best practices that can simply be explained as the most effective way to do something. The definition for best practice as defined by the Business Dictionary is "methods and techniques that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and which are used as benchmarks to strive for." (http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/ best-practice.html). In the researcher's experience, high quality teachers determine best practices in their own contexts on a daily, even hourly, basis.

Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (2011) propose ten evidence-based best practices for comprehensive literacy instruction that are generally accepted by experts in the field:

1. Create a classroom culture that fosters literacy motivation.
2. Teach reading for authentic meaning-making purposes: for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task.
3. Provide students with scaffolded instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension to promote independent reading.
4. Give students time for self-selected independent reading.
5. Provide students with high-quality literature across a wide range of genres.
6. Use multiple texts that build on prior knowledge, link concepts, and expand vocabulary.
7. Build a whole class context that emphasizes community and collaboration.
8. Balance teacher and student led discussions of texts.
9. Integrate technologies that link and expand concepts.
10. Differentiate instruction using a variety of instructionally relevant assessments. (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011, p. 21)

The above general practices are applicable to all readers in the classroom, including students with learning disabilities. Research suggests that teachers not only teach to students' strengths but also directly address students' difficulties. Decoding skills instruction is crucial, and explicit instruction may have to occur through a combination of resource and general classroom settings (Atkinson, Wilhite, Frey, & Williams, 2002, p. 159). It is generally suggested in the literature that a balanced

approach that addresses skills directly, in addition to immersing students in literature, can go far in addressing the needs of readers with learning disabilities (Atkinson et al., p. 160).

In 2006 the US Department of Education also identified characteristics of effective reading interventions. These were much more specific than Gambrell, et al.'s, and include recommendations for how, where, and what type of instruction should be delivered. The following are examples of these recommendations:

- homogeneous groups of 3 to 6 students;
- daily intervention for at least 30 minutes of intervention that addresses all five essential components of reading instruction;
- explicit and direct instruction that is engaging and fast-paced;
- immediate error feedback; and
- data-driven decision-making using ongoing assessment data to determine the intensity and duration of the reading intervention. (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009, p. 192)

Additionally, the same discussion continues as to whether interventions should be implemented in the classroom with various kinds of support and or whether they should be delivered outside of the classroom with specialized support (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009, p. 192; Atkinson, Wilhite, Frey, and Williams, 2002, p.159; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010, p. 318). This decision is impacted by the vision of RTI that educators hold as discussed above, and is likely to also have an effect on the roles of classroom teachers as well as special educators.

Research Questions

This study responds to the question "What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions of effective instructional interventions for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers?" A second question refers to what kinds of instruction are perceived as effective and how they are perceived as being delivered in order for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers. Finally, the research looks for themes and common factors in instruction that have led to the success of schools meeting AYP in reading which have surfaced in each school and are found to be shared with the other schools. The results, which go beyond instruction alone, enable this study to suggest critical steps that might be included in improvement plans for New Hampshire Priority and, most importantly, Focus schools, where there is a need to address inadequate progress of special education students in the area of reading.

Methodology

This study examines teachers' and administrators' perceptions of reading instruction which has allowed schools to make AYP, meaning that students became proficient readers in their educational disability subgroups. This mixed method study uses a case study approach involving four schools that have all made AYP in 2011 and 2012. After making the selection of case study schools, data collection utilized interviews and surveys. Qualitative data were analyzed using QSR NVivo software, while quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software (see Appendix I). Results are reported using descriptive statistics because of the sample size.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions of effective instructional interventions that contribute to students with reading disabilities becoming proficient readers?
2. What kinds of instruction are perceived as effective and how are they most effectively delivered in order for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers?
3. What are the themes and common factors in instruction which have surfaced in each school as leading to the success of schools meeting AYP in reading and are found to be shared with the other schools?

Participants

Participants in this multiple case study were principals, assistant principals, directors of special education, general education teachers, reading specialists, and special education teachers. The first set of criteria for purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) was

used to identify New Hampshire elementary schools that met the following conditions: a) elementary schools that have made AYP in reading in 2011 and 2012 and b) schools that have an educational disability subgroup. Reports were retrieved from the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) website to begin the selection process. First, the Final AYP Status for All Schools 2011 and 2012 reports were accessed. By choosing only elementary schools that had made AYP in reading in 2011 and 2012, a list of 53 schools emerged. Initially, the selection criteria specified schools that had always met AYP, but this proved to be too restrictive.

Individual school AYP reports were then accessed to ensure each had a special education subgroup, resulting in a list of 13 schools. The New Hampshire School and District Profiles on the NHDOE website were also used to compare school demographics, as outlined in Table 3.3, School Demographics 2013 – 2013. This resulted in three schools and districts in which interviews were conducted, with two backup schools also identified. The list also yielded two schools with different demographics from the first three schools but similar to each other. Initially the third school that was selected for interviews would have been a closer match in categories such as enrollment, student per capita cost, and median household income, with Schools A and B, but that school chose not to participate and one of the backup schools was then included.

The second part of the study involved surveying regular and special education teachers in schools that had been Schools in Need of Improvement (SINI) schools but had made AYP in 2011 and 2012 and had exited SINI designation. Two schools were identified and one of the two schools, School D, elected to participate in this study.

Table 3.1 History of Adequate Yearly Progress in Reading portrays a five-year history of the final participant schools in terms of AYP.

Table 3.1

History of Adequate Yearly Progress in Reading

	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009
School A	yes	Yes	yes	yes	yes
School B	yes exited SINI reading	Yes	no SINI yr 2 reading	no SINI yr 1 reading	yes
School C	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes
School D	yes Exited SINI reading	Yes	no SINI yr 2 reading	no	yes

Setting

The final selection yielded four schools in four different districts, with AYP being the first criterion. In order to have some kind of similarity to compare districts, the next selection criteria were community factors such as town population, socioeconomic status, size of district, and size of school as seen in Table 3.2 Community Demographics.

Table 3.2

Community Demographics

Community	Town population in 2012	Median household income in 2011	Median house/condominium value in 2011	Student per capita cost
District A	22,000	105,299	400,960	12,044.85
District B	7,519	108,265	343,698	16,478.35

District C				
	23,272	47,396	192,138	16,922.86
District D				
	21,379	63,221	289,089	14,753.47

Following these considerations, each school's demographics were compared in Table 3.3 School Demographics.

Table 3.3

School Demographics 2013 - 2013

School	Student per capita cost	Enrollment	% students with disabilities[a]	% SES[b]	Total teachers[c]
School A	12,044.85	505	17	7	33
School B	16,478.35	450	10	6	32
School C	16,922.86	317	18	26	37
School D	14,753.47	277	14	32	25

Note :[a]Refers to percentage of students with all disabilities. [b] Refers to percentage of students on free or reduced lunch. [c]Total Teachers is the full-time equivalent of teachers for grades 1-12. This includes subject-specific teachers at all grade levels, as well as special education and regular classroom teachers. [d]Refers to paraprofessionals but does not include occupational or speech-language therapists.

Table 3.3 School Demographics continued

School Demo-graphics	Instructional Support[d]	Grades	Student/ teacher ratio-district	Avg class size gr 1+2	Avg class size gr 3+4
School A	25	pre k-4	14.2	18.4	18.9

School B	23	pre k-4	12.1	15.8	20.9
School C	26	k-5	11.2	17.3	20.7 gr 5-19
School D	14	k-5	11.4	17	14.2 gr 5- 26.5

Note: [d]Refers to paraprofessionals only.

The final four schools are not identical in their profiles; however they share a number of factors which enable them to be compared. All four schools are located in the south central part of New Hampshire. Schools A and B are socioeconomically very similar although School A is located in a much larger town. They are also similar in enrollment, total number of teachers, instructional support, grades served, and average class size. However, School A, that has always made AYP, has a 25% lower student per capita cost. Conversely, Schools C and D have similar town populations, medial household incomes, enrollment, percent of low SES students, grades served, student-teacher ratio, and average class sizes. Schools C and D have a considerably higher percentage of low SES students than Schools A and B have.

School A

This is a statement directly from the district's website:

> [District A] has adopted an inclusive philosophy for all students with disabilities. As such, it is agreed that the primary educational environment for all students with disabilities is a regular class within the neighborhood school. Students are provided a wide variety of curriculum. Supports include, but are not limited to, special education professional consultation, direct and consultative related service support, recommended outside consultative services, individualized instruction

> which incorporates recommended adapted equipment, materials and/or curriculum, and environmental accommodations. (Philosophy, 2013, para 1)

The current principal of this school is a doctoral level administrator but historically administrators in School A have believed in providing professional development for general education teachers, reading specialists, and special educators in most of the major literacy basics recommended by the National Reading Panel (NRP) and interventions. Interventions include all Project Read programs, Rave-O, Wilson, and Orton-Gillingham as examples.

Among the four schools in which research was conducted, School A is the only one that has always made AYP and was named a Blue Ribbon school in 2012. Although this is a national program, the State of New Hampshire defines a Blue Ribbon school in this case as a school with student achievement in the top 10 percent of the state's schools as measured by their performance on state assessments (NHDOE website). The principal stated that because they have been fortunate to be successful, they feel it is their responsibility to participate in and encourage educational studies. The school welcomes professionals who may come to study various facets of its programs and organization, and are open to considering new insights this may bring. Table 3.4 School A NECAP Trends demonstrates the longevity of their academic strength.

Table 3.4 School A NECAP Trends

Student Achievement Trends Number and Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above N is the number of students enrolled during testing minus the number of state-approved nonparticipants

Grade	Content Area	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	Reading	98	95	85	96	94	86	92	89
	Mathematics	98	93	85	99	94	93	92	90
4	Reading	102	90	99	92	88	95	95	88
	Mathematics	102	93	99	86	88	100	95	93

(NH Department of Education, 2013, para. 1)

There are a total of 33 teachers and 25 instructional support staff in the pre-K - 4 building. Average class size in grades one and two is 18.4 students, and 18.9 students in grades three and four. It has 21 classrooms in the following configuration:

Preschool	3 classrooms
Kindergarten	2 classrooms
Grade 1	4 classrooms
Grade 2	3 classrooms
Grade 3	4 classrooms
Grade 4	5 classrooms

Kindergarten is a half-day program. Although this school does not have a formally organized Response to Intervention system, it does have a child study team that is a group of professionals from regular and special education, administrators, and specialists who meet regularly to discuss students who are not making progress. Positive results for students and data from interviews would indicate that the team functions efficiently and collaboratively. Service delivery in reading for at-risk students as well as students with disabilities is a combination of in and out of class remediation, based

entirely upon the needs of the students. The staff in this school is well established with a very low turn-over rate. In the district's vision statement, reference is made to high expectations, diversity, individual potential, life-long learning, productive effort, shared responsibility, and ethical behavior. It also makes reference to 21st century skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and adaptability.

School B

This statement is quoted directly from School B's website:

> The Special Education Department of School District B provides specially designed instruction and implementation on an individual basis to children with unique needs who require individualized attention or instruction to be successful. Each child is given as much access as possible to the general curriculum so that he or she can meet the educational standards that apply to all children. (Philosophy, 2013, para 1)

This school is also led by an administrator holding an Ed.D. in leadership, along with an assistant principal who holds a CAGS in leadership. The special educators and reading specialists are similar to School A's staff in terms of longevity and training and share their dedication to endeavoring to meet every child's needs. This school has a fully developed RTI system for Tiers I through III. Reading specialists and special educators provide intervention and support services to students with disabilities as well as non-identified students in Tiers II and III.

There are a total of 32 teachers and 23 instructional support staff in a pre-k - grade 4 school with 450 students. Average class size for grades one and two is 15.8 students,

and 20.9 studentsfor grades three and four. The classes are configured in the following way:

Preschool	2 classrooms
Kindergarten	3 classrooms
Grade 1	4 classrooms
Grade 2	4 classrooms
Grade 3	3 classrooms
Grade 4	6 classrooms

It has a child study team that manages the RTI system and members of the team decide in a collaborative manner how the students' academic needs will be met. In an effort to keep pace with the changing face of assessment, the district is embarking on more frequent use of Measures of Academic Progress testing as well as Aimsweb (see Appendix I) benchmarking and progress monitoring. School District B's philosophy indicates it strives to challenge students to attain their full potential across the curriculum in a supportive environment. Achievement trends are noted in Table 3.5 School B NECAP Trends.

Table 3.5.

School B NECAP Trends

Student Achievement Trends
Number and Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above
N is the number of students enrolled during testing minus the number of state-approved nonparticipants

Grade	Content Area	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	Reading	95	87	93	90	107	88	94	81

	Mathematics	95	85	93	86	107	79	94	84
4	Reading	120	78	98	80	94	94	115	83
	Mathematics	120	77	98	71	94	87	115	83

(NH Department of Education, 2013, para. 6)

School C

The school's mission statement addresses a positive, caring environment, appreciation of cultural diversity, and acknowledgement of the uniqueness and creativity of every person. School climate is specifically mentioned in terms of promoting academic growth to insure that each individual, in his or her own way, builds the confidence to meet the challenges of becoming a lifelong learner. The district's special education philosophy is based on inclusion, but delivery of services occurs both inside and outside the general education classroom.

This school is located in a small city of just over 23,000 people similar to the community in which School A is located, but the community's median income per household is less than half that of School A at $47,400. This is also true of the median house/condominium value in 2011. The enrollment is 317 students but has the largest percentage of students with disabilities at 18%. This may be impacted by the fact that School C houses two Emotional Handicap (EH) Collaborative programs for the district, including a primary program and an upper elementary program. These collaboratives also contribute to the largest number of teachers in the four schools at 37 as well as the highest number of instructional support staff, or paraprofessionals, at 26. Eight of the paraprofessionals work in the EH Collaboratives. The following is the configuration:

Kindergarten	3 classrooms
Grade 1	3 classrooms
Grade 2	3 classrooms
Grade 3	3 classrooms
Grade 4	3 classrooms
Grade 5	3 classrooms

Eighteen regular education classroom teachers teach five grade levels, with three sections at each grade level. Their teacher to student ratio is the lowest at 11.2 students/teacher. However Table 3.3 School Demographics tells us that average class size in grades one and two is 17.3 students, 20.7 students in grade four, and 19 students in grade five. Every classroom has a paraprofessional who is technically classified as a special education aide, although he/she supports any child in need of help.

School C is unique in that it has had the same principal for well over 30 years and a fairly stable staff until recently when several key educators retired. It has a loosely organized RTI structure with Tier I and II relatively clear, but no Tier III. The principal stated that he has been urged by staff to delineate Tier III in part due to the EH Collaboratives whose students, he believes, would "more than likely" be in Tier III. Table 3.6 School C NECAP Trends demonstrates School C's student achievement trends for the last four years.

Table 3.6.

School C NECAP Trends

Student Achievement Trends Number and Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above N is the number of students enrolled during testing minus the number of state-approved nonparticipants

Grade	Content Area	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	Reading	47	100	53	96	52	92	61	97
	Mathematics	47	89	53	92	52	88	63	89
4	Reading	61	93	50	84	53	92	61	90
	Mathematics	61	97	50	86	53	94	61	89
5	Reading	53	98	62	89	50	80	57	84
	Mathematics	53	98	62	87	50	84	57	86
	Writing	0		62	66	50	70	57	67

(NH Department of Education, 2013, para. 6)

School D

This school is the smallest of the four schools with an enrollment of 277. Its philosophy is expressed in a Learning Compact, which includes specific responsibilities delineated for students, parents, and teachers. The special education website states:

> In order to accomplish the mission of the School District [D] Schools "… to educate all students by challenging them to become thinking, responsible, contributing citizens who continue to learn throughout their lives …,' special education supports and teaches students by:
>
> - Offering a continuum of other instructional settings, programs, and services;
> - Working with regular teachers to implement strategies and modifications in regular education classrooms;
> - Assisting teams in defining priorities for students and their learning;
> - Using technology to make the curriculum accessible to all students; and

- Instruction, modifications, education-related therapies and other supports for identified students are provided according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and related New Hampshire and Federal laws and standards (Philosophy, 2013, para. 1).

Demographically, this school is located in a city about the same size as the cities of Schools A and C. However, at 32%, it has the highest percentage of low SES students of all four schools. This kindergarten through fifth grade school has 25 teachers with 14 instructional support staff. Sixteen classrooms are organized in the following way:

Kindergarten	3 classrooms
Grade 1	2 classrooms
Grade 2	3 classrooms
Grade 3	3 classrooms
Grade 4	3 classrooms
Grade 5	2 classrooms

School D's student teacher ratio is 11.4/1, and has experienced fluctuations in enrollment similar to the other schools in this research study. However, the class size as stated in Table 3.3 School Demographics, is 17 students in grades one and two, and 14.2 students in grades three and four, with 26.5 students in grade five. School D's young principal has led the school from being a SINI school in 2012 to exiting that status and subsequently named to the New Hampshire Commissioner's Circle of Excellence in 2013 (see Appendix I). This honor is awarded to schools and districts that aspire to excellence by being innovative in service to children. His staff is varied in age and experience, but from the responses on the survey to be discussed in Chapter Four, appear willing to move

forward to do what is best for students. The researcher's impression, gathered from the only actual interface with all of the staff in the building during a staff meeting, is that the principal seemed to understand what kind of support was needed for the task being discussed and provided the necessary leadership. However, in that meeting he encouraged the staff to make decisions about the what, how, and when in a curriculum decision. The school climate appeared comfortable, welcoming, and collaborative. This school's academic achievement is demonstrated in the Table 3.7 School D NECAP Trends.

Table 3.7.

School D NECAP Trends

Student Achievement Trends
Number and Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Above
N is the number of students enrolled during testing minus the number of state-approved nonparticipants

Grade	Content Area	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	Reading	50	88	48	92	39	92	47	96
	Mathematics	50	82	48	83	39	92	47	94
4	Reading	34	82	48	81	50	92	37	95
	Mathematics	34	79	48	81	50	80	37	97
5	Reading	44	89	34	85	51	94	53	92
	Mathematics	44	77	34	88	51	84	53	83
	Writing	0		34	79	51	73	53	77

(NH Department of Education, 2013, para. 5)

Instrumentation

The researcher designed a structured interview based on the research questions and information from an extensive literature review. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of nine questions (see Appendix C). Topics included what kinds of interventions and supports their district provided for students with disabilities, what specific programs or strategies teachers used, and what teachers do when students aren't making progress. These interviews ranged from one half hour to an hour and a half using the same protocol. The coding process yielded themes associated with this specified cohort of students becoming proficient readers and thus aiding their school in making AYP.

These themes were then used for the researcher to create a survey for general education teachers in three of the schools, A, B, and C, and all teachers in the fourth school D (see Appendix D). The survey includes a total of 40 questions and includes open-ended, multiple choice, and rank order formats. The first eight questions cover demographic information such as gender, age range, degrees, and number of years teaching. The next nine questions ask participants to rank order or identify most common practices in the delivery of reading instruction for students with disabilities in their school. Questions also address the perceptions of teachers concerning the most effective methods of instruction for students with disabilities. Questions 18 through 39 inquire into teachers' beliefs about teaching reading and used a scale of 1 to 5, strongly disagree being one to strongly agree being five. The last question asks teachers to rate needs of students with disabilities on a scale of always, usually, sometimes, and never.

Data Collection

Permission to conduct this research was obtained through the individual Superintendents' offices as well as from principals and teachers who were interviewed (see Appendix A). Initial contact was made with administrators by sending a letter of introduction followed by a phone call. Principals facilitated getting letters of introduction to teachers. Principals identified and set up interviews with special educators and reading specialists in Schools A and B. Interviews with special educators in School C were set up directly with them by the researcher, as well as the remainder of administrators who elected to participate in the study. Before each interview the consent form was explained and signed. Interviews were stored on the digital recorder, transferred to a computer, stored on the hard drive, and saved on two flash drives kept in different locations. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. A copy of the transcription was emailed to each interviewee to check for inaccuracies or changes and there were no requests for edits.

The survey phase utilized paper and pencil surveys. During the interview process, interviewees were asked whether they thought their colleagues would prefer an electronic or a paper and pencil survey. Overwhelmingly the response was paper since teachers could do it anywhere at any time. Once surveys were constructed from interview data, they were personally delivered to each of the three buildings where interviews had been completed, with written instructions to the principals to hand them out to regular education teachers.

Consent forms were attached to all surveys. To ensure anonymity of participants but still be easily accessed by this researcher if needed, every survey had a separate set of directions numbered with the same number as the survey. The participant kept the

directions with his/her number on it. Because the return of surveys on the first attempt was insufficient, a second round was tried. The return rate for School A in total was 79%, School B was 47%, School C was 30%, and School D was 100%. In School D the principal invited me to come to a staff meeting and gave me time at the end for all staff to fill out the survey since interviews were not being conducted in that building. Every teacher completed the survey and turned it in before I left the building.

Qualitative Data Analysis

These case studies are a type of "cross-case comparison" (Lichtman, 2011). "Cross-case analysis is a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences in the activities and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies" (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p. 1). Data quality was ensured by considering "informants' knowledgeability, subjectivities, and candor" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 206).

QSR NVivo software (see Appendix I) was used to manage the data to organize and keep track of interview files, field notes, and open-ended responses on the surveys. Initial coding was also done with QSR NVivo. In this process patterns, categories, and themes were identified from the ground up by "organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). Partially through analytic memo writing (see Appendix I) in the software, a comprehensive set of themes formed by going back and forth between the themes and the database.

Initially, the researcher analyzed data from the interviews with special educators and reading specialists in the three schools. Secondly, data were examined searching for themes in the surveys from general education teachers in these schools. Thirdly, final

patterns that emerged in the first three schools were then compared with those from the fourth school to look for overarching themes and to validate the themes perceived as necessary to meet AYP. Triangulation of the data established credibility through using multiple sources, including school, state, and town statistics, individual interviews, and a survey.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Information from surveys with the exception of open-ended questions was analyzed using the SPSS predictive analytic software (see Appendix I). Because of the small sampling size generalizability is limited and percentages are not reported. All data from the 40 questions of the 53 surveys were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet was then exported into SPSS and a descriptive analysis was conducted. Analysis of the data is reported with descriptive statistics.

Results

Purpose of the Study

This study examined teachers' and administrators' perceptions of reading instruction which have contributed to schools making AYP, meaning that students became proficient readers in their educational disability subgroups. The purpose of this study was to explore reading instruction for students with disabilities in order to assist educators and elementary school leaders to help these students achieve success in reading. Participants included: regular education teachers, special educators, reading specialists, and administrators in four schools in New Hampshire. Three of the schools were chosen on the basis of achieving AYP in 2011 and 2012. The fourth school was chosen as a school that had been designated a SINI school and was able to successfully exit that status. School D was subsequently named in 2013 to the New Hampshire Commissioner of Education's Circle of Excellence.

Structured interviews were conducted with administrators, special educators, and reading specialists in the first three schools. Interviews were coded using QSR NVivo qualitative software to inform a survey which was then responded to by regular education teachers in those three buildings. The same survey was then filled out by regular education teachers, reading specialists, and special education teachers in the fourth school, where interviews were not conducted. Survey data, with the exception of open-ended questions, were analyzed using SPSS quantitative software.

Through case study and cross-case analysis methods, those groups' perceptions about reading instruction have been researched to see if there are specific links between a particular constellation of instructional practices and students with reading disabilities

who have become proficient readers. The results of this study will advance our knowledge in this area by suggesting how other educators may be able to make decisions and changes in the instruction of reading for students with disabilities so that they may become proficient and continue to make consistent progress.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions of effective instructional interventions that contribute to students with reading disabilities becoming proficient readers?
2. What kinds of instruction are perceived as effective and how are they most effectively delivered in order for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers?
3. What are the themes and common factors in instruction that have led to the success of schools meeting AYP in reading which have surfaced in each school and are found to be shared with the other schools?

Introduction

The story of best practices in teaching reading to students with disabilities cannot be told with just a series of tables and graphs because that approach totally lacks the human interface. Sharratt & Fullan (2012) refer to the "human side of learning" and generating and using data "in a way that makes the child come alive in the minds and actions of the teachers (p. 3). As the researcher has seen and reports, teaching students who struggle to read is much less an exact science and much more a human endeavor than one might imagine. Sharratt & Fullan (2012) suggest that the use of data should not only indicate directions for instruction, but also "connect the emotions and the intellect of teachers and students" (p. 4). In the 15 interviews that were conducted, and even in the 53

surveys that were subsequently completed, the voices of these educators demonstrate their dedication to their profession, their students, and their colleagues. Their words echo a commonality throughout the themes that have emerged, and the reader can feel their deep sense of caring for what they do and with whom they do it.

Best practices cannot be boiled down to a list of materials and methodologies because without looking at the interaction of all of the actors in a setting, the true picture of factors contributing to the achievement of students with disabilities cannot be represented. Initially these schools were chosen to participate in the study because they were designated as successful by one measure alone, namely the determination of Adequate Yearly Progress by the State of New Hampshire according to federal guidelines. However, the existence and importance of multiple factors that support the best practices for reading instruction for students with disabilities emerged from the data. In the following paragraphs, educators' words reveal the themes that contribute to a set of positive beliefs and attitudes, and effective, successful practices.

Themes

1. Highly trained teachers.
2. High expectations of success.
3. Resources provided by the school and/or district
4. Collaboration/communication.
5. Teachers' and school responses when a student is not making progress.
6. Instructional delivery.

These themes are not necessarily arranged in the order of their importance. Instead, they follow a logical sequence going from general perceptions concerning the

school to perceptions concerning teachers, practices, and delivery of instruction. Themes one and two speak to the high standards expected for both teachers and students, while theme three addresses the supports that the districts provide to both groups. Themes four and five discuss specific perceptions around interventions and supports, first by discussing how decisions are made and second how recommendations for interventions and supports are continually monitored and adjusted. Theme six describes effective delivery of instruction in a number of settings and combinations of instructional staff.

Highly Trained Teachers

The first theme to emerge is the importance and appreciation of a school's highly trained, skilled teachers. Although this does not directly address reading instruction, leading researchers in the field of reading disabilities suggest it is one of the conditions important to students with disabilities making progress. Authors such as Moats (2009) suggest that students with disabilities are the most dependent on excellent instruction to make adequate progress. Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (2011) and Allington (in Gambrell & Morrow, Eds., 2011), also support this notion. In fact, Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2011) write that researchers have identified teacher quality, not the program, as the critical factor in successful reading instruction (in Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., 2011, p. 359).

Additionally, The New Hampshire Task Force on Effective Teaching Report (NHDOE, 2011) "recognizes that teacher effectiveness has profound implications for all students from the lowest performing to the highest performing students" (p. 10). Hattie (2009) proposes a "hinge-point" which is an effect size of 0.40, meaning "the effects of innovation enhance achievement in such a way that we can notice real-world differences"

(p. 17). Atherton (2013) quotes Hattie's 2003 effect size for instructional quality as d = 1.0. Teacher effectiveness is addressed indirectly by Allington (2005) who supports the notion of teachers making decisions based on "professional wisdom integrated with the best available empirical evidence" (p. 16). Table 4.1 Survey Data on Teacher Efficacy gives descriptive statistics for classroom teachers' perceptions on reading for students with disabilities.

Table 4.1.

Survey Data on Teacher Efficacy

n	strongly agree	agree	neutral
Q. 34 Highly skilled teachers are the most important factor in helping students with disabilities become successful readers.			
53	25	19	8
Q. 29 Most reading failure is preventable and most high-risk students can improve their reading and writing achievement with expert instruction.			
53	13	29	10
Q. 33 I feel adequately prepared to teach reading to students with disabilities in my classroom.			
53	8	33	7

Overwhelmingly, teachers in this study said they appreciate working with individuals who are "a wealth of resources and knowledge." In reference to students who don't fit the typical learning patterns, "you need to be highly skilled at figuring out exactly what went amiss and what types of specific interventions would best address those gaps in skills." This was supported by an administrator who stated, "We have an excellent teaching staff and they take their work seriously. I try to leave it up to them to do what they think is right for the kids." One administrator referred to several teachers who had just retired as "A-1, high class, wonderful, wonderful teachers" and said that the school was struggling with the loss of their expertise. Administrators referred to teachers

as the greatest asset a successful school has. It is demonstrated in the following statement made in an interview:

> I would say, first and foremost it's the people who deliver instruction to students, more than any type of program. I believe the people are our most valuable resource, and [we] seek to hire the most highly qualified people that we can. So when I think of the type of interventionist we're looking for in our school, we would be looking for somebody who has the ability to figure out the recipe for success for each individual student.

Professional development. A sub-theme which emerged as part of the highly trained teachers theme was the importance of relevant and effectively delivered professional development. Pinnell & Fountas (2009, p. 499) discuss the importance of embedded professional development as one of 15 keys to successful intervention design. It was also listed in a 2006 study by the Florida Center for Reading Research (fcrr.org) as one of the seven characteristics in ten schools whose students' rate of growth in reading and mathematics surpassed similar schools. Although this researcher's survey revealed that 41 out of 53 respondents held a Master's or higher degree, teachers continue to request and seek out relevant professional development to either hone present skills or develop new skills. This was evident in the interviews and survey data with both regular education and special education teachers.

Administrators in all four of the schools where research was conducted were very supportive of professional development and encouraged teachers to get as much training in reading as possible. They stated that particularly with all of the research being done on the brain and reading, they needed their teachers to "keep abreast" of new developments

that could change what and how they teach. These administrators stated that they are committed to helping people grow professionally and continue to learn. Professional reading, conference attendance, and internet research were mentioned as resources. Delivery of professional development differed among schools. In every school a teacher could attend specific outside workshops or courses related to his/her work. In School B, the district provides bimonthly professional development on a team-by-team basis in a targeted area such as guided reading or teaching vocabulary strategies. In School C, the online program P-D 360 (see Appendix I) is utilized, and teachers may access it at their discretion. This is in addition to district initiatives with professional development days.

The majority of School A's classroom teachers and special educators are trained in many of the major evidence-based reading programs and methodologies in addition to the core program. When a specific training is going to occur, such as Lindamood Intensive Phonemic Sequencing (LiPS), a case manager, a classroom teacher, and a reading specialist are sent to the training. These people then come back and do an in-house training. There is a revolving cycle so that everyone has a turn to go to an actual training. School A also encourages teachers to observe each other to continuously improve their craft, although teachers report it is sometimes difficult to make the schedule work for this.

High Expectations of Success

The second theme, high expectations for students and staff, is closely related to high quality teachers and professional development, and also appears to be a necessary support for effective instruction to take place. High expectations for all students were part of the reason legislation was passed such as the No Child Left Behind Law in 2001,

the intent of which was to increase accountability for subgroups which included students with educational disabilities. When the State of New Hampshire received its ESEA Waiver, it continued to address Annual Measurable Objectives for subgroups to attain proficiency. Although it is more subtle, concern for high expectations for every student is also included in the text from the New Hampshire State Board of Education when they adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010. The Board wished to "ensure that all New Hampshire students experience a successful and productive future…" (NHDOE, webpage retrieved from 2012, para 1).

Other sources in the literature suggest that students may spend their entire school careers learning to decode and never get to higher level thinking. This may lead to lowered expectations and limited instructional focus and consequently lower achievement (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael in Morrow & Gambrell, Ed., 2011, p. 43). However, 43 out of 50 respondents in the survey indicated high expectations were "always" needed, while six responded in the "usually" category. This would be borne out by data from another question asking teachers whether they agree that most students with disabilities can make AYP with support. Out of 53 respondents, 45 either agreed or strongly agreed that they could.

Qualitative data wholeheartedly and overwhelmingly reveal that teachers and administrators in these four schools hold high expectations of success for every student. One teacher said, "Everybody just has the same attitude that nobody's going to fail. We're just going to keep plugging along, and if we need more support, somebody will jump in and offer it up." Teachers not only want to see students be successful, but also for

students with disabilities to close the gap between their achievement levels and those of their peers. An interviewee spoke eloquently when she stated:

> I think that we need to have very high expectations for all students, and we need to have very high expectations for ourselves as teachers of all students. A student with a disability may present a whole host of other things we need to consider as we design and implement instruction, so the challenge for us is to get better and better at that for the individual student, and to do that each and every time we are delivering instruction to the student. It may be an additional challenge, but it's not an obstacle, not a barrier to expecting great things.

The previous statement is typical of the responses from other teachers; as a group, these respondents reflected a sense of optimism about, and faith in, the potential for all students, particularly students with disabilities, to become successful readers. Teachers want the students to be successful and they walk a fine line between pushing them academically as much as possible "without sending them over [the edge] and stressing them out." Interview data also demonstrated the difficulty of finding appropriately high expectations for each student taking into consideration their abilities and disabilities.

What the District Provides

Core curriculum. A third theme to emerge was the supports districts had in place to assist students with reading disabilities. The most fundamental of these was the core curriculum and core instruction, which took place in the regular education classroom, as a base. The Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) recommended five primary areas, also referred to as the five pillars of reading instruction, as the foundation of any reading program. These include phonemic awareness, phonics,

vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency using research-based methods for teaching reading. This was confirmed and updated in 2010 by the Put Reading First report. In 1998, Snow, Burns, & Griffin recommended this kind of instruction to take place in the regular classroom. Allington (2011) tells us that "high-quality classroom reading instruction is absolutely essential" (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., p. 113). Many of the largest textbook publishers have created core reading programs which include the NRP's recommendations for research-based instruction. It is noteworthy that there is not quality research published about the impact of all programs. Three of the four research schools used a commercial core reading program, while one of the schools used primarily guided reading along with pieces of a commercial curriculum.

Quantitative data from this study demonstrate that regular education teachers support the five pillars as the most effective way to help struggling readers. In the survey, 49 out of 53 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this, with four neutral responses. The data also reveal that teachers prefer to have students with disabilities in their classrooms to access the general education core reading curriculum. Twenty-five out of 48 respondents chose full inclusion with special education support in their first three choices out of seven. Thirty-four out of 49 respondents chose specialized instruction in addition to the general education curriculum in their first three choices. Forty-two out of 52 respondents felt they could best meet the reading instructional needs of a student with disabilities with small group instruction in the classroom. Lastly, 41 out of 53 teachers agreed or strongly agreed to a question asking whether they felt adequately prepared to teach reading to students with reading disabilities in the classroom.

Interview data strongly support the research and quantitative data concerning the importance of the core curriculum and instruction. All four of the research schools set aside a 90-minute literacy block. One participant stated, "our philosophy here is they need all the different pillars of instruction: the phonology, fluency, and comprehension, vocabulary, instruction." With very few exceptions all students receive their core instruction in the regular classroom. "I personally believe that if they're really, really far below they still need to have some access to the core curriculum instruction, and they still need to have some differentiated time with a classroom teacher." A reading specialist interviewee concurred, saying that they "try to keep them in the core as much as possible, so they're in their classroom for core instruction, and then we'll pull them out for intervention." Even in an unusual case where a child receives a large portion of instruction outside of the classroom, teachers said they were cognizant of keeping the student connected to the curriculum so that when the gap is closed the student can reconnect to the classroom. Both regular and special educators agreed that the core curriculum, and students with disabilities having full access to this in the regular classroom, was the first consideration in designing a comprehensive intervention program.

Program*s*. In interviews, teachers discussed programs that were being used for the instruction and remediation of students with reading disabilities, and programs also emerged on responses to the teacher survey. When teachers discussed appropriate designs for interventions, they consistently mentioned the importance of selecting and utilizing quality intervention programs. For the purposes of this subtheme, a program is defined as a system to instruct or remediate all or certain aspects of reading. The

National Reading Panel (NRP) recommends the inclusion of the five pillars: phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Core programs that were being used in the research schools included Houghton-Mifflin, Rigby, and Open Court. Some teachers in one school were also using guided reading as part of a balanced literacy program in lieu of the Rigby program.

Pinnell and Fountas suggest "the intervention lesson structure should include phonics principles built systematically, as well as emphasis on reading text and writing about reading" (2009, p. 499). A basal reading program, which would be used as the research-based core curriculum, would include all of the five pillars from the NRP. However, a program designed for Tier II and III students may address only one or two of those elements. As teachers expressed in theme six, instructional delivery, the program was totally based on student need. Reading specialists and special educators said the following about programs:

> There is no program that's going to fix everybody. Take the parts of the program; I personally am big on Visualizing and Verbalizing. I'm not a Speech Pathologist, but I use the strategies.
>
> I think no program is absolutely perfect in and of itself. I think, and I think no student, well particularly the population of students that I work with, I think you can't say, this is the program you have to use … knowing, having a variety, and being trained and understanding, you know, a variety of different types of programs, you can say, OK, this might work and this might work".
>
> By base, I mean it's not the actual program. We don't use one program. We use methodologies. So especially if what a student needs is an intervention for a

focus on decoding and phonics, you know we would often use the methodology of Orton Gillingham, you know, starting small and building on that .

Specialized programs. The following are programs that were in use by special educators and reading specialists from data collected in interviews: Wilson Reading System, Project Read, Orton-Gillingham, Rave-O, Lindamood Intensive Phonemic Sequencing, SPIRE, Visualizing and Verbalizing, Great Leaps, and Read Naturally (See Appendix I Glossary).

The teacher survey yielded a list of programs which included Project Read, Read Naturally, and RaveO, also mentioned by special education teachers. In addition, Rebecca Sitton Spelling Program, The Daily Five, Fundations, Words Their Way, and Edmark were also listed.

Materials. The teacher survey yielded the following list of materials teachers found particularly useful: High interest materials, Open Court alphabet cards, high quality literature matched with interest, leveled texts, hands-on materials, a variety of materials at children's instructional levels, and different colors and textures of print. Computer programs indicated included A to Z reading, RAZ Kids, Book Share, and recorded text.

Strategies. The teacher survey yielded the following strategies they found especially useful: direct instruction, multisensory instruction, increased reading time, audio and text presented simultaneously, shared reading modeling successful strategies, consistent practice and review, build background knowledge, and conferences setting goals. Qualitative data supports all of the above lists of materials and strategies. When this researcher asked teachers if they had any favorites, one responded, "Whatever's

working" and another "What's working for the child." A final comment comes from a special educator in School A. "I guess it's just that thought that anything you do, it has to be engaging and explicit for kids, no matter which of the components of reading you're working on."

Literacy support block. There was a literacy support block in all four schools, in addition to a 90 minute literacy block, set up for students not yet proficient or on grade level in reading, with or without reading disabilities. Adlof, Perfetti, and Catts see this layer as being for children who "need longer, more explicit, and more intensive instruction to increase their skills" (in Samuels & Farstrup, Eds., 2011, p. 206). As Tier II the support block is designed to be supplemental to core instruction. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) suggest that Tier II may "provide for systematic, focused, intensive research-based interventions within the responsibility of the regular education program" (p. 19).

Data indicate teachers could use this block for supplementary literacy instruction for non-identified students, or to provide special education services. It could be provided by the classroom teacher, a Title I tutor, the reading specialist, a paraprofessional, or a special educator. Title I is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), and in all four of the research schools, Title I personnel were partially responsible for servicing Tier II students with or without a disability. Forty-two out of 53 survey respondents agree that Tier II and Tier III programs are effective with students with reading disabilities.

Use of data. The effective use of data to monitor progress as well as to drive instruction was one of the most universally agreed-upon best practices for teaching

reading to students with reading disabilities in the four schools. Both survey and interview data indicate this is another necessary element for a team to include when designing individualized reading instruction. There continues to be accountability on a state and national level for students with disabilities to make progress. The U.S. Department of Education identified the importance of data driven decision-making using ongoing assessment data to determine the intensity and duration of the reading intervention in 2006 (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009, p. 192). Other studies that referred to assessment as a major factor in instruction were also cited by Voltz and Collins (2010) and Strahan (2003). Additionally, Afflerbach, Kim, Crassas, and Cho (2011) suggest that "effective instruction depends on assessment that helps teachers and students move toward and attain daily and annual reading goals" (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011, p. 334). Forty- eight out of 53 teachers in this study "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that utilizing regular progress monitoring information to design targeted interventions was essential to helping students with reading disabilities become proficient readers.

In interviews, many teachers stressed the importance of using data to make decisions about grouping and instruction, while a special educator's perception was that data help interventions to be more targeted. In all four study schools, district assessments such as NWEA (see Appendix I) or state assessments such as NECAP (see Appendix I) are considered in programming decisions for students on a case-by-case basis. Data from interviews and surveys show that progress monitoring occurred on a biweekly and sometimes weekly basis for those at risk or students with disabilities. Progress monitoring in all four schools was accomplished using AIMSWEB or Dynamic

Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS, see Appendix I) curriculum-based measures as well as informal measures such as reading inventories and/or phonics and decoding surveys.

Paraprofessionals and support staff. The last subtheme under what districts provide for students with reading disabilities is the importance of highly trained and readily available paraprofessionals and support staff. In each of the four buildings there are a large number of paraprofessionals who work with students in a number of different ways and settings. Many of these paraprofessionals are assigned to classrooms to support students with disabilities and those identified as at-risk. Paraprofessionals assist with required accommodations as well as differentiated instruction. Other than in school C, where each classroom has its own paraprofessional, "they are also there as sort of an umbrella service for the rest of the kids." Teachers reported that several paraprofessionals are certified teachers and all are well trained in some specific programs and may provide pullout services in the resource room. Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) suggest a paraprofessional is usually an integral part of the best learning experience a teacher can create.

Quantitative data from classroom teachers demonstrate that small group instruction by a paraprofessional is common in their schools, with 24 out of 52 respondents rating it as one of their first five choices for ten most common practices in their school. Twenty-five out of 48 respondents chose full inclusion with special education support in the classroom as one of their first three choices for the most effective way of delivering reading instruction for students with disabilities. Thirty-five out of 52 felt they could best meet the reading instructional needs of a student with

disabilities "with the help of a paraprofessional in my classroom." An interesting piece of data is that in schools A, B, and D, the student to paraprofessional ratio is approximately 20 to one, which is roughly 40% higher than the district-wide student to teacher ratio which is 14.2 to one, 11.2 to one, and 11.4 to one respectively. However, it should be noted that the student to teacher ratio may include non-classroom certified staff. In school C, where there is a paraprofessional in every classroom, the student to paraprofessional ratio is about 12 to one as opposed to the student to teacher ratio of 11.4 to one.

In the schools studied, there is also a large number of certified support personnel which included speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, school psychologist, and guidance counselors who provide services to all students. These personnel also may be included in identified students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) on a case-by-case basis. In three of the four schools, there is a case manager at each grade level as well as one or two paraprofessionals assigned to that grade. Additionally, there are full-time reading specialists in all buildings and part-time reading teachers in two buildings. An administrator said, "There's a lot of personnel here to help kids", and indicated he felt most students' needs could be addressed.

Collaboration/Communication

Two of the most frequent words used in interviews were collaboration and communication, which is the fourth theme. The need for collaboration and communication is well supported in the research by educators such as Bean and Morewood (2011). They propose that "interactions and relationships among teachers, administrators, and others that promote trust, a shared vision, and a sense of collective

responsibility for the students they teach can make a difference in student learning" (in Gambrell & Morrow, Eds., 2011, p. 467). Gambrell et al. (2011) include a sense of community and collaboration in their ten best practices list (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011, p. 21). This is a factor that doesn't directly address instruction but instead supports the milieu in which it takes place.

Data in Table 4.2, Survey Data Addressing Regular Education and Special Education Communication, support the advantages of communication of regular and special education. Interview data demonstrate that there seems to be ongoing conversations with individual teachers and interventionists about students. "Sometimes there are several interventionists that may work with the child, and the more providers you give to a child, the more necessary communication is. That's probably the greatest challenge." One teacher said, "We don't teach in a vacuum anymore. I communicate regularly every day with my teachers."

Table 4.2

Survey Data Addressing Regular Education and Special Education Communication

n	strongly agree	agree	neutral
Q28. Is frequent communication between the classroom teacher and special educators the most important factor in helping students with disabilities become proficient readers?			
53	15	23	13
Q.35. The special education teacher and I meet frequently to discuss progress and make necessary adjustments to a student's program.			
53	19	20	10

Data from schools where interviews were conducted also reveals a strong, mutual professional respect between administrators, classroom teachers, special educators, reading specialists, and paraprofessionals. "Teachers are valued here for their expertise"

and “Teachers have ownership in their classroom and make professional choices about what they want to do and how they want to teach, and to try things that are new.” A special educator says:

> We've got administrators that put the child first... we've got a great team, we all work well together, 'cause we've always had to work together, so there's no me, you, me against you going on, and it's just, you know if we have trouble with something we know, we have resources... we've got people that are willing to help you out... I don't think it's just a program that's gonna fix anything, there's got to be this whole philosophy... and it's, yeah, all about giving the kids what they need.

Response to Intervention (RTI). IDEA (2004) was meant to address learning needs and access to education for all students. Controversy exists between the supporters of IDEA(IDEA group) and the supporters of No Child Left Behind (NCLB group) as to what RTI should look like, who will implement it, and how it will be implemented. The IDEA group sees RTI as a continuum that would eventually lead to disability identification, with only those students with well documented educational disabilities becoming eligible for special education services under IDEA. The NCLB group sees RTI as a means of accomplishing standards-driven general education reform, whereby uniformly challenging standards are established across the board. This group seeks to serve all students equally in a unified system with general education and special education working together (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010, p. 301). “General and special education, according to the NCLB group, are too often separate and... disconnected silos” (NADSE & CASE, 2006, p. 4).

The blending of special education and regular education was observed in schools A, B, and C. In two of the three schools where interviews were conducted there is a Response to Intervention system in place. School B has entrance and exit criteria for Tier II and III, as well as interventions specified and available. In School C Tier II is well-defined with interventions available, and RTI meetings are held by grade levels. Tier I is considered to be in the classroom, Tier II is Title I, and Tier III is in the learning center. However Tier III is somewhat amorphous and the staff has been requesting a more clear definition and more specific interventions.

School A has a Child Study Team that functions like an RTI team. The difference is that children are not relegated to Tier II or Tier III when they are experiencing difficulty, and many decisions are left up to individual classroom teachers, reading specialists, and special educators. Teachers said that on occasion, even differentiated instruction designed and delivered by a skilled teacher cannot fulfill the needs of every student. It is at this point that the teacher reaches out to other staff such as special educators, Title I teachers, or reading specialists, initially in informal conversations. However, if progress is not made, and if the teacher feels he/she needs more help or consultation, then the student is brought to the Child Study Team. In all three schools, this team is really the centerpiece of any intervention system for both identified and non-identified students, and is seen as a resource that consists of many well educated, experienced, open-minded individuals.

> What's great about our school is it truly is student centered and student need driven, so we have this great camaraderie, this Child Study Team process that

> truly is for anybody in our school, whether they are receiving services just through CST or because of an IEP, and it's about problem solving opportunities.

There is tremendous flexibility, particularly in schools A and B, in who has the training and the time to provide specific interventions. Every resource is brought to bear when a child needs help, whether it's a particular program, a particular time slot, or personnel. "Let's look at this kiddo. Does he need more, less, or different?" "When we identify a need, we attack from different directions, and put as much in place as is allowable, given the constraints of schools, to make a kid move." These are all statements that support the child centered philosophy and the safety net of supports that are in place in each school to keep students from falling through the cracks.

A significant factor the researcher found was that standardized assessments could be given, with parent permission, without going into the special education process. Staff other than special educators are able to administer these evaluations. As one teacher said, "It's all hands on deck." Another special educator stated, "I think it is that our model has kind of dissolved some of the lines between special education and regular education."

> You can brainstorm, maybe other solutions that I wouldn't think of, or the general classroom teacher. I think it's always good to just have that documentation too, as the child moves up, that people were still concerned with him. It's not like, he's on an IEP - done! There's still that expectation that you want to close that gap, and if it's not happening fast enough you need to go elsewhere and try to figure out what's not working.

A special educator provided a good example of how collaboration, always with the best interests of the student in mind, can happen using the vehicle of the Child Study Team:

> I wanted to get the speech language pathologist at the table with me, the administrator, and the case manager to talk about strategies I'm using, to talk about what I'm seeing in the data, and just to brainstorm conversation about "what am I missing?" What other approach can I try? What suggestions do you have? And also, the classroom teacher was there to start aligning her instruction so that it looks like mine and mine would look like hers - common language, common focus. That's a great vehicle for those kinds of conversations.

Professional Learning Communities. This subtheme surfaced as part of the discussion around RTI. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been discussed for decades, but the concept has gained strong popularity in the last 20 years. Two of the most notable authorities are DuFour and DuFour (2008) who define a PLC as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, p. 14). Bean and Morewood (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011, p.466) propose PLCs are defined by their focus on learning, building a collaborative culture, and results orientation. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) refer to professional capital which will "increase teachers' capacity to help all students learn and achieve" and suggest that "peers are the strongest source of innovation" (p. 86). The end result of PLCs should be student progress, and the following quote from a teacher not only speaks to that, but also to the collaborative culture:

> I think that kind of philosophy or belief system, I think we have really grown and nurtured, that we understand we're all teachers of all students, we all own - we all own - and are responsible for the progress of students. And that's not just

students in my classroom, but you know, these are our students and we all work together to insure that students are making the grade...

Schools A and C have a PLC structure in place. In one of the schools the PLC groups are organized by grade level and integrated with special education. Teachers felt that a special educator at every grade level facilitated communication and collaboration in the building. One teacher felt that this had contributed to some rich conversations about students and the give-and-take of professional dialogue provided learning opportunities.

Teachers' and school responses when a student is not making progress

The fifth theme that emerged is closely related to collaboration and communication. This theme is the ongoing conversation about what schools do when students are not making growth in reading. Research supports the formula of Time x Intensity as one of the first considerations. This concept as a significant factor in a child's success in reading is suggested by McDonald et al. (2009, p. 78). Torgeson, Wagner, & Rashotte (1997) agree with McDonald et al.'s idea that when children receive the appropriate type and amount of instruction, their literacy skill growth becomes larger. Proper time and intensity is also supported by Foorman & Moats, 2004, Hardman & Dawson, 2008, Moats, 2009, and Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011. The quantitative data from the survey are also in agreement. Teachers were asked whether it was necessary for students to receive the combination of the correct time and intensity of instruction to become proficient readers. Forty-three out of 53 teachers "strongly agreed" and ten out of 53 teachers "agreed." This formula, which is different and individualized for every student, is another of the elements teams considered in designing individualized reading instruction.

Qualitative data produced interesting results. “No two children are alike. Some children, you give them a little bit of intervention and they fly, and other children you give them a ton of intervention and the struggles continue.” When one teacher was asked what she does when a student isn’t making progress, she said:

> Go to your trick bag and you pull, try some more tricks. That's a hard one because you go to your team members, you know you pull the teams in and you meet again, you say we're not making progress, what do we do. You try adding more time with something, or you try, to mix it up and say, you know, so and so is available, let him go work with her, you do what you need to do... it's not a big shift when we make it, it's just you know, increasing or decreasing something. We might do more of this and less of that, not a complete shift from this program to that program...

Other teachers gave further insight into making progress. “When we feel that there isn’t progress being made we keep meeting and talking and brainstorming and bring in people that we think can maybe shed a new light on things. We keep adjusting the program.” This continual effort to keep improving the intervention so that a student makes progress was confirmed by another teacher. “So if a student’s not progressing, we need to work on what we’re doing, we need to do something different. And it's not that anyone's done anything wrong. It's just we need to find another way to help the student, you know, make the progress that we hope for them.” Finally, a teacher speaks about the willingness to go to any length to help a child. “There's nothing that wouldn't be tried or used in any instance if the kid needed it here, so I think that [between] the flexibility and

the training of the staff that we have and so many programs and interventions available to us to use, everybody gets their needs met."

Social emotional considerations. As teachers discussed interventions for students in their interviews in three of the schools, they also showed how much they really cared about all of the students and their need to make progress. Teachers voiced concerns about more than their academic skills and talked about things like trust, self-esteem, motivation, and investment. Sousa & Tomlinson (2011) tell us that when the classroom climate is relatively free of distress and fear of failure and/or humiliation a chemical reaction can create a feeling of euphoria (p. 21). In this kind of learning environment, students can be motivated to become deeply engaged in the learning process (Graves, 2006, p.119).

The notion of teachers and administrators as counselors and coaches in relationship to students with reading disabilities is discussed by Hattie (2009) who suggests teacher-student relationships have an effect size of 0.72. Qualitative data demonstrated the importance of the emotional connection between teachers and students, as well as teachers' concerns for the affective well-being of their students and the importance of this overall well-being on students' academic progress.

> I think with the right programs, making those connections with students, because they have to feel safe and trust you in order to take the risk, and that's what they're doing, um, with the right program, having the right connection, um, and the right strategies, you can move kids and so I've learned that from working here. And I think pushing them, as much as you can push them, without sending them over. Because you don't want to stress them out, so it is a fine line.

Two teachers described this fine line as a dance. "It's a dance and I look at the kids I work with. I'm down in the trenches, and you know, I care about them deeply." A special educator said:

> ... They already come with some anxiety, whatever their disability is, and they know in fourth grade, they know they're different... They don't want to read in front of others and because they know they can't read like the others, but they want to, and then they start to build up fences. They don't want to look different. They don't want to go with me to the "dumb room" or the "stupid room." So you know, it's a dance and it's a fine line. And so I try and maintain the standards that the district sets and I think it's very important, but also advocate for my kids.

One administrator described the role of the Responsive Classroom philosophy (See Appendix I) in nurturing a positive school climate, saying that that was the significant piece and explaining that their school uses the Responsive Classroom philosophy. "It starts with the fundamental elements of Responsive Classroom of speaking and listening and being part of the school community and being proud of a larger community and the serious nature of our work." This coincides with the notion of self-esteem and being able to show students that not everyone can do everything. Teachers stated that they tried to find students' strengths and to help them set goals for themselves. "And I would talk to him about his character. I said this is hard - really hard, and you know that you struggle more than probably anyone you know and I said, but in that, this is what you have developed within yourself - and once you get through school, that will take you far." An administrator said:

> I don't think fundamentally, you can't force people to learn. You know learning is something that you engage people in and you have to build constructs in such a way that they want to, they want to do it, and kids do want to learn you know. . . Most kids have an innate desire to be successful and learn.

Teachers build a trusting relationship with students as they strengthen their self-esteem. Additionally they find ways to motivate students to persevere and reach a deeper understanding from the written word. A very skilled and experienced special educator said:

> I think the emotional health the student really carries in is very important when teaching them and they really really do. Those kids, by the time they get to see me in fourth grade, they're bruised. They are bruised. Because I've seen kids, I used to be the first grade special ed. teacher years ago, who would come to school and they would be so excited about learning. They were so excited they couldn't wait, and that enthusiasm would fade away because they could see that all the other kids were getting things that they weren't able to, and they couldn't understand, and then they wouldn't have that excitement in their eyes. So, when I'm able to do that now, when I can get these kids to get something that they haven't been able to grasp, and they're feeling good about themselves, then they're - you know, they're more willing to take a risk to do something else.

Instructional Delivery

The sixth theme to emerge is the importance of how reading instruction is delivered. Research tells us that one single approach is insufficient (Marshall, 2012, p. 2). This theme is linked to time x intensity, in that the greater the time and frequency a

student requires, the more restrictive the setting in which it occurs will be (Foorman & Moats, 2004; Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Moats, 2009; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011). For the purposes of this dissertation, restrictive is defined as the classroom, or Tier I as the least restrictive setting. The most restrictive setting, or Tier III, would be the resource room with one-to-one instruction. There is an entire continuum of how instruction can be delivered for students with disabilities which would be very similar to this definition. The delivery of instruction would also depend on the purpose of the instruction. Some programs are designed for small groups, while some programs such as phonology may need to be delivered in a one-to-one, very quiet setting. However, first and foremost, instructional delivery in the four schools studied is determined by the needs of the student.

Quantitative data was informative about what kind of instruction teachers observed as well as what they felt was most effective. Teachers were asked to rank order, from most to least prevalent, ten choices of different types of delivery of reading instruction for students with reading disabilities in their schools. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 4.3 Participants' Rank Order for Most Commonly Observed Instructional Delivery for Students with Reading Disabilities.

Table 4. 3.

Participants' Rank Order for Most Commonly Observed Instructional Delivery for Students with Reading Disabilities

Instruction observed	n	Chosen as 1, 2, 3	Chosen as 4, 5, 6	Chosen as 6,7,8, 9,10
Small group instruction in resource room by SPED	49	32	16	2
Small group instruction regular education	47	30	12	5
Small group instruction in	41	21	10	10

classroom by SPED				
Specialized instruction and general education	42	17	13	12
Full inclusion, SPED support	36	15	12	9
One to one instruction	42	11	17	14
Small group instruction by paraprofessional	38	10	21	7
Full inclusion, no SPED support	24	8	6	10
Resource room	30	8	10	12
Specialized instruction, no general education	42	17	13	12

When teachers were asked what they feel is the most effective way of delivering reading instruction for students with reading disabilities using rank ordering with seven choices, the descriptive statistics are demonstrated in Table 4.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Most Effective Way of Delivering Reading Instruction for Students with Disabilities.

Table 4.4

Teachers' Perceptions of Most Effective Way of Delivering Reading Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Instructional delivery	n	Choice 1, 2, or 3	Choice 4, 5, 6, or 7
Small group instruction	52	40	12
Specialized instruction and general education curriculum	49	34	15
One to one instruction	46	30	16
Full inclusion SPED support	48	25	23
Resource room	42	18	24
Specialized instruction/no general education curriculum	38	8	30

Full inclusion	39	5	34

Teachers were given a choice of five methods of instruction and asked to check all that applied in reference to how they could best meet the reading instructional needs of students with disabilities. The results in Table 4.5 Teachers' Preferred Methods of Instruction indicate how many teachers out of 52 respondents chose each category.

Table 4.5

Teachers' Preferred Methods of Instruction

Method of Instruction	n	Participants choosing this option
With small group instruction in my classroom	52	42
With reading specialist in my classroom	52	42
With special educator in my classroom	52	40
With a paraprofessional in my classroom	52	35
With the student instructed outside of my classroom	52	26

It is interesting to note that teachers were evenly split on number five, with 26 saying yes and 26 saying no.

Teachers were given a choice of 12 practices in reading instruction and asked to indicate all that they used with their students with disabilities. The top five choices of 53 respondents, in descending order of popularity, were:

1. differentiated instruction 49
2. expert instruction in addition to the classroom teacher-special educator 48
3. heterogeneous grouping 44
4. homogeneous grouping 44
5. protected time for literacy blocks 43

Next five choices in popularity:

1. classroom teacher and reading specialist 39
2. RTI Tier II and III 38
3. One on one instruction 35
4. Cooperative grouping 30
5. RTI Tier III 25

Less than half of the respondents chose the remaining two choices, which were co-teaching and reciprocal teaching.

Qualitatively, School A uses a team-instructed model for some at-risk students as well as students with disabilities. In this way they get the most support in the classroom. Classroom instruction is considered to be Tier I. Generally, students who receive instruction outside of the classroom are pulled out depending on what part of instruction they cannot access in class. A Tier II or Tier III student may be pulled out for remediation in a particular area of need or for a specific program, such as phonology, in

addition to their regular core curriculum. Pullout groups do not exceed 3 to 4 students, or may be one to one instruction. A special educator described a typical Tier II group:

> If we have a small group, we'll do a lot of pre-reading, looking at words ahead of time, making predictions, things like that, and then we'll work on like, two pages of text and then, so that everyone is reading as much as possible, I'll say, "OK, whisper read these two pages. OK I'm listening, I'm listening, don't hear you". You know, and then follow up and really dissect it. And so we will often stay in a small, teeny tiny little text for, you know, minimum a week, because there's always some, a lot of pre-reading, actually active reading in the book, always some follow up, always then a written connection. Usually small, because we never have enough time to do the writing that these kids need.

A typical literacy program for a Tier III student described by another special educator would be the following:

> He receives 20 minutes of reading group in his classroom, with his classroom teacher, that's Tier I. He receives 4 days a week, during that Literacy block, he gets pulled out with me and he meets with another little girl. Then he goes back, so that's like 50 minutes of his 90 minute reading period, and then that other 40 minutes that he is in the classroom, there are assistants that go in there and help him with his work. That work that he's doing, that independent work, is collaborated between myself and the classroom teacher. It's differentiated for him based on that. Then he gets help from the Para. Outside of the Literacy block, he gets 3 other sessions of Reading, one to one with me.

Differentiation of instruction. "One size doesn't fit all" was one interviewee's succinct summation. The previous excerpt from an interview refers to differentiation as a means of instructing children at their level which may be different from the rest of the class's level. The qualitative data tell us that 49 out of 53 teachers use differentiated instruction in their classrooms. Classroom teachers in all four schools understand differentiated instruction and utilize it to provide maximum student success and growth. A special educator said, "It's not just looking at a profile of the kid, it's always diagnostic teaching. Sometimes what you see on a formalized testing profile is very different when you hit reality. Some of those challenges turn into actual strengths and vice versa." In the research schools it was clear that teachers have the ability to not only differentiate instruction for students, but to also deviate from the basal series for any individual or group of students. On rare occasions, interviewees indicated a replacement curriculum was used for some Tier III students, but teachers continued to expose students to the core curriculum by whatever means possible. Teachers generally indicated that the success of all students hinged on how well they could differentiate instruction in their classrooms.

The next chapter will discuss implications of these results and findings. Implications will involve interpretation of the findings in terms of the questions that guided this study. They will also address how applied practice could be affected utilizing these new insights, as well as limitations of this study. Lastly, suggestions for future research will be made.

Discussion

This chapter describes the evolution of this study and presents interpretation of the study data. The main research question is revisited to provide a framework for how the data respond to that question. Recommendations and limitations of the study are suggested. Finally, implications for future research are proposed and the chapter summarized.

Accountability for all students making reasonable progress in public education is one of the most important issues in education today. Federal legislation, policies at all levels, curriculum, and school personnel are engaged in the conversation regarding how to ensure high levels of educational outcomes for all students. The intent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to attain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (P.L. 107-110 No Child Left behind Act of 2001, Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Section 1001, Statement of Purpose).

In an effort to hold schools accountable for the success of every child, including those with disabilities, NCLB legislated arbitrary standards and punitive measures if schools did not meet those standards within a specified time frame. Relief from NCLB was offered by the federal government to states that could show evidence that they could meet certain criteria to be granted a waiver. In June of 2013, New Hampshire was granted such a waiver, but had to prove it had put structures and plans in place for: a) differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; b) college and career ready

expectations for all students; c) supporting effective instruction and leadership; and d) reducing duplication and unnecessary burden (NH ESEA Flexibility Request, 2013, p. 5).

This study began as research in reading instruction for students with disabilities in high performing elementary schools who had met AYP, which included the educational disability subgroup. In the process of data collection, the state received a waiver eliminating AYP. As a condition of the waiver granted in June, 2013, the state agreed to put Annual Measurable Objectives in place for all students. The notion of accountability is not going away; it is simply going to be more individualized from school to school and district to district, but now is using a "Networked Strategy which connects and uses educator, school and district development and supports" (NHDOE Waiver, p.21). The State of New Hampshire has set in motion an extensive framework of supports for students, teachers, administrators, and schools. Students with disabilities will still have to become proficient readers by standards as yet unknown and to be decided this year by the State of New Hampshire. We must continue to research what teachers and schools are doing for their students with disabilities to be successful. In view of the controversy between the NCLB and IDEA groups concerning the implementation of RTI, it is important to examine teachers' perceptions of best practices, because without their input and buy-in, no model can be effective.

This study has been designed to take into account the perceptions of administrators, special education teachers, and reading specialists through interviews, and regular education teachers through a survey. The interview process, using open-ended questions, allowed participants to express their perceptions and beliefs with total confidentiality. The patterns and themes which emerged from this data then became the

basis for the 40 question survey for regular education teachers. The survey (see Appendix D) included questions that asked teachers to rank order the best delivery of reading instruction as well as most common types of instruction they observed. Although the return rate in School A was 79%, School B 49%, School C 30%, and School D 100%, descriptive statistics can allow us to examine the data with caution.

Research Question

What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions of reading instruction that is necessary for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers? There is no simple answer to this question. When this study was initiated, it was anticipated that there would be certain ingredients, in the form of programs, interventions, and strategies, which would be revealed to combine into a recipe of success. This study found that there is no one program, one intervention, or one strategy that is the answer. Inasmuch as children with reading disabilities differ from each other, their instruction must also differ.

What this study did find, however, is that there is a menu of choices that is critical. As data were coded, themes emerged which formed patterns. Findings of the study exceeded the confines of instruction, and suggested the following proposed framework for decision-making as well as supports for it to be operational. It is based on those patterns common to all three schools where interviews were conducted, and confirmed by surveys from the fourth school.

Framework: CPTPT

This data from this research suggests the creation of this framework:

- **Core curriculum** **C** **Children**
- **Programs** **P** **Practicing reading**

- **Time x intensity** **T** **Together**
- **Progress monitoring** **P** **Progress**
- **Tuning up** **T** **Together**

Core Curriculum

First and foremost, teachers and administrators agreed that all students must participate in the core curriculum, based on the NRP's five pillars, delivered by the regular education teacher to the greatest extent possible. Further programming would take place in addition to core instruction. Pinnell and Fountas (2009) tell us "The first line of instruction is always the classroom. No series of interventions - even highly effective ones - can take the place of the classroom instruction that builds a rich base and creates a community of learners" (p. 497).

Differentiation. In the context of the core curriculum in the regular classroom, many levels of differentiation can take place. Classroom teachers felt they were capable of delivering effective instruction for students with reading disabilities and could at least partially meet their needs. Allington (2012) suggests that differentiation all day long is necessary for struggling readers (p. vi).

Programs

Following determination of student need, differentiated intervention pieces from the five pillars were added. Teachers and administrators discussed research-based programs and methodologies that are used frequently. Project Read programs were discussed, and their versatility lend themselves to use as whole class instruction and small group instruction. They can be used as Tier I intervention in the classroom, or Tier II in a small group outside of the classroom. One of the most popular programs discussed for

decoding/encoding was Orton-Gillingham (OG), which can be a program as well as a methodology. Almost all of School B's, and many of School A's, special education and reading specialist staff were trained in OG, as well as the Wilson Reading System, an OG-based program. Lindamood Intensive Sequencing Program (LiPS) was discussed by the majority of interviewees as the "gold standard" for phonemic awareness intervention. Another Lindamood program, Visualizing and Verbalizing (VV), was considered to be a top choice for comprehension. Rave-O was also very popular for fluency. Almost all of the special educators and reading specialists in the four schools had access to most of these programs. Emphasis was also placed on highly trained personnel who knew which program/methodology would be most effective, as well as how to deliver the program.

All of these programs share the characteristic that they are multisensory, meaning that they are visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and/or tactile (VAKT). Secondly they are backed by a number of years of scientific research and their validity and success has been proven (Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madded, 2011). Thirdly, these programs continue to be updated according to the latest brain research. In conclusion,

> Determining which reading intervention approach is best depends on the needs of the students, the facilities and qualified personnel available, and the willingness of classroom teachers and reading specialists to collaborate to maximize quality instructional time and resources to improve student achievement (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009, p.199).

Time x Intensity

Time and intensity, defined as appropriate type and amount of instruction, were discussed by participants as significant factors, and are supported by the research of

McDonald et al. (2009, p. 78) and Torgeson et al. (1997). Intensity also includes where the instruction is delivered, by whom, and size of group, with one-to-one instruction by a special educator in the resource room being the most intense. Classroom teachers in this study perceived that the most common delivery of instruction for identified students in their schools was by small group in the resource room by special educators, with small groups in the regular education classroom with the regular classroom teacher, and small groups in the classroom with special educators being next (see Table 4.3, Participants' Rank Order for Most Commonly Observed Instructional Delivery for Students with Reading Disabilities). Teachers indicated that they felt the most effective instruction was delivered in a small group, has a combination of specialized instruction and general curriculum, but in some cases one-to-one instruction is indicated (see Table 4.4, Teachers' Perceptions of Most Effective Ways of Delivering Reading Instruction for Students with Disabilities). When teachers were asked what method they preferred and what they use, they verified that they desire small group instruction in class with help from a reading specialist, a special educator, or a paraprofessional using various groupings (see Table 4.5, Teachers' Preferred Methods of Instruction for Students with Disabilities). These results are encouraging, given the fact that NCLB squarely places the responsibility on the teacher as the default setting of instruction. The teachers in this study clearly want to collaborate and participate in the reading instruction of their students with disabilities.

Progress Monitoring

All schools in this study had established data collection systems in addition to the data collected through NECAP testing. The US Department of Education (2006) named

data driven decision making using ongoing assessment data to determine the intensity and duration of the reading intervention as a best practice. Systems in place in the four schools included NWEA testing two to three times a year and benchmarking systems in reading such as DIBELS or AIMSWEB, which could also provide periodic progress monitoring. Data-based decision-making was the norm in all schools, and data were collected by various staff on a specified schedule. Progress monitoring through DIBELS or AIMSWEB occurred most frequently for students with reading disabilities, sometimes weekly or bi-weekly.

Tuning up

Tuning up, or fine tuning, refers to adjustments, usually in small incremental fashion, which are made in the instructional programming. Special educators suggested that once a program is initiated and data monitoring is in place, if progress was not being made, the RTI Team or Child Study Team looks at time and intensity to see what should be changed or added. It takes regular education and special education collaboration to be able to make these adjustments. Teachers explained it was not generally a change from one program to another, but could be added time or change of intensity from small group to one-on-one instruction.

Supports for CPTPT Framework

Although the research question addressed instruction and its delivery for students with reading disabilities, the findings of this study went beyond those boundaries. The elements of the CPTPT framework propose five components for making decisions about instruction for students with disabilities. However, the ability to make this framework functional depends much on the level of effectiveness of the individual school. The

schools where data were collected shared factors that support the proposed CPTPT framework. In the literature, these elements are usually discussed in the context of characteristics of effective schools. The first, and one of the more subtle supports, is school climate. The New Hampshire Response to Instruction Framework: a Multitiered System of Support for Instruction of Behavior That Supports Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (2013) "defines RTI, individualization, differentiation and personalization and explains the interrelatedness of those instructional practices" (p. 94). Effective reading instruction for Tier II and Tier III students cannot happen in isolation. A healthy climate fosters collaboration across all grades and layers of staffing. Gambrell, Molloy, and Mazzoni state that a positive school climate is the basis upon which an inclusive educational community can be built (in Morrow & Gambrell, Eds., 2011, p. 21). Unless there is mutual respect between administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and children, hundreds of thousand dollars in materials, programs, and professional development can be cast like bread upon the waters, but to little avail. Participants mentioned acceptance and emotional safety for children, but also said that they felt respected and valued by their administrators and were trusted to make decisions for students.

The second key feature, a collaborative culture, was overwhelmingly evident in the collaboration of regular education and special education. From interview data, collaboration seemed to be ingrained in the school culture that created a systemic flexibility in each of the schools which allowed different pieces of the intervention puzzle to move, sometimes independently and sometimes in concert with other pieces. There was a clear crossover of the lines between regular education and special education. For

example, students could be assessed using standardized instruments without being in the special education process as part of data collection prior to designing an intervention. Perhaps reasons such as this are why participants often indicated that all staff felt ownership of all of the children.

This crossover of roles has been discussed by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010), who have suggested that there is controversy over how RTI is implemented stemming from differing ideas about the purpose of RTI, but it can serve as the pathway to serving every child's needs. In all four of the schools in the study, participants reported the intervention process as highly collaborative and totally driven by student need. One interviewee explained it as "All hands on deck," whether it was the classroom teachers, reading specialists, interventionists, or special educators. All groups worked with at-risk students as well as those with disabilities. One special educator said, "There's nothing that wouldn't be tried or used in any instance if the kid needed it here, so I think that [between] the flexibility and the training of the staff that we have and so many programs and interventions available to us to use, everybody gets their needs met."

A third factor that supports the CPTPT framework is high expectations for teachers and students, as well as high quality teachers. Because of high expectations, the Child Study Team or RTI Team is able to work through the steps of the CPTPT framework to design an intervention that will have the highest probability of the student becoming a proficient reader. Allington (2010) suggests that "the most powerful feature of schools. . . is the quality of classroom instruction" (p. 159). Waldron and McLeskey (2010), in referring to increasing the capacity of a school to serve the needs of all students, state, "A critical aspect of increasing capacity is improving the skills of

professionals to meet student needs through professional development" (p. 61). As several participants said, the key element and asset is really the human asset, the people who work directly with the children. Aside from having to meet standards set by the State of New Hampshire, it was clear in the interviews that teachers want students to succeed not just in reading in school, but in using this skill to have an improved quality of life during and after their years in school. This anonymous quote was noted on the desk of one interviewee. "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it."

This study confirms the results of a study done by Taylor, Pressley, and Pearson in 2000. Their research found that effective schools were typically characterized as "learning, collaborative communities in which staff assumed a shared responsibility for all students' learning, monitor progress as a way of planning instruction for groups and individuals, and help one another learn about the art and science of teaching. . ." (p. 15). Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (2011) confirm the results of this study and list classroom culture, community and collaboration, and differentiated instruction among their ten best practices (p. 21).

Recommendations

The following recommendations would be useful to any RTI Team, Child Study Team, or anyone who is designing a reading intervention for identified students to become proficient in reading. Some of these are specific to students with disabilities, but could also be used for any student who is reading below grade level. Other recommendations are more general in nature, and apply to the conditions within a school that contribute to student growth.

- Use the CPTPT framework when making decisions for reading programming for at-risk students or those with disabilities (Core curriculum, programs, time x intensity, progress monitoring, and tuning up).
- Provide a continuum of delivery of instruction, from whole group to one-to-one approaches.
- School climate is the basis upon which everything else rests. Ensure it is solid so that every student and staff member can achieve and grow.
- Schools need to keep the student at the center of the conversation and determine resources required to implement the intervention plan. Greatest consideration should be given to the nature of the need and who has the expertise, and then time x intensity.
- Set high expectations for all students.
- Secure the best trained and most experienced staff available. Provide ongoing professional development for both regular and special educators, developing a plan for continually upgrading each teacher's expertise. Embedded professional development, with shared decision-making, leads to greater gains in student growth.
- Establish a collaborative culture where regular and special educators have the flexibility to work together to provide for the unique needs of all learners.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in four elementary schools that made AYP in 2011 and 2012; all are considered to be high-performing schools. Because of the range of enrollment, as well as demographics, it would be difficult to extrapolate these findings to a larger school and community, and vice versa to a smaller school and community. Descriptive statistics are utilized due to the low rate of return in two of the schools. However, this may be due to less robust administrative support and not sample bias (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000, p. 222).

Because survey data are self-reports, they could be considered a potential limitation. However, one strength of the survey approach used here was that the questions on the final survey were constructed based on data cited by reading specialists, administrators, and special educators in interviews. Generalizability to other settings may also be limited by the organization of staff such as regular or special education staff in a school or district where there would be less flexibility than in the schools in this study. The amount and type of training provided to personnel, as well as types and quantity of resources could also be limitations. Although these and the low rate of return and limited demographics may limit generalizability, there are still noteworthy insights provided into helping students with disabilities make adequate growth in reading and eventually close the gap in reading proficiency between special education students and regular education students.

Implications for Future Research

Further research into best practices in reading instruction for students with disabilities should include interviews with classroom teachers in addition to those in this study. Although it was not possible in this study, the perceptions of students with reading

disabilities should also be explored. The additional element of classroom observations would provide more extensive triangulation than was possible in this study. As part of the observations, classroom climate and strategies used to differentiate instruction could also be examined in relation to the growth of this population of students. This could also indicate the importance of examining the role of the principal in promoting and supporting the necessary human and physical resources required for the growth of students with reading disabilities.

Several other suggestions for future research involve elements that were not mentioned frequently enough in the data to include in this study. The first of these is the influence that attendance in pre-school has on the success of children with disabilities. The second is the role of parent participation and/or interest in their child's educational process. Thirdly, although it was asked in a survey question, what is the role of technology in teaching students with disabilities to read?

Research in Priority Schools and Reward Schools through the lens of CPTPT could yield insights into the actual RTI or child study team process, and comparisons could be drawn to further refine the decision-making process. This could help identify needs in their CPTPT menu choices as well as lead to facilitating collaboration between regular and special education.

Summary

Concern about students with disabilities making adequate growth in reading was addressed by NCLB in 2000, resulting in many schools being labeled as a School in Need of Improvement. In June, 2013, a federal waiver granted to the State of New Hampshire changed the way accountability would be measured through Annual Measurable

Objectives calculated by the State. Limitations included a low rate of return of regular education teacher surveys. The return rate and the demographics may limit generalizability. Another limitation was that the researcher was not able to fully explore the role and perceptions of administrators in each building and district. Implications for future research include continuing to research effective reading instruction for students with disabilities within the context of the RTI or Child Study Team process, and examining the function of the RTI team to increase regular and special education collaboration.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the achievement of struggling readers is highly dependent on a collaborative school culture where skilled, resourceful teachers and administrators are deeply committed to "doing whatever it takes" to teach every child, including those with disabilities, to become successful readers. This study also provides an outline of specific key characteristics of four New Hampshire schools where students with educational disabilities have demonstrated sufficient growth to become proficient in reading as assessed by the third and fourth grade NECAP tests. Analysis of the data revealed six key factors: highly trained teachers, high expectations of success, what the district provides both in resources and organization, collaboration/communication, what to do when students don't make progress, and delivery of instruction. The study also yielded a list of the most commonly used direct instruction programs for reading, while small group instruction in the classroom or resource room emerged as the preferred method of instructional delivery. A framework for decision-making (CPTPT) was proposed which included core curriculum, programs, time x intensity, progress monitoring, and tuning-up.

Finally, this researcher, along with the United States Congress, believes that every child is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education. Learning to read is every child's right. As educators, we must ensure that all schools have the staff, environment, resources, and interventions to collectively come together for every student to attain proficiency in reading. This kind of achievement, particularly for students with disabilities, would surely lead to further career and educational opportunities that would not otherwise be possible.

Afterword

As we met Danny in the introduction, he had the hopes and dreams of every child, but the system failed him as time progressed. What if he had been in a school with quality teachers, or what if there had been a team that collaborated to address Danny's challenges, or what if just the right reading instruction had occurred? These what-ifs are perhaps a bit late for him when he wears an orange jumpsuit, but we know what can prevent this story from being repeated for millions of other children. This is America, and it is not only our legal but also our moral imperative to prepare every student to be able to receive the key to the golden door of opportunity.

References

About the Common Core State Standards. (n.d.). Common Core State Standards. Retrieved February 25, 2014, from http://www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss

Allington, R. (2005). What counts as evidence in evidence-based education? *Reading Today*, 23 (3), 16.

Allington, R. (2012). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs*.Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., Osborn, J., & Adler, C. R. (2001). *Put reading first: the research building blocks for teaching children to read : kindergarten through grade 3*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Literacy, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, U.S. Dept. of Education.

ASR-CAS Joint Study Group on Adequate Yearly Progress. (2002). *Making valid and reliable decisions in determining adequate yearly progress*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Atherton J S (2013) Learning and Teaching; What works best [On-line: UK] retrieved 8 March 2014 from http://www.learningandteaching.info/teaching/what_works.htm

Atkinson, T. S., Wilhite, K. L., Frey, L. M., & Williams, S. C. (2002). Reading Instruction for the Struggling Reader: Implications for Teachers of Students with Learning Disabilities or Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 46*(4), 158-162. doi: 10.1080/10459880209604415

Balanced Literacy Instruction: A Truce For The Reading War?. (n.d.). Reading Worksheets Grammar Comprehension Lesson Plans. Retrieved February 23, 2014, from http://www.k12reader.com/balanced-literacy-instruction/

Best practice. (n.d.). BusinessDictionary.com. Retrieved February 25, 2014, from http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/best-practice.html

Blachman, B. A., Schatschneider, C., Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Clonan, S. M., Shaywitz, B. A., & Shaywitz, S. E. (2004). Effects of Intensive Reading Remediation for Second and Third Graders and a 1-Year Follow-Up. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *96*(3), 444-461. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.96.3.444

Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2009) *Pyramid response to intervention: Rti, professional learning communities, and how to respond when kids don't learn*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Calkins, L., & Ehrenworth, M. (2012). *Pathways to the common core: accelerating achievement.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Caron, E. A., & McLaughlin, M. J. (2002). Indicators of beacons of excellence schools: what do they tell us about collaborative practices. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *13*(4), 285.

Chapman, C., & King, R. (2005). 11 Practical Ways: To Guide Teachers Towards Differentiation (and an evaluation tool). *Journal of Staff Development*, *26*(4), 20-25.

Common Core Standards. (n.d.). corestandards. Retrieved February 24, 2014, from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCS

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Evaluating no child left behind. *Nation*, *284*(20), 11-18.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Lieberman, A. (2012). Teacher Education around the World: Changing Policies and Practices. *Teacher Quality and School Development*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Dehaene, S. (2009). *Reading in the brain: the science and evolution of a human invention*. New York: Viking.

Duncan, A. (2013) New Hampshire's Request for ESEA Flexibility. US Department of Education. Retrieved from www/2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/secretary-letters/nh.html on 9/9/2013/

Duran, A. (2005). Factors to Consider When Evaluating School Accountability Results. *Journal Of Law & Education*, *34*(1), 73-100.

Foorman, B. C. & Moats, L.C. (2004). Conditions for sustaining research-based practices in early reading instruction. Remedial & Special Education, 25(1), 51.

Forte, E. (2010). Examining the assumptions underlying the NCLB federal accountability policy on school improvement. *Educational Psychologist*, *45*(2), 76-88. doi:10.1080/00461521003704738

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Stecker, P. M. (2010). The "blurring" of special education in a new continuum of general education placements and services. *Exceptional Children*, *76*(3), 301-323.

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2009). Creating opportunities for intensive intervention for students disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 60-62.

Gallimore, R., Hiebert, J. Red flags on the road to common core state standards reform. *Teachers College Record*, February 28, 2014. http://www.tcrecord.org ID Number 17451. Accessed 3/10/2014.

Gambrell, L. B., & Morrow, L. M. (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction* 4th Ed. New York: Guilford Press.

Graves, M. (2006). *The vocabulary book: Learning and instruction*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

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

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hassan, M. (2013). Press Release. New Hampshire receives flexibility waiver under federal no child left behind education law

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.

Hock, M. F., Brasseur, I. F., Deshler, D. D., Catts, H. W., Marquis, J. G., Mark, C. A., & Stribling, J. (2009). What Is The Reading Component Skill Profile Of Adolescent Struggling Readers In Urban Schools? *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 32(1), 21-38.

Jensen, E. (1995). *The learning brain*. San Diego, CA: Turning Point.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). *Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy*. Discourse: Studies In The Cultural Politics Of

Education, 26(3), 369-386. doi:10.1080/01596300500200169

Kamil, L., Pearson, D. Moje, E., & Afflerbach, P. (2011). *Handbook of reading research.* London: Routledge.

Khan, S. & VanWynsberghe, R. (2008) Cultivating the under-mined: Cross-case analysis as knowledge mobilization. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9(1), Art 34.

Kober, N., & Center on Education Policy, W. C. (2007). Why we still need public schools: public education for the common good. *Center on Education Policy.*

Krieg, J. M., & Storer, P. (2006). How Much do Students Matter? Applying the Oaxaca Decomposition to Explain Determinants of Adequate Yearly Progress. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 24(4), 563-581. doi:10.1093/cep/byl00

Lesnick, J., Goerge, R. M., Smithgall, C., Gwynne, J., & Chapin Hall at the University of, C. (2010). Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade: How Is It Related to High School Performance and College Enrollment? A Longitudinal Analysis of Third-Grade Students in Chicago in 1996-97 and Their Educational Outcomes. A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Chapin Hall at the University Of Chicago.

Lichtman, M. (2011). *Understanding and evaluating qualitative educational research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

LLIE Efficacy Study Report. (n.d.). Heinemann Publishers. Retrieved February 24, 2015, from http://www.heinemann.com/fountasandpinnell/research/LLIEfficacyStudyReport2010.pdf

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2006). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McDonald Connor, C., Piasta, S. B., Fishman, B., Glasney, S., Schatschneider, C., Crowe, E., & Morrison, F. J. (2009). Individualizing student instruction precisely: effects of child × instruction interactions on first graders' literacy development. *Child Development*, *80*(1), 77-100. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01247.x

McLaughlin, M. J., Malmgren, K., Nolet, V., & Educational Policy Reform Research Institute, (2006). Accountability for students with disabilities who receive special education: Characteristics of the subgroup of students with disabilities. A summary of quantitative findings from the educational policy reform research institute (EPRRI). Topical Review Seven. *Educational Policy Reform Research Institute*.

McLaughlin, M. J., & Rhim, L. (2007). Accountability frameworks and children with disabilities: A test of assumptions about improving public education for all students. *Policy Reform Research InstituteInternational Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, 54(1), 25-49. doi:10.1080/10349120601149698.

McNeil, M. (2011). Rising proportion of schools falls short on ayp, study says. *Education Week*, 30(30), 22.

Moats, L. (2009). Knowledge foundations for teaching reading and spelling. *Reading & Writing*, *22*(4), 379-399. doi:10.1007/s11145-009-9162-1

Moats, L. C., & Foorman, B. R. (1997). Introduction to special issue of SSR: Components of effective reading instruction. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *1*(3), 187.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education & Council of Administrators of Special Education. (2006, May). Response to intervention: NASDSE and CASE white paper on RTI. Alexandria, VA: Author.

National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read-and evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.Bethesda, MD: NICHD, National Institutes of Health.

New Hampshire Department of Education. (2013). Integrated framework for transformation: NH response to instruction model for implementation. Retrieved from http://www.education.nh.gov/innovations/rti/documents/framework.pdf

New Hampshire Department of Education. (2011). New Hampshire task force on effective teaching phase I report. Retrieved June, 2013, from http://www.education.nh.gov/teaching/documents/phase1report.pdf

New Hampshire Department of Education. (2013). New Hampshire ESEA flexibility request for window 3. Retrieved from http://www.education.nh.gov/accountability-system/documents/flexibility-waiver-request20130605.pdf

New Hampshire Index Targets. (n.d.). New Hampshire Department of Education. Retrieved February 24, 2014, from http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/accountability/ayp/documents/2012_nh_index_targets. pdf

Newkirk, T. (2011). Slow Reading. *Independent School*, *70*(4), 88.

Newkirk, T. (2011). *The art of slow reading: Six time-honored practices for engagement*.

Portsmouth, NH.: Heinemann.

Overturf, B., L. Montgomery, and M. Smith. (2013). *Word nerds: Teaching all students to learn and love vocabulary.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Perfetti, C. (2007). Reading ability: Lexical quality to comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading,* 11(4), 357-383.

Pinnell, G. S., & Fountas, I. C. (2009). *When readers struggle: Teaching that works*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pressley, M., Roehrig, A., Bogner, K., Raphael, L., & Dolezal, S. (2002). Balanced literary instruction. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 34(5), 1.

Rankin-Erickson, J. L., & Pressley, M. (2000). A Survey of Instructional Practices of Special Education Teachers Nominated as Effective Teachers of Literacy. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (Lawrence Erlbaum)*, *15*(4), 206-225.

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system*. New York, NY.: Basic Books.

Release of the 2012 adequate yearly progress reports. (n.d.). New Hampshire Department of Education. Retrieved February 24, 2014, from http://www.education.nh.gov/news/ayp12.htm. Release of the 2012 adequate yearly progress reports

Ritchart, R., Church, M., and Morrison, K. (2011). *Making thinking visible*. SanFrancisco, CA.: Jossey Bass.

Roach, A. T., & Elliott, S. N. (2009). Consultation to support inclusive accountability and standards-based reform: Facilitating access, equity, and empowerment. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, *19*(1), 61-81.

doi:10.1080/10474410802463320

Samuels, C. (2014). Graduation disparities loom large for students with special needs. (cover story). *Education Week*, *33*(19), 1.

Samuels, S. J., & Farstrup, A. E. (2011). *What research has to say about reading instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Scheurich, J. J., Skrla, L., & Johnson, J. F. (2003). Thinking carefully about accountability and equity. In L. Skrla & J. J. Scheurich (Eds.), *Educational equity and accountability: Policies, paradigms, and politics* (pp. 13–27). New York: Routledge.

Schmidt, R. J., Rozendal, M. S., & Greenman, G. G. (2002). Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom: Research-Based Practices. *Remedial and Special Education,23*(3), 130-140. doi: 10.1177/07419325020230030101

Sharratt, L., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Putting FACES on the data: What great leaders do*!. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N. A. (20 11). Effective Programs for Struggling Readers: A Best-Evidence Synthesis. *Educational Research Review*, *6*(1), 1-26.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M., Griffin, P., & National Academy of Sciences - National Research Council, W. n. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*.

Sousa, D. A. (2011). *How the brain learns* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press.

Sousa, D. and Tomlinson, C.. (2011*). Differentiation and the brain: How neuroscience supports the learner-friendly classroom*. Bloomington, IN.: Solution Tree Press.

Strahan, D. (2003). Promoting a collaborative professional culture in three elementary schools that have beaten the odds. *Elementary School Journal*, 104(2), 127.

Swanson, E., Solis, M., Ciullo, S., & John, W. (n.d). Special Education Teachers' Perceptions and Instructional Practices in Response to Intervention Implementation. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 35* (2), 115-126.

Swanson, E. A., & Vaughn, S. (2010). An observation study of reading instruction provided to elementary students with learning disabilities in the resource room. *Psychology In The Schools*, *47*(5), 481-492.

Taylor, B., Pressley, M., & Pearson, D., & Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, A. I. (2000). Effective Teachers and Schools: Trends across Recent Studies.

Tomlinson, C. (2012). Teach Up for Excellence. *Educational Leadership*, 69(5), 28.

Tomlinson, C., Brighton, C., Hertberg, H., Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., Brimijoin, K., & ... Reynolds, T. (2003). Differentiating Instruction in Response to Student Readiness, Interest, and Learning Profile in Academically Diverse Classrooms: A Review of Literature. *Journal For The Education Of The Gifted*,*27*(2-3), 119-145.

Tomlinson, C. A., & Imbeau, M. B. (2010). *Leading and managing a differentiated classroom*. Alexandria, Va: ASCD.

Tomlinson, C., & Imbeau, M. B. (2012). Common sticking points: About differentiation. *School Administrator*, 69(5), 19-22.

Torgesen, J. K., Wagner, R. K., & Rashotte, C. A. (1997). Prevention and remediation of severe reading disabilities: Keeping the end in mind. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *1*(3), 217.

UDL and the Curriculum | National Center On Universal Design for Learning. (n.d.). Retrieved February 25, 2014, from http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlcurri

U.S.Department of Education. (2006). National assessment of Title I interim report: Executive summary. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences.

Voltz, D. & Collins, L. (2010). Preparing special education administrators for inclusion in diverse, standards-based contexts: Beyond the council for exceptional children and interstate school leaders licensure consortium. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 33(1) 70-82.

Waldron, N. L., & McLeskey, J. (2010). Establishing a collaborative school culture through comprehensive school reform. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 20(1), 58-74. doi:10.1080/10474410903535364

Welcome page. (n.d.). New Hampshire Department of Education. Retrieved February 25, 2014, from http://www.education.nh.gov/?SAUId=76. Welcome page.

Welcome to Teaching Every Student. (n.d.). *Teaching Every Student*. Retrieved February 25, 2014, from http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/

What is Universal Design for Learning | National Center On Universal Design for Learning. (n.d.). *What is Universal Design for Learning | National Center On Universal Design for Learning*. Retrieved February 23, 2014, from http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl

Willis, J. (2006). *Research-based strategies to ignite student learning*. Alexandria, VA.: ASCD.

Woodward, M. M., & Talbert-Johnson, C. (2009). Reading Intervention Models: Challenges of Classroom Support and Separated Instruction. *Reading Teacher*, *63*(3), 190-200.

Appendices

Appendix A

Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information	
Project Title:Factors that Contribute to the progress in Reading for Students with Disabilities in Relationship to Adequate Yearly Progress	
Site IRB Number:	Sponsor:
Principal Investigator:Cheryl Orcutt	Organization: New England College
Location:Peterborough, NH	Phone:603 924 7963

1. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to find factors in schools that contribute to the progress in reading for students with disabilities in relationship to Adequate Yearly Progress. I am looking at the perceptions of administrators and teachers concerning the instructional needs of students with reading disabilities in the context of Adequate Yearly Progress. Your views on these subjects will form the basis of my study. Your school is one of five schools that has been chosen to participate in this case study. This research could not only help your school, but others as well.

2. PROCEDURES

You will be asked to participate in a survey or a separate personal interview after school for an hour to an hour and a half.

I will be tape recording the discussions.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT

There are no forseeable risks involved as sources of all information are unidentified. I will be sending you a summary of the focus group discussion and/or interview for your verification.

4. OWNERSHIP AND DOCUMENTATION OF SPECIMENS

All data collected will be the property of the researcher and will be used expressly for the purpose of this study. At the end of the study The data will be stored for 5 years at which time it will be shredded/destroyed.

5. POSSIBLE BENEFITS

I hope to provide possible insights as to what instructional factors in your school either could or do contribute to students with disabilities becoming proficient in reading. This could provide new directions for other schools in this academic area.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

"Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. The results of the study, including research data, may be published for educational purposes but will not give your name or include any identifiable references to you or your school."

However, any records or data obtained as a result of your participation in this study may be inspected by New England College Institutional Review Board, or by the persons conducting this study, (provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law."

8. TERMINATION OF RESEARCH STUDY

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty if you choose not to participate. You will be provided with any significant new findings developed during the course of this study that may relate to or influence your willingness to continue participation.

In the event you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, please notify Cheryl Orcutt, 603 924 7963, or email me at cmgworcutt@gmail.com.so that your participation can be terminated.

9. AVAILABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Any further questions you have about this study will be answered by the Principal Investigator:

Name:Cheryl Orcutt
Phone Number: 603 924 7963

New England College: Dr. Debra Nitschke-Shaw

Phone: 603-428-2322

Any questions you may have about your rights as a participant will be answered by:

Name: see above

10. AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant Name (Printed or Typed):
Date:

Participant Signature:
Date:

Principal Investigator Signature:
Date:

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:
Date:

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Principals, Assistant Principals, SPED Directors

1. What kinds of interventions and supports does your district provide to students with reading disabilities?

2. Describe what you think should be done for students to make growth and become proficient in reading. Are there differences for students with disabilities?

3. What is the greatest challenge when trying to raise students with disabilities to proficiency in reading?

4. How important is it for the educational disabilities subgroup to make AYP

5. A)Why do you feel your school went from not making AYP to making AYP?)

   B)What has enabled your school to continually make AYP? Type 1 school

6. What specific instruction, programs, or strategies are you using to ensure that students with disabilities reach proficiency in reading so that the subgroup meets AYP?

7. Anything else?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What kinds of interventions and supports does your district provide to students with reading disabilities?

2. What do you think are effective/appropriate methods in reading instruction for all students?
    a. Are there differences for students with disabilities?

3. To what extent do you believe the school's reading instruction and curriculum aligned with what you believe is the optimal way to provide reading support to students with reading disabilities? To all students?

4. Tell me about your most successful experience teaching reading to a student with disabilities.

5. Describe some changes you have made in teaching reading to students with disabilities in the last few years.

6. What is it like teaching reading to students with disabilities when you're trying to make AYP?

7. What do you do when identified students aren't making progress?

8. What specific instruction, programs, or strategies are you using to ensure that students with disabilities reach proficiency in reading so that the subgroup meets AYP?

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

Cheryl Orcutt, M.Ed. CAGS

Survey: What Are Teachers' And Administrators' Perceptions About The Most Effective Interventions For Students With Reading Disabilities To Make AYP?

As many of you know, I have been in your building to interview special educators, reading specialists, interventionists, and administrators about effective reading interventions for
students with disabilities. Your data will make a very important contribution to my case study, and I hope you will take 15 minutes to take this survey so that your thoughts and ideas can be included in my work.

General Education Teachers

Participant and school data

1. Gender
   - Female
   - Male
   - Do not care to share

2. Age
   - under 25
   - 25-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - Over 56
   - Do not care to share

3. Ethnicity
   - African-American
   - Asian American
   - Caucasian American
   - Latino/ Latina
   - Native American
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say

4. What grade level are you currently teaching?
   - kindergarten
   - first grade
   - second grade

- third grade
- fourth grade
- fifth grade
- multi-age

5. What is the highest degree you have earned?
   - B.A.
   - B.S.
   - M.A./M.S./ M.Ed.
   - C.A.G.S.
   - doctoral degree

6. In what areas are your undergraduate and/or graduate degrees?

   _____

7. Including this year, how many years have you been teaching?
   _____ years

8. How many years have you taught in your present school?
   _____years

9. Describe your school's delivery of reading instruction for students with reading disabilities. Please prioritize beginning with (1) for most common to least common. Use NA for not applicable.
   - ____full inclusion without special education support in the classroom
   - ____full inclusion with special education support in classroom
   - ____resource room
   - ____small group instruction in regular classroom by classroom teacher
   - ____small group instruction in regular classroom by special educator
   - ____small group instruction in resource room by special educator
   - ____small group instruction by paraprofessional
   - ____one to one instruction
   - ____specialized instruction instead of the general education curriculum
   - ____specialized instruction in addition to the general education curriculum
   - ____other (please specify)_____

10. What do you feel is the most effective way of delivering reading instruction for students with reading disabilities? Please prioritize beginning with (1) for most effective.
    - ____full inclusion
    - ____full inclusion with special education support in classroom
    - ____resource room
    - ____small group instruction
    - ____one to one instruction

- ____specialized instruction instead of the general education curriculum
- ____specialized instruction in addition to the general education curriculum

11. Which category most accurately describes the type of text, program, or series currently used in your school for the teaching of reading, either in print or electronic form? Please prioritize using (1) for most common. Use 0 for not at all.
    1. ____basal reader
    2. ____literature anthology
    3. ____trade books
    4. ____other

12. How many minutes per week do you spend working exclusively with each of the following groups teaching reading?
    - Students with reading disabilities_____
    - on grade level readers_____
    - above grade level readers_____

13. About how many minutes per week do you spend preparing to teach reading?
    - _____ minutes

14. Check all that apply: As a classroom teacher I feel I can best meet the reading instructional needs of a student with disabilities:

    - With small group instruction in my classroom
    - With the help of a paraprofessional in my classroom
    - With the help of a reading specialist in my classroom
    - With the help of a special educator in my classroom
    - With the student instructed outside of my classroom

15. The following are various practices in reading instruction. Please check all that you use with your students with disabilities.

    - Co-teaching
    - Reciprocal teaching
    - Cooperative grouping
    - Heterogeneous grouping
    - Homogeneous grouping
    - Differentiated instruction
    - Protected time for literacy blocks
    - One to one tutoring
    - Expert instruction in addition to the classroom teacher- reading specialist
    - Expert instruction in addition to the classroom teacher - special educator
    - Response to Intervention Tier II and III
    - Response to Intervention Tier III

Note: RTI integrates assessment and intervention within a school-wide, multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems .

16. The following are very effective ways to help struggling readers
    - Read alouds Agree Disagree
    - guided reading Agree Disagree
    - shared reading Agree Disagree
    - independent reading Agree Disagree
    - word study Agree Disagree

17. Please number the following in the order of their importance for instruction with children with reading disabilities: most important # 1 to least important #5

    - ____fluency
    - ____phonics
    - ____phonemic awareness
    - ____comprehension
    - ____vocabulary

	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
18. I believe that certain computer programs such as Lexia are effective interventions for students with reading disabilities.					
19. I believe that most of my students with reading disabilities can become proficient in reading and make AYP with support.					
19 a. I believe that most of my students with reading disabilities can become proficient in reading and make AYP without support.					
20.Response to Intervention Tier II and III interventions, such as Orton-Gillingham, Rave-O, or LiPS are effective in working with students with reading disabilities.					

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
21. It is necessary for students to receive the combination of the correct time and intensity of instruction to become proficient readers.					
22. My students with reading disabilities have adequate reading instructional time.					
23. "Constructing meaning through the written word and then expressing meaning through writing" (Marshall, 2010, p. 4) is a very effective way to help struggling readers.					
24. Multisensory instruction is the most effective method in teaching reading to students with disabilities.					
25. A student with a reading disability should have reading instruction designed around his/her needs.					
26. Instruction that focuses on the five pillars from the National Reading Panel Report (phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency) is the most effective way to help struggling readers.					
27. Moving a student from being able to perform a task in isolation with support to being able to do it independently is one of the greatest challenges in bringing students to proficiency in reading					

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
28. Frequent communication between the classroom teacher and special educators is the most important factor to helping students with disabilities become proficient readers.					
29. "Most reading failure is preventable and most high-risk students can improve their reading and writing achievement with expert instruction" (Moats, 2009, p. 381)					
30. Differentiated instruction using strategies that are "student-centered, based on readiness and planned with flexible grouping designs" (Chapman, 2005, p. 20) is the most effective way to teach reading to students with reading disabilities.					
31. Utilizing regular progress monitoring information to design targeted interventions is essential to helping students with reading disabilities make AYP.					
32. "The intervention lesson structure should include phonics principles, built systematically, as well as emphasis on reading texts and writing about reading"- Pinnell & Fountas, 2009, p. 499).					
33. I feel adequately prepared to teach reading to students with reading disabilities in my classroom**.**					

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
34. Highly skilled teachers are the most important factor in helping students with disabilities become successful readers.					
35. The special education teacher and I meet frequently to discuss progress and make necessary adjustments to a student's program.					
36. Children with reading disabilities need substantially different instruction than children without disabilities.					
37. Reading and spelling should be instructed simultaneously with children with disabilities.					
38. A student's background knowledge strongly influences success in reading.					

Students with reading disabilities need:

	Always	**Usually**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Accommodations				
Modified program				
Specialized materials				
One on one instruction				
High expectations				
Other: Please specify				
Other:				

Other:				
Other:				
Other:				

39. List any strategies, techniques, or materials that you have found especially useful in teaching
reading to students with reading disabilities.

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E

Introduction Letter to Principal

Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.
507 Old Greenfield Rd.
Peterborough, N.H. 03458
603 924 7963
corcutt_gps@nec.edu

August 15, 2012

Mr. Neville John, Principal
Jones Elementary School
21 School St.
Smalltown, NH 03764

Dear Mr. John:

This letter is to introduce myself as a doctoral student at New England College. My dissertation work is researching teachers' and administrators' perceptions about instruction in an elementary school that encourage the growth of students with reading disabilities in the context of Adequate Yearly Progress. My goal is to understand what kinds of instruction must be present in order for students with disabilities to achieve proficiency in reading.

Riverside Elementary School is consistent with the criteria for one of the four schools in different districts that I will study. Dr Doe has been presented with this request. I am conducting a multiple case study consisting of schools that have made AYP in reading in 2011 and 2012. Since this is a qualitative study using case study methodology, data will be collected through personal interviews, surveys, and archival data. All data will be kept strictly confidential, and will be unidentifiable with individuals, schools, or districts. Participation is strictly voluntary, and each person will be asked to sign the attached consent form. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during the study.

If you deem it appropriate, I would be very happy to visit your office to discuss this in greater depth and answer any further questions you may have. It is my hope that this study will provide insights for all educators who are engaged in providing services to close the gap in reading for students with disabilities. Because of your success, Riverside Elementary School would provide a rich source of data to inform this study.

You can reach me at the above telephone number and email. I hope you will consider participation.

Sincerely,
Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.

Appendix F

Introduction Letter to Superintendent

Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.
507 Old Greenfield Rd.
Peterborough, N.H. 03458
603 924 7963
cmgworcutt@gmail.com

Dr. John Doe, Superintendent of Schools
S.A.U. 5
21 School St.
Smalltown, NH 03764

Dear Dr. Doe:

This letter is to introduce myself as a doctoral student at New England College. My dissertation work is researching teachers' and administrators' perceptions about instruction in an elementary school that encourages the growth of students with reading disabilities in the context of Adequate Yearly Progress. My goal is to understand what kinds of instruction must be present in order for students with disabilities to achieve proficiency in reading.

Riverside Elementary School is consistent with the criteria for one of the four schools in different districts that I will study. I am conducting a multiple case study consisting of schools that have made AYP in reading in 2011 and 2012. Since this is a mixed method study using case study methodology, data will be collected through personal interviews, surveys, and archival data. All data will be kept strictly confidential, and will be unidentifiable with individuals, schools, or districts. Participation is strictly voluntary, and each person will be asked to sign the attached consent form. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during the study.

If you deem it appropriate, I would be very happy to visit your office to discuss this in greater depth and answer any further questions you may have. It is my hope that this study will provide insights for all educators who are engaged in providing services to close the gap in reading for students with disabilities. Because of its success, Riverside Elementary School would provide a rich source of data to inform this study.

You can reach me at the above telephone number and email. I hope you will consider participation.

Sincerely,

Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.

Appendix G

Introduction Letter to Teacher

Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.
507 Old Greenfield Rd.
Peterborough, N.H. 03458
603 924 7963
cmgworcutt@gmail.com

August 30, 2012

Dear Teacher Participant:

This letter is to introduce myself as a doctoral student at New England College. My dissertation work is researching teachers' and administrators' perceptions about instruction in an elementary school that encourage the growth of students with reading disabilities in the context of Adequate Yearly Progress. My goal is to understand what kinds of instruction must be present in order for students with disabilities to achieve proficiency in reading.

Riverside Elementary School is consistent with the criteria for one of the five schools in different districts that I will study. Dr Doe has been presented with this request. I am conducting a multiple case study consisting of schools that have made AYP in reading in 2011 and 2012. Since this is a mixed method study using case study methodology, data will be collected through personal interviews, surveys, and archival data. Interviews would take approximately a half hour. Surveys will be distributed to schools in print form. All data will be kept strictly confidential, and will be unidentifiable with individuals, schools, or districts. Participation is strictly voluntary, and each person will be asked to sign the attached consent form. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during the study.

If you have any further questions about participation, please contact me by phone or email. I would be happy to discuss this in greater depth and answer any further questions you may have. It is my hope that this study will provide insights for all educators who are engaged in providing services to close the gap in reading for students with disabilities. Because of your success, Riverside Elementary School would provide a rich source of data to inform this study.

You can reach me at the above telephone number and email. I hope you will consider participation.

Sincerely,

Cheryl G. W. Orcutt, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.

Appendix H

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, Ed. D.
Associate Dean of Education
Telephone (603)428-2215
cfitzgerald@nec.edu

August 19, 2012

To: Cheryl Orcutt
Re: IRB Approval

Dear Jacqueline,

I am writing to congratulate you on the approval by the IRB for your dissertation proposal. This is a very exciting project. Your work with effective reading interventions will have far reaching effects on how students learn and how teachers teach reading in the future.

This approval is valid for one calendar year from the date of acceptance. If you have a need to extend that time frame please contact the IRB in order to request an extension for a second year.

Again, congratulations on your fine efforts. If the IRB may be of further assistance please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Carlton J. Fitzgerald
Carlton J. Fitzgerald
IRB Chair

Appendix I

Glossary

Aimsweb. A commercial online system of curriculum-based measurements that provides benchmarks as well as progress monitoring.

Analytic memo writing. The process of writing memos that summarize key "chunks" of the findings after developing categories and themes.

Close the gap. The process of students moving from below grade level academically to on grade level.

Commissioner's Circle of Excellence. Recognition of schools and districts that aspire to excellence by being innovative in service to children.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS). A free system of curriculum-based measures in reading benchmarks as well as progress monitoring.

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Computerized adaptive assessments by the Northwest Education Association (NWEA) that provide individualized data and can be given several times per year.

New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). A series of reading, writing, mathematics and science achievement tests, administered annually, which were developed in response to the Federal No Child Left Behind Act

PD 360. An online professional development network offering over 3,000 videos by master teachers and nationally recognized experts in the field of education

Progress monitoring. The practice of collecting data on a specified schedule to document academic growth.

QSR Nvivo. An online program that enables researchers to collect, organize and analyze content from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, audio, social media, videos and webpages.

Responsive Classroom. The philosophy of the Responsive Classroom approach is to create a safe, joyful and challenging learning environment for every child.

SPSS. Predictive analytic software for quantitative analysis of data.