

2011

## Effective reading comprehension teaching and research: How do they relate

Lauri M. Leeper

*William & Mary - School of Education*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Leeper, Lauri M., "Effective reading comprehension teaching and research: How do they relate" (2011). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1550154114.  
<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.25774/w4-f67z-yc86>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

**Effective Reading Comprehension Teaching and Research:  
How Do They Relate?**

---

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

---

by  
Lauri M. Leeper  
July 2011

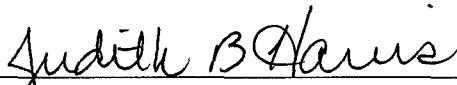
**Effective Reading Comprehension Teaching and Research:  
How Do They Relate?**

by

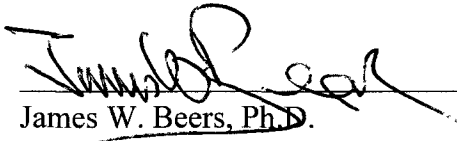
Lauri M. Leeper

---

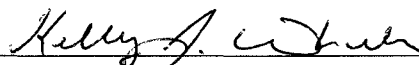
Approved July 2011 by



Judith B. Harris, Ph.D.  
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee



James W. Beers, Ph.D.



Kelly J. Whalon, Ph.D.

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, Jeff—whose love, support, and encouragement sustained me through this effort. When I took myself too seriously, your timely sense of humor lightened the load. To my children, Ashley and Ricky, who make me proud every day. To my parents, Pat and Carl Morris, who believe in me unceasingly and love me unequivocally.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 .....	2
Overview .....	2
Teaching Versus Evaluating Comprehension .....	5
Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction .....	6
Metacognitive Strategy Instruction and Higher-Level Thinking Skills.....	6
Instructional Frameworks. ....	8
Reading Materials. ....	9
Lesson Structures. ....	10
The Lack of Reading Comprehension Instruction .....	10
Goals and Rationale for Study .....	11
Research Questions .....	12
Chapter 2 .....	14
Reading Comprehension Defined .....	15
Readers Who Struggle with Comprehension.....	18
Comprehension Monitoring .....	18
Inference Making .....	20
Narrative Production .....	21
Syntactic Knowledge .....	23
Semantic Knowledge .....	23
Verbal Working Memory.....	24
Skilled Readers .....	26
Skills Versus Strategies.....	30
Effective Reading Teachers .....	32
The NRP, the RRSg, and the Critics.....	33
Best Practice Categories .....	34
Comprehension Monitoring .....	37
Question Generation. ....	38
Question Answering.....	38
Story Structure. ....	39
Summarization. ....	39
Use of Graphic Organizers.....	40

Implications.....	40
Instructional Frameworks.....	41
Reciprocal Teaching Approach.....	42
Direct Explanation.....	43
Transactional Strategies Instruction.....	44
What This Means.....	45
Instructional Techniques.....	46
Cooperative Learning.....	46
Mental Modeling.....	47
Direct and Explicit Instruction.....	49
Scaffolded Instruction.....	50
Other Aspects of Effective Reading Instruction.....	53
Engaged Students and Time on Task.....	54
Student Interactions and Communication.....	55
Higher-Level Questioning.....	60
The Problem.....	61
Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 3.....	65
Research Approach and Rationale.....	65
Interpretivism.....	65
Phenomenology.....	67
Theoretical Perspective.....	69
Participant Sample.....	73
Data Generation and Collection.....	78
Observations.....	78
Interviews.....	82
Material Culture.....	85
Triangulation.....	87
Data Analysis.....	88
Trustworthiness and Authenticity.....	90
Trustworthiness.....	91
Authenticity.....	94
Conclusion.....	99
Chapter 4.....	101

The Teachers .....	101
Connie .....	101
Background. ....	101
Defining Reading Comprehension.....	102
Teacher Beliefs. ....	102
National Board Certification in Literacy. ....	105
Missy.....	105
Background. ....	105
Defining Reading Comprehension.....	107
Teacher Beliefs. ....	107
National Board Certification in Literacy. ....	109
Katie.....	109
Background. ....	109
Defining Reading Comprehension.....	110
Teacher Beliefs. ....	111
National Board Certification in Literacy. ....	113
Ashley .....	113
Background. ....	113
Defining Reading Comprehension.....	115
Teacher Beliefs. ....	115
National Board Certification in Literacy. ....	117
In Summary.....	117
Transactional Theory of Reading and Effective Teacher Beliefs and Practices.....	120
Reading Time.....	122
Conducive Environment. ....	125
Text Selection. ....	127
Student and Teacher Transactions .....	130
Whole Group Transactions. ....	130
Small Group Teacher and Student Transactions.....	134
Individual Teacher and Student Transactions.....	138
Student and Student Transactions.....	140
Overarching Themes in Reading Comprehension Instruction.....	143
Student-Focused Instruction Centered on Reading and Discussion .....	144
Instructional Beliefs.....	145

Instructional Practice.....	147
Continuous, Deliberate Informal Assessment of Learning and Instruction.....	151
Instructional Beliefs.....	151
Instructional Practice.....	155
Teacher Intention to Strengthen Reading Interest.....	158
Instructional Beliefs.....	158
Instructional Practice.....	163
Relationships among Themes.....	166
Chapter 5.....	169
Discussion.....	169
Use of Research-Based Practices during Reading Comprehension Instruction.....	170
Regularly Used Strategies.....	172
Strategies Used Sometimes.....	174
Strategies Never Used.....	176
Why These Identified Strategies and Practices Are Used.....	177
Additional Research Findings.....	179
Alignment of Practices with Beliefs.....	179
Ongoing Formative Assessment.....	183
Supportive Classroom Environment.....	185
The Outlier.....	188
Implications for Practice.....	194
Implementing Discussion during Reading Instruction.....	194
Reflecting on Beliefs and Practices.....	194
Encouraging Ongoing Formative Assessment during Reading Instruction.....	195
Emphasizing the Importance of a Supportive Classroom Environment.....	195
Conclusion.....	196
A Closing Thought.....	197
References.....	198
Appendix A - Sample Observations.....	220
Appendix B - Interview Guides 1 & 2.....	235
Appendix C - Sample Interviews.....	237
Appendix D - Consent Form.....	268
Appendix E - Sample Interview Summaries.....	273
Appendix F - Member Checking Sample Responses.....	291

Appendix G - Sample Lesson Plans .....	290
Appendix H - Sample Lesson Plan Coding .....	297
Appendix I - Sample Instructional Handouts.....	306
Appendix J - Student Work Samples.....	316
Appendix K - Sample Teacher Notes .....	318
Appendix L - Interview Open Coding Samples.....	321
Appendix M - Interview and Observation Axial Coding Samples.....	338
Appendix N - Codebook .....	351
Appendix O - Sample Reflexive Journal Entries .....	368
Appendix P - Researcher as Instrument .....	359
Appendix Q - Sample Member Checking .....	372
Vita.....	396

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Let me begin by thanking my dissertation committee members for their assistance, guidance, and support during this research process. Dr. Judi Harris, my dissertation chairperson, was invested in every step of this journey. Saying I could not have done it without her is an understatement to say the least. When I sought assistance, she provided it, graciously and comprehensively. She challenged me to think more deeply, to write more expansively, and to dig deeper. Everyone should be so lucky to have a scholar of her caliber as her dissertation chairperson.

Thank you also to Dr. Jim Beers and Dr. Kelly Whalon—my other two committee members—for their guidance, recommendations, and encouragement during each phase of this research process. I had the pleasure of working with Dr. Beers as his graduate assistant for three years. His literacy expertise seems to know no bounds. I was the beneficiary of this expertise during many pleasant conversations, and I thank him for his generous spirit.

This dissertation could not have happened without my participants—Ashley, Connie, Katie, and Missy. I thank all of them for giving so graciously of their time and sharing so openly their beliefs and practices. I was heartened as I watched these teachers perform their craft.

I must also thank Dr. Ginny Tonneson and Mary Runnells, who both started this doctoral program with me. We spent many hours working together and discussing ideas, offering advice, or just commiserating when needed. I am grateful for both their professional competence and their friendship.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my good friend, Joyce Burke, who planted the seed that germinated into a doctoral program. Who knew that a conversation on a car ride back from a professional off-site weekend would culminate in a Ph.D.? Thank you for helping me to make a lifelong dream feasible. To my other girlfriends, Angela, Barbara, and Betsy—thank you for always asking and never getting glassy-eyed—when I answered. It must have been hard at times.

Finally, to my husband—how do I even begin to thank you? Whenever, whatever, however, you are there. For me. Always. My gratitude runneth over.

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Nationally Board Certified Teachers in Literacy.....	76
Table 2: Lesson Composition.....	77
Table 3: Participants Roster of Interviews and Observations.....	80
Table 4: Overarching Themes and their Relationship to Participants' Beliefs and Observed Practice.....	144
Table 5: Teacher Implementation of Reading Comprehension Strategies & Practices.....	171



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Relating Overarching Themes to One Another.....	167
---	-----

**EFFECTIVE READING COMPREHENSION TEACHING AND RESEARCH:  
HOW DO THEY RELATE?**

**ABSTRACT**

This interpretivist study drew upon a transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1979) to study the reading comprehension beliefs and instructional practices of nationally board certified teachers (NBCT) in literacy, and how these beliefs and practices are related to current reading comprehension research results. Four reading teachers working with students in grades 3-5—three reading specialists and one classroom teacher—from three southeastern United States school divisions were participants in the study. Participating teachers were interviewed and observed about their beliefs and practices as they worked with both struggling and proficient readers. With each teacher, a preliminary interview, followed by 12 classroom observations of reading comprehension instruction, then a final interview, were conducted.

Each of the different types of transactions posited in transactional reading theory—student and text, student and teacher, and student and student—was evidenced. The teachers used small-group guided reading and discussion as the primary vehicles for reading comprehension instruction. It was in this instructional context that comprehension strategies identified as effective in current research were observed on a regular basis. These included summarizing, higher-level questioning, scaffolded instruction, question-asking and -answering, communication among students, and comprehension monitoring. Additionally, results indicated that three of

the four NBCT teachers' instructional practices were aligned with their instructional beliefs. They focus on their students' reading comprehension needs, identifying these needs continually through ongoing informal assessment. Overall, they create supportive classroom and small-group reading environments.

LAURI M. LEEPER

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

AREA OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING, AND LEADERSHIP

COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

**Effective Reading Comprehension Teaching and Research:  
How Do They Relate?**

## Chapter 1

### Overview

Ethan, an energetic third grade boy, is filled with stories about skateboarding and the Dallas Cowboys. Though math is sometimes “hard,” it is his favorite subject in school. Reading is his least favorite. He has “lots of books at home,” but Ethan does not read aloud to anyone and rarely reads by himself. He is much more interested in playing with his X-Box 360 or riding bikes with his best friend, T.J. He was referred for diagnostic testing by his teacher because he is reading below grade level. A series of tests reveal that Ethan reads fluently at a fourth-grade level, has strong fifth-grade decoding and word attack skills, and a fifth-grade vocabulary. Where he falls short is in his ability to comprehend text; at even the first-grade level.

Ethan is not alone. Many students in intermediate grades and higher are struggling to comprehend what they read. As defined by the Rand Reading Study Group (RRSG, 2002), reading comprehension is understood to be “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading.” (p. 11) Improved reading comprehension must incorporate all three of these elements, including how each interacts with the others to impact comprehension. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Test found that 33% of fourth graders and 26% of eighth graders scored below basic levels in reading, while

only 33% of fourth graders and 31% of eighth graders scored at a proficient level or above.

A further look at subgroups provides amplified information. Females performed 7 and 10 percentage points better than males, respectively, in grades 4 and 8 in 2009. This gap remains unchanged, showing no decrease since the NAEP's inception in 1992. The same holds true for the performance gap in grades 4 and 8 between Hispanic and White students and between Black and White students. White students scored an average of 26 points higher than Hispanic students in fourth grade, and 27 points higher in eighth grade. Similarly, White students scored an average of 29 points higher than Black students in fourth grade and 27 points higher in eighth grade. These results indicate that the achievement gap by minority and gender is not narrowing over time (NAEP, 2009). Considered alone, these statistics are cause for concern. When combined with adult literacy statistics, the figures become even more disturbing.

Students who experience reading difficulties in school often continue into adulthood with these difficulties. The latest figures from the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) are dismal. Fourteen percent of adult Americans read at the lowest level of proficiency (level 1) and 29% read at level 2. This means that almost half of Americans are unlikely to comprehend higher-level prose or solve written problems accurately. If, as is stated in the report, "literacy can be thought of as currency in this society" (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kilstad, 2003, p. 1), the ramifications of reading comprehension difficulties in the intermediate grades that persist into adulthood are serious at both individual and societal levels. Addressing reading comprehension concerns early is critical.

Considering these statistics, it is probable that Ethan is one of a multitude of intermediate students struggling to comprehend text who may not overcome these difficulties before adulthood. Just like Ethan, 47% of students who experience reading comprehension difficulties in the intermediate grades are not identified in the primary grades (Pressley, 2006) because the instructional emphasis during these early years is on learning to read or decoding words, rather than reading to learn or comprehension (Chall, 1983). Many struggling readers are able to decode and pronounce words fluently, but do not skillfully comprehend what is read (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla, 2003). Oftentimes, this deficiency is not identified until the focus of reading instruction shifts to comprehension; usually in the third or fourth grades. Though reading instruction must continue to include both the mechanics of and meaning made from reading, once students transition into the intermediate grades in elementary school, comprehension is necessarily a crucial component of the reading instructional program (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998; Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Hampston, 1997). Appropriately, the emphasis for intermediate-level reading instruction becomes making meaning from connected text.

Reading comprehension and the teaching of comprehension strategies is identified as one of five foci of literacy programs (National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000). With an emphasis on reading to learn in the intermediate grades, reading for meaning is central to any and all instructional reading programs. This includes teaching students to use strategies and practices that promote and enhance their abilities to think deeply about what they read and how they construct meaning (NRP; Pressley, 2006; RRSF, 2002). If children can decode words, read fluently and with prosody, but cannot make meaning

from what is read, the act of reading is meaningless. Comprehension instruction must therefore be an integral component of reading instruction.

### **Teaching Versus Evaluating Comprehension**

What is happening in the classroom regarding reading comprehension instruction? In a landmark study, Durkin (1978) expressed concerns about the lack of comprehension instruction in classrooms. During her observations of teachers and students in grades 3-6, Durkin found that teachers were spending much more time assessing reading comprehension than teaching it as a process that can be learned and strengthened. More recently, others have come to the same conclusion (e.g., Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998). Much evaluating but little instruction was occurring in the classroom interactions observed. After analyzing decades of research focused on reading comprehension instruction, Pressley (2006) stated that much more could and should occur in elementary classrooms during reading instruction to improve comprehension in the elementary grades, particularly with struggling readers and poor comprehenders. These are the students most in need of reading comprehension instruction, rather than evaluation.

Struggling readers are those who read below grade level. These readers are a diverse group. Some struggle with a lack of fluency due to decoding limitations. Others lack a robust sight vocabulary. Still others fail to comprehend text. They are poor comprehenders. Effective reading teachers can and do help struggling readers to improve by assessing students' reading needs and focusing instruction on strengthening these weaker areas (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Teachers can help struggling readers to succeed by teaching them to use reading comprehension strategies and higher-level



thinking skills, and by providing them with regular opportunities to discuss what they have read in an effort to build meaning (RRSG, 2002).

### **Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction**

Reading researchers agree that teachers are instrumental in helping students build comprehension of text during reading (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006; Stahl, Jacobsen, Davis, & Davis, 1989; Taylor et al., 2003). Research-based practices that increase reading comprehension must be taught to struggling readers and poor comprehenders. However, many teachers are not implementing practices that foster reading comprehension (Pressley, 2006).

Reading comprehension research has identified four ideas that undergird effective comprehension instruction. First, metacognitive strategies and higher-level thinking skills can and do increase reading comprehension in struggling readers (Knapp et al. 1995; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, 2006). Second, three instructional frameworks are successful in increasing comprehension: reciprocal teaching, transactional strategies instruction, and direct explanation (NRP, 2000). Third, the reading materials that are chosen for use—rich literature at the student’s appropriate reading level—can benefit struggling readers, helping them to more actively construct meaning (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). Finally, structuring lessons through scaffolding and differentiation are also important elements of effective reading comprehension instruction (Allington & Johnston, 2002). Each of these ideas is discussed separately below.

#### **Metacognitive strategy instruction and higher-level thinking skills.**

Comprehension strategies are “specific, learned procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated, and intentional reading” (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002, p. 177). Struggling

readers and poor comprehenders—a subset of struggling readers—use few comprehension strategies to help them understand and remember what they read (Pressley, 2006). Conversely, skilled readers actively construct meaning using metacognitive strategies that include predicting, summarizing, questioning, clarifying, imaging, and connecting what they read to prior knowledge (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Teachers can foster reading comprehension with specific strategy-based instruction that is applied during the reading of texts. When comprehension strategies are used, the result is increased reading comprehension (Duffy et al., 1987; NRP, 2000; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley et al., 1998; RRSB, 2002).

Many struggling readers can be taught to use the fostering and monitoring strategies used by skilled readers to improve their reading comprehension (Duffy & Roehler, 1989; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley et al., 1991). Teaching struggling readers to use these strategies is a powerful way to increase comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading comprehension instruction. However, most teachers use comprehension strategies infrequently, and others fail to use them at all (Pressley et al., 1998; Taylor et al., 2003).

Promoting the use of higher-level thinking skills is another way to increase comprehension. Using higher-level thinking skills, in the form of questioning techniques or specific assigned tasks, requires students to make meaning from reading, which ultimately increases understanding of the text (Knapp et al., 1995). Requiring students to respond to the text by asking or answering questions increases active engagement, which leads to higher levels of comprehension.

Similarly, completing assigned tasks linked to the text, both during and after reading, requires students to actively process and transact with the text—that is, to make unique meaning by combining text information with personal experiences and knowledge—thereby increasing understanding (Rosenblatt, 1979). Further, teachers who respond to students’ responses with probing questions, rather than evaluations, force students to continue to use metacognitive strategies and higher-level thinking skills to elaborate upon and think more deeply about reading (Knapp et al. 1995; Pressley et al., 1991). Thinking more deeply about what is read, in turn, increases comprehension. Helping struggling readers to use metacognitive strategies and higher-level thinking skills increases comprehension through active involvement in meaning construction (Knapp et al. 1995; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley et al.).

**Instructional frameworks.** In an effort to consolidate findings and synthesize research on reading comprehension instruction, the NRP conducted a comprehensive literature review and studies analysis. Synthesizing the findings of these studies resulted in the identification of eight categories of effective reading comprehension strategies and instructional practices. The categories include: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, use of graphic and semantic organizers, question answering, question generation, story structure, mental imagery, and summarization (NRP, 2000). Additionally, three effective programs include: reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), direct explanation (Duffy & Roehler, 1989), and transactional strategies instruction (Pressley et al, 1991).

Effective practices and programs used in the classroom to increase reading comprehension are systematic and programmatic (NRP, 2000). Each of the three

instructional frameworks named above uses a structured program of implementation to increase reading comprehension, and all follow a similar prescribed sequence that includes: telling students explicitly about the why's and how's of the particular strategies used in the frameworks, thinking aloud while modeling strategy use, sharing personal experiences about the benefits of strategy use, and guiding students to independent use by giving them clues as they are reading (Gaskins, Anderson, Pressley, Cuncelli, & Satlow, 1993). Teachers who use these explicit instructional frameworks, which will be fully detailed in the literature review that follows this chapter, help struggling students to understand how to improve their reading comprehension (Duffy et al., 1987; Knapp, et al., 1995; RRSB, 2002).

However, increasing reading comprehension includes more than just the how of instruction. The "what" of instruction is also important. Which materials should be used when teaching reading comprehension?

**Reading materials.** Specific instructional strategies are implemented by effective reading comprehension teachers to improve students' understanding of text. Embedding that instruction in rich, worthwhile literature is one such practice (Pressley, 2006). Literature-based instruction provides the rich context in which to situate strategy teaching (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). When students read and respond to interesting texts, engagement is heightened and learning is the outcome. Engaged readers are more likely to be readers who comprehend text (Taylor et al., 2003). Increasing interest through the selection of highly readable literature at the students' independent or instructional reading levels helps to make reading more pleasurable and thus more engaging (RRSB, 2002).

**Lesson structures.** How lessons are structured is also critical in reading comprehension instruction success. Differentiating instruction focuses teaching on the individual needs of students. Effective reading teachers use flexible grouping strategies and scaffolded instruction to differentiate instruction based on the specific needs of different readers (Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Teachers who target instruction to specific reading deficiencies, model strategies, and monitor student understanding are successful in achieving reading comprehension gains in struggling readers (Gaskins, et al., 1993; Pressley et al., 1992).

As has been discussed, there is much research available that identifies effective reading comprehension instructional practices. However, there continues to be evidence indicating a lack of reading comprehension instruction in intermediate level classrooms.

### **The Lack of Reading Comprehension Instruction**

Unfortunately, as Durkin noted in 1978, reading comprehension instruction is not practiced regularly by reading teachers (O'Connor et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 1998; Taylor et al., 2003). Though studies have identified effective practices in intermediate grade reading classes, overwhelmingly, the consensus is that little comprehension instruction is happening during scheduled reading time blocks. O'Connor et al. note that minimal emphasis on strategic reading comprehension is the norm. There seems to be a disconnect between what is known in the research literature and what is happening in reading classrooms. Perhaps this is because adequate professional development at district and school levels in how to effectively use the identified practices has not been provided. Or perhaps, as Pressley's (2006) research indicates, the learning curve and difficulty of "mastering" metacognitive strategies instruction—a minimum of three years—is too

great. It may be that there are so many practices identified that teachers are unsure of which ones they should use and when it is optimal to use them. I seek to address some of these issues in this study.

### **Goals and Rationale for Study**

Much is known about effective reading comprehension instruction. One of the goals of this study is to see whether or not the extensive research base undergirding reading comprehension instruction is reflected in instructional practices in several intermediate elementary classrooms in which effective teachers teach. Studying the practices of effective intermediate elementary reading teachers during reading comprehension instruction will serve to inform the field about what is happening in those reading classrooms in which teachers are helping struggling readers to comprehend. Decades of research have resulted in the identification of instructional practices that clearly increase students' reading comprehension levels (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002; Snow et al., 1998). What is less clear, however, is the nature of the practices that effective teachers of reading comprehension are implementing in their classrooms to positively impact struggling readers' comprehension of texts.

Are there clear connections between reading comprehension research results and classroom practice? The answer to this question has important ramifications on two fronts. First, some believe that "if we are going to call ourselves professionals, we are obligated to use best practices; anything less is unacceptable" (Dufour, 2003, p. 71). To those who believe that research must inform practice, knowing how or if the two are related is important information. If there is a chasm between what research tells us about effective reading comprehension instruction and what is actually happening in

classrooms, this must be brought to light so that it can then be addressed. Additionally, if research results are not being translated into classroom instruction, it is important to know why this is the case. Second, if effective reading teachers are using strategies and practices with success that are not part of the reading comprehension research base, reading comprehension researchers can learn from practitioners whose heretofore unexplored techniques are successfully helping students to build their reading comprehension. Logically, this would lead to future strands of research that could further inform classroom-based reading comprehension instructional knowledge.

Ultimately, the hope is that this research study might inform others about ways to improve the quality of reading comprehension instruction in all classrooms so that struggling students can become proficient readers. Proficient readers are those who “have a capacity to read a wide variety of different kinds of materials for varying purposes and to read with comprehension even when the material is neither too easy to understand nor intrinsically interesting” (RRSG, 2001, p. 9). Seeking to uncover congruence or incongruence between research and practice could lead to knowledge that improves future professional practice, which, in turn, could increase students’ reading comprehension.

### **Research Questions**

The nature of teachers’ reading comprehension instruction, their professional decisions regarding those practices, and how the practices are related to current reading comprehension research results are the foci of this investigation. Specifically, this study seeks to uncover what several effective teachers of reading comprehension are doing in their classrooms to help struggling readers and poor comprehenders to improve, and these

teachers' reasoning behind those instructional choices. With this in mind, the study will address the following research questions:

1. Which instructional practices and strategies are implemented by effective reading teachers in their classrooms during reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers and poor comprehenders?
2. Why do effective reading teachers choose these practices and strategies?
3. What, if any, are the differences between current reading comprehension research results and the instructional practices and strategies used by effective reading teachers during reading comprehension instruction? Why are they different?

In the next chapter, a review of relevant literature will serve to amplify and inform understanding of the research base surrounding effective reading comprehension instruction; in particular, those practices that positively impact readers who struggle to comprehend text.



## Chapter 2

To be successful academically, children must comprehend—derive meaning— from what they read. Many of our children are failing to comprehend. The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Test (2009), for example, found that 33% of fourth graders scored below basic levels in reading, while only 33% of them scored at a proficient level or above. This means that one third of U.S. elementary students are probably struggling readers.

“Struggling readers” is a broad category. Readers struggle to comprehend for myriad reasons: some have decoding problems; some have weak sight word vocabulary development; and some lack reading fluency. However, another group of intermediate struggling readers exists separate and apart from those just mentioned. These children decode proficiently, have an adequate on-grade-level or higher sight vocabulary, and read fluently (Buly & Valencia, 2002). Nonetheless, they fail to comprehend what they read. They are labeled poor comprehenders (Nation, Clarke, & Snowling, 2002; Weekes, Hamilton, Oakhill, & Holliday, 2008). It is estimated that 10% of children are poor comprehenders (Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). In the United States there are approximately 20 million children between the ages of five and nine (U.S. Census, 2000). If, in fact, 10% are poor comprehenders, approximately two million 5-9 year-olds fall into this category. The number is sobering.

Many children in primary grades are deemed proficient readers when in fact they are not, because they are not reading with full comprehension (Pressley, 2006; RRSF,

2002). As mentioned previously, 47% of those students who experience reading difficulties in the intermediate grades had no identified difficulties in the primary grades (Pressley, 2006). Both historically and today, primary teachers stress word decoding, rather than reading comprehension. This necessary emphasis on decoding and fluency oftentimes obscures a troubling truth. Though many primary students can read—that is, decode—what is written, they are failing to comprehend what they read (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Pressley, 2006). This becomes evident when students enter third and fourth grades and the emphasis for reading instruction changes to comprehension (Chall, 1991). At this point, many children are identified as struggling readers or poor comprehenders for the first time in their educational lives. But why is this the case? What exactly does it mean to comprehend reading?

### **Reading Comprehension Defined**

Reading comprehension is understood to be “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading” (RRSG, 2002, p. 11). In other words, readers make meaning as they are reading by taking meaning from the words while also building meaning from the words in context. Further, an individual’s reading comprehension or meaning construction varies depending on what is being read and why. Comprehension, therefore, is fluid.

Each reader, by virtue of differing experiences, background knowledge, socio-cultural group affiliation, socioeconomic status, motivation, and other factors, brings unique ideas to texts. This ultimately influences understanding and interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1978; RRSg, 2002). The nature of the text that is read also influences what

is extracted from the pages, impacting reading comprehension significantly (RRSG). Specifically, factors such as reading level, text readability, genre, formatting, and font all affect the reader and his/her ability to comprehend (Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2003; RRSB). Moreover, the purpose for reading influences the construction of meaning. A text read for enjoyment is read differently than one read to extract and use pertinent information. Said another way, a novel read for the sheer pleasure of reading will be read differently than a manual on how to set up a new Smart phone. The purpose is different; the outcome desired is different; and therefore, the focus is different (Rosenblatt, 1978). The reader, the text and the purpose for reading are integrally intertwined, each influencing the other.

Though the definition of reading comprehension as conceived by the RRSB (2002) might seem obvious, it was Louise Rosenblatt's work from the 1930s that resurfaced in 1978 through her seminal publication, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* that encouraged scholars to look at reading comprehension as constructivist in nature. Until this time, text was thought to have singular meaning, rather than multiple meanings as interpreted by the reader. This singular meaning was that of the author. Rosenblatt (1978) changed the thinking of the day when she reintroduced what came to be known as transactional learning theory or reader response theory.

This theory posits that each reader interprets text uniquely because he/she brings different experiences, prior knowledge and understanding, that when combined with text, produce slightly different interpretations of the same text. The interaction between reader and text is called a "transaction," and the product of that transaction is called "the poem" (Rosenblatt, 1978). This theory was embraced by prominent reading researchers in the

late 1970s through the 1980s when much research was being conducted on reading comprehension (Duffy & Roehler, 1989; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, El-Dinary, et al., 1992). I discuss transactional learning theory fully in chapter three of this dissertation, and it serves as the perspective forming the theoretical foundation of my research.

Today, reading scholars continue to view reading comprehension as constructivist, understanding that readers build comprehension through reading coupled with prior knowledge and experiences (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2006; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Many educational scholars, cognitive psychologists, and educational practitioners alike agree that the teacher is instrumental in helping students build their comprehension of text during reading (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006; Duffy, 2002; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2006; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, 2006). Each of these groups contends that systematic and programmatic instructional practices can improve students' reading comprehension. Many of the instructional practices used to help students comprehend text were designed after decades of research on the practices that skilled readers invoke while comprehending text (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Readers who extract and construct meaning from connected text—that is, text that contains a coherent message (Duffy, 2003)—are proficient readers. They are active, self-regulated readers who use multiple comprehension strategies to understand what is read (Pressley, 2006). Proficient readers are able to read easily and with interest. They read for different purposes and they read a wide variety of different kinds of materials. Further,

they comprehend even when material is not easily understood or particularly interesting (RRSG, 2002). This is not the case for readers who struggle to comprehend.

### **Readers Who Struggle with Comprehension**

Struggling readers are a complex, multi-faceted group. Within the struggling readers category, poor comprehenders are a subgroup. As previously stated, it is estimated that 10% of 7- to 11-year-old children fall into this category (Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). Their struggle to comprehend is attributable to numerous causes. Poor comprehenders develop age-appropriate word recognition skills—reading with accuracy, fluency, and at age-appropriate levels—but do not comprehend at age-appropriate levels (Oakhill, Hartt, & Samols, 2005). Research indicates that within this population is a great deal of heterogeneity (Cain & Oakhill, 2006). Therefore, a single cause of poor comprehension seems unlikely (Cain & Oakhill; Nation, Clarke, & Snowling, 2002).

Research over the course of twenty years indicates that poor comprehension may be identifiable in several types of knowledge and comprehension processes. Individuals may demonstrate deficits in some but not all of these factors, and also vary in the degree to which they are affected by them. These factors include: comprehension monitoring, inference-making, narrative production, syntactic knowledge, semantic knowledge, and verbal working memory. Each will be explored in the sections that follow.

#### **Comprehension Monitoring**

The process an individual uses to evaluate his/her understanding of what is read is referred to as comprehension monitoring (Pressley, 2006). It is an essential component of skilled reading (NRP, 2000; RRSG, 2002). Those who are competent or proficient readers monitor their comprehension on an ongoing basis, stopping to repair

misunderstandings as they occur (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1985). However, this is not the case, on a consistent basis, with poor comprehenders (Garner & Taylor, 1982; Oakhill, Hartt, & Samols, 2005; Perfetti, Marron, & Foltz, 1996). Research results indicate that good comprehenders monitor sentence meaning and notice anomalies significantly better than poor comprehenders. Additionally, poor comprehenders are less able to identify anomalies in sentences that appear farther apart in the text. This might be the result of poor comprehenders' less well-developed ability to construct a mental model of the text as a whole, which is critical to text comprehension (Oakhill, Hartt, & Samols, 2005).

Some poor comprehenders use context to try to resolve ambiguity in reading. However, good comprehenders are more active and effective in monitoring comprehension than their poor comprehension counterparts (Van der Schoot, Vasbinder, Horsley, Reijntjes, & Van Lieshout, 2009). When faced with ambiguous words, good comprehenders slow their reading down and perform reanalysis of ambiguous words. This is in contrast to poor comprehenders, who tend to slow their reading to a lesser extent when faced with inconsistencies (Van der Schoot et al.). Some poor comprehenders are less likely to return to and reread text in an effort to rectify inconsistencies and build understanding. Good and poor comprehenders have also been shown to differ in their rates of reading and rereading when experiencing inconsistencies in text. Additionally, less-skilled comprehenders identify fewer inconsistencies overall than those labeled as better-skilled comprehenders (Ehrlich, Remond, & Tardieu, 1999; Yuill & Oakhill, 1991).

There are differences between good and poor comprehenders in the degree of active regulation applied to reading meaning. Proficient readers evaluate understanding

continually as they read (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). They regulate their reading when comprehension problems are encountered. Conversely, poor comprehenders tend to be more passive during reading, not as strategically aware, and therefore less likely to recognize the need for regulation (Van der Schoot et al., 2009). However, this is not the only difference between good and poor comprehenders. In addition to lower rates of comprehension monitoring, poor comprehenders tend to have difficulty making inferences.

### **Inference Making**

To infer is to use context from the reading itself, word knowledge, and world knowledge to link ideas and fill in missing details that are not overtly stated (Oakhill & Cain, 2007). Inferencing helps readers create text representations that are coherent and integrated, thus fostering increased reading comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 1999). Skilled readers make inferences continuously while reading. These inferences are, in large measure, accurate (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1985). This is not the case with some poor comprehenders.

Some children who comprehend poorly have difficulty making inferences with the text they are reading (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006; Laing & Kamhi, 2002; Oakhill, 1982, 1984). In a study of 8- and 9-year-olds matched on reading fluency and word knowledge, for example, Oakhill (1984) found that inference deficits in poor comprehenders fell into two categories. These categories were labeled as text-connecting inferences and gap-filling inferences. In the former, the reader uses information from other places in the text and combines it with current information to formulate local coherence. The latter type of inference is made when the reader connects information that

is not in the text (world knowledge) with text information, thereby filling gaps in the reading to form a cohesive representation of the text as a whole. This study found that poor comprehenders are significantly less likely to make both text-connecting and gap-filling inferences than skilled comprehenders. But is poor inference-making a cause or an effect of reading comprehension difficulties? Further studies were conducted to answer this question.

Following this line of research, results of studies conducted continued to indicate that the ability to infer is predictive of variance in comprehension skill (Cain & Oakhill, 1999; Cain, Oakhill, & Lemon, 2004; Oakhill & Cain, 2000). Each of these studies serves to link inferencing deficits—both text-connecting and gap-filling inferences—to poor reading comprehension rather than the opposite. Further, inferencing seems to assist in development of comprehension rather than being simply an outgrowth of good reading comprehension (Oakhill & Cain). Inferencing is just one of several factors that may affect poor comprehenders' reading comprehension, however. Another is the ability to understand and reconstruct story structure in narrative text.

### **Narrative Production**

Children begin hearing stories—fictional narratives—before they are able to read. Caregivers read stories and children slowly become familiar with narrative structure. When they enter school and begin to read, narrative is used most often at beginning stages of reading, mirroring what is more often read at home (Duke 2003a, 2003b). Narrative has a structure (beginning, middle, end) and component features (character, setting, plot, theme) that categorize it as such (Oakhill, Yuill, & Parkin, 1986).



Poor comprehenders demonstrate a poorer understanding of what they have recently read, and also demonstrate less comprehension of stories they have just heard (Catts, Adlof, Weismer, 2006; Oakhill, Yuill, & Parkin, 1986). When, for example, students were shown picture cards in conjunction with a story being told, both skilled and poor comprehenders were able to retell the stories with connectives—words that link causes within the story (e.g. and, then, because, so, the next day)—for story cohesion. However, skilled comprehenders used more connectives in story retelling; thus, making the story more cohesive and ultimately, easier to understand (Yuill & Oakhill, 1991).

Subsequent studies have resulted in similar findings. Poor comprehenders perform more poorly on story retellings (Cain & Oakhill, 1996; Laing & Kamhi, 2002). Additionally, poor comprehenders' story retellings are structured less effectively than skilled comprehenders. Findings also indicate a link between comprehension proficiency and knowledge of narrative structure (Laing & Kamhi). These findings indicate that picture sequence supports important event structures for poor comprehenders and that a lack of knowledge about narrative structure adds to a lack of comprehension about the stories themselves (Cain & Oakhill).

Cain (2003) continued to refine the research line described above and found that, like Cain and Oakhill (1996), poor comprehenders are less likely to produce structured, cohesive stories. This suggests that comprehension skill and limited ability to create narrative structure are somehow related. However, other differences also exist between poor and skilled comprehenders. In addition to lack of narrative structure knowledge, poor comprehenders also seem to lack knowledge of syntax.

## **Syntactic Knowledge**

To comprehend text, knowledge of syntax is required (Cain & Oakhill, 2009). Syntax is the rules that govern sentence structure (Owens, 2008). For instance, English syntax explains why “Marty has eaten the cake” is a sentence possibility, while “Marty the cake has eaten” is incorrectly structured, lacking cohesive syntax.

Skilled comprehenders seem to intuitively identify syntactic abnormalities. This is not the case with all poor comprehenders. Some poor comprehenders show weakness in syntactic knowledge while other poor comprehenders’ syntactic knowledge is intact (Catts, Adlof, Weismer, 2006; Cain & Oakhill, 2006; Nation, Clarke, Marshall, & Durand, 2004). Lack of syntactic awareness is related to lower levels of reading comprehension overall (Mokhtari & Thompson, 2006).

Researchers hypothesize that these differences in syntactic knowledge may be due to disparity in reading experiences (Cain & Oakhill, 2009). Poor comprehenders, as a whole, read less than proficient readers. Syntactic knowledge, learned through reading practice, may not be developed fully in poor comprehenders because they do not practice and become proficient (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Nation, Clarke, Marshall, & Durand, 2004; Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2005). As indicated, syntactic knowledge is important to text comprehension. Understanding structure, or syntax, helps readers to build meaning. Another facet of meaning-building is semantic knowledge.

## **Semantic Knowledge**

Deriving meaning from text—the aim of comprehension—requires both syntactic and semantic knowledge. While syntax focuses on language structure, semantics is the system of rules that governs the meanings of individual words or words used in

combination (Owens, 2008). Understanding these rules and how they impact meaning formation is necessarily a component of reading comprehension (Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2007).

Some poor comprehenders have weaker semantic knowledge than skilled comprehenders (Weekes, Hamilton, Oakhill, & Holliday, 2008; Nation, & Snowling, 1999). In two studies comparing skilled comprehenders with poor comprehenders on vocabulary knowledge, results indicated that poor comprehenders had specific word recognition deficits and semantic impairments regarding word knowledge (Nation & Snowling, 1998a, 1998b). However, because vocabulary knowledge was not controlled in these studies, some researchers have questioned the veracity of the findings (Oakhill & Cain, 2007).

Subsequent studies have been conducted with results indicating that some—not all—poor comprehenders do show semantic knowledge deficits (Cragg & Nation, 2006; Landi, 2005; Nation, Snowling, & Clarke, 2007). Further, it has been concluded that even when some poor comprehenders successfully link words and their semantic properties, they find it difficult to develop deep and lasting semantic representations (Ricketts, Bishop, & Nation, 2008). This lack of internalized semantic understanding has a detrimental effect on reading comprehension, which requires ongoing semantic processing for meaning making. Another factor shown to have a detrimental effect on reading comprehension is verbal working memory deficits.

### **Verbal Working Memory**

The system used to store and simultaneously process information is called working memory (Baddeley, 1986). In reading comprehension, working memory is

engaged when new information is integrated with previously processed information to extend or create new meaning. The link between verbal working memory and reading comprehension performance is a strong one. A meta-analysis of 77 studies found that performance on a range of verbal working memory tests was a good predictor of reading comprehension ability (Daneman & Merikle, 1996).

Several studies indicate that poor comprehenders exhibit verbal working memory deficits or weak verbal working memory capacity (Cain, 2006; Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; Nation, Adams, Bower-Crane, & Snowling, 1999). This suggests that working memory plays a role in comprehension (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006; Laing & Kamhi, 2002; Oakhill, Hartt, & Samols, 2005), though it does not explain the entirety of poor comprehension problems. A more recent meta-analysis (Carretti, Borella, Cornoldi, & De Beni, 2009) focusing on the role of working memory on reading comprehension concluded that poor comprehenders' deficits can be attributed partially to verbal working memory inefficiencies.

Another recent study showed a significant difference and large effect size for working memory differences between good and poor comprehenders (Pimperton & Nation, 2010). Using newly standardized and co-normed memory measures, the researchers screened 109 students and matched 28 on nonverbal reasoning, decoding, word reading, and reading comprehension. Once again, results indicated that poor comprehenders showed deficits in verbal working memory, confirming previous findings. Additionally, the experiment showed that poor comprehenders are significantly less effective at suppressing irrelevant verbal information, which may have a negative impact on reading comprehension.

The research seems clear: comprehension problems cannot be linked causally to a single factor. Many factors contribute to poor reading comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 2006). As has been illustrated, poor comprehenders are not homogenous; some have working memory or inferencing deficits, while others demonstrate a lack of syntactic or semantic knowledge. Some may not monitor their comprehension, and others lack an understanding of narrative structure. Children with any or all of these deficits are categorized as poor comprehenders. But what do we know about children who do not struggle with reading comprehension? What do they know and do that makes them skilled readers? How do they differ from poor comprehenders?

### **Skilled Readers**

Skilled readers engage in particular practices to comprehend text. Over the course of several decades, researchers have conducted think-aloud studies of skilled readers to identify and analyze what these practices are. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) analyzed and summarized more than 40 think-aloud/verbal protocol studies to identify the practices and strategies used by skilled readers. The participants were diverse, ranging from sixth graders to college professors.

In addition to participant diversity, diversity was also noted in the types of texts read by participants, including: poems, narrative, and expositions. Some of the texts were suited to the participants' content area expertise; others were not. The authors contend that this diversity adds to the strength of the analysis, as greater variety and reading levels of texts logically expands the types of skills and processes that would be observed in the studies. This, in turn, results in more comprehensive and robust research results. None of the participants had any decoding deficiencies with the text read; as such, they were

regarded as skilled (proficient) readers. As these readers prepared to read, then read, then concluded their reading, they were encouraged to report verbally about their thinking processes and what they were doing (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

After analysis was concluded, Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) identified practices used by skilled readers before reading, during reading, and after reading. They concluded that skilled readers are active readers in each phase. Before reading, they are intentional in setting goals and aims for reading which include:

#### Before Reading

- Constructing a goal for reading the text;
- Overviewing (skimming) the text;
- Deciding to read only particular sections and which particular sections;
- Deciding to quit reading because the content in the reading is not relevant to current reading goals;
- Activating prior knowledge and related knowledge;
- Summarizing what was gained from previewing text; and
- Based on overviewing, generating an initial hypothesis about what the text is about, one that can be revised or refined in light of information gained during subsequent and more careful reading (pp. 32-33).

During reading, skilled readers continue to exhibit practices that help them to comprehend. Some of these practices help to: (a) clarify reading; (b) hone in on critical parts of the reading; or (c) to reinforce what is read. They include:

#### During Reading

- Generally front to back reading of text;

- Reading only some sections, ones believed to contain critical information based on prior knowledge about the writing structures used in genre, author style, or overviewing;
- Skimming;
- If text is easy, reading using automatic processes with few intentional, conscious strategies aimed at meaning construction. This reliance of automatic processes continues until something goes wrong;
- Reading aloud;
- Repeating/restating a thought that occurred during reading;
- Making notes;
- Pausing to reflect on text;
- Paraphrasing part of text;
- Explicitly looking for related words, concepts, or ideas in text and using them to construct a main idea, gist, or summary;
- Looking for patterns in the text;
- Predicting/substantiating; and
- Resetting reading/learning goals at a different level of understanding because the text suggests that there might be a more appropriate goal (pp. 34-37).

After reading, skilled readers make decisions about what to do with what they have read. These practices show an intentionality that is critical to reading comprehension. They include:

### After Reading

- Rereading after the first reading as necessary;
- Recitation of text to increase memory of it;
- Listing pieces of information in text;
- Constructing a cohesive summary of the text;
- Self-questioning or self-testing over text content;
- Imagining how hypothetical situations might be viewed in light of information in text;
- Reflecting on information in the article, with the possibility of this reflection going on for a long time and consequent shifts in interpretation unfolding over an extended period of time;
- Rereading parts of text following reflection in order to reconsider what is in text exactly in light of insights gained during reflection;
- Continually evaluating and possibly reconstructing an understanding of the text;
- Changing one's response to a text as the understanding is reconstructed; and
- Reflecting on/mentally recoding text in anticipation of using it later (pp. 58-59).

In summary, the findings show that skilled readers are active readers who consciously and continually use practices that clarify understanding in an effort to build meaning. Comprehension evolves as readers use their overviews or previews of the text to inform understanding during reading. Initial understandings are confirmed, modified,



or discounted as more thorough reading ensues. When reading is complete, the reader may not be satisfied with his/her understanding, and may initiate strategies to increase it, such as rereading, summarizing what was read, or asking questions about the text (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Skilled readers use two types of practices to comprehend text: skills and strategies. However, these are not always clearly delineated or and categorized finitely (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Skills and strategies may—and probably do—differ by reader proficiency; the reader may use a particular practice as a skill at one time, and a strategy at another, depending on several factors. The distinctions between the two and how they are used are important, and require further explanation.

### **Skills Versus Strategies**

The terms “skills” and “strategies” have been used interchangeably or synonymously by some reading comprehension researchers. Because of this, there is confusion. The lack of consistency in term use implies conceptual confusion (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Are skills and strategies one and the same? If not, how are the two related?

Intentionality in use is the logical discriminator between skills and strategies. Strategies are used intentionally and with awareness on the part of the reader (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). So, for instance, if the reader does not understand a passage, he/she might elect to slow down or reread that passage in an effort to build meaning, which is the ultimate goal of reading. He/she is consciously using a strategy to build comprehension. Regulation of reading comprehension and repair of understanding are features of strategy implementation (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). In essence,

strategies are intentional practices used consciously and deliberately by readers in an effort to better understand text.

Skills, on the other hand, are associated with automaticity (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Readers use skills without thought. Because they are used without conscious awareness, they are implemented more quickly than strategies, requiring no deliberation on the part of the reader (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Skills, then, are used by readers unconsciously and without distraction to enable text comprehension (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991).

Skills and strategies differ from reader to reader. For some, a particular action designed to enhance understanding—perhaps summarizing text, for example—is initially deliberate and plodding. Each time a portion of text is read, the reader specifically and intentionally performs a mental summary in an effort to make meaning. However, over the course of time, this strategy becomes more automatic and less overt, to the point that the reader ceases to be aware that he/she is summarizing text periodically. When this happens, the strategy has become a skill (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Shifting seamlessly between skills and strategies as text dictates can build motivation and self-efficacy (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Expert readers have a repertoire of skills that are often deficient in less skilled readers (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). The aim of reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers is to expand strategies, and to eventually turn that repertoire of strategies into an arsenal of skills through repeated use (RRSG, 2002). Effective reading teachers can help poor comprehenders to do just this. But what do we know about effective teachers of reading

and what they are doing to increase reading comprehension in struggling students, particularly poor comprehenders?

### **Effective Reading Teachers**

Effective teachers positively impact students' learning. Less effective teachers negatively impact students' learning (Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Effective reading teachers are a primary determinant of student reading progress (Pressley, Gaskins, Solic, & Collins, 2006; Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret, 2007; Taylor et al., 2002). Reading teachers who successfully implement research-based instructional approaches and teach reading comprehension strategies can significantly increase reading comprehension in struggling readers (Block, Parris, Reed, Whiteley, & Cleveland, 2009; NRP 2000).

Effective reading teachers are effective for a number of reasons. First, they believe that reading comprehension instruction is important. Rather than simply evaluating reading comprehension—as is the case in many reading classrooms—these teachers understand that teaching comprehension strategies must be a component of the reading instructional program (Pressley, 2006; Taylor et al, 2003). They use direct instruction to model and teach comprehension strategies. These include: (a) predicting; (b) setting a purpose for reading; (c) summarizing; (d) monitoring comprehension; and (e) analyzing story structure (Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Hampston, 1997). Additionally, they ask higher-level questions and expect students to participate in discussions of text. They believe that students build meaning by thinking actively about their reading and discussing their thoughts about the text with others (Allington et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2006; Pressley et al., 2007). Finally, these teachers

understand that activating students' prior knowledge and building background knowledge is a way to enhance comprehension of text. They practice this routinely with their students during instruction (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998). Effective reading teachers teach comprehension strategies and implement instructional methods to increase students' reading comprehension.

Conclusions from relevant research on this topic are clear: Appropriate reading comprehension instruction can prevent reading comprehension problems and promote development of proficient comprehenders. Teachers can positively impact struggling readers and poor comprehenders (RRSG, 2002). There are effective practices implemented by effective teachers—teaching comprehension strategies and implementing research-based instructional methods—that work to improve reading comprehension. These practices have undergone much testing and validating by researchers in the reading community (NRP, 2000; RRSG, 2002; Snow et al., 1998).

### **The NRP, the RRSG, and the Critics**

Much of what was known about reading comprehension instruction in elementary school-aged children up to 2002 has been synthesized in two national reports: the National Reading Panel's "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction" (2000) and the RAND Reading Study Group's "Reading for Understanding: Toward a R&D in Reading Comprehension" (2002). Each of these publications offers extensive recommendations about what should be occurring in classrooms regarding reading comprehension instruction and is discussed further below.

In 1997, Congress directed the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development along with the Secretary of Education to create a national panel to assess the scientific research on effective reading instruction. The National Reading Panel (2000) was the result. It was charged by Congress to provide a written report along with conclusions and recommendations for classroom application. Further, the panel was tasked to provide a strategy for implementation of its recommendations into classrooms and schools. The panel convened, and subsequently divided itself into subgroups. Reading comprehension was one of five focus areas, and fell under the auspices of the comprehension subgroup.

Prior to beginning a review of the research, the Panel established criteria to use in the selection of appropriate research studies. These included studies:

- Published in English in a refereed journal;
- Focused on children's reading development in the age/grade range from preschool to grade 12; and
- Using an experimental or quasi-experimental design with a control group or a multiple-baseline method (NRP, 2000, p. 5).

### **Best Practice Categories**

The comprehension subgroup initially reviewed 481 studies. Two hundred five of those studies were deemed to have met the NRP's methodological criteria as sound research studies of reading comprehension instruction. From these, seven best practice categories that improve comprehension instruction were established that include: (a) comprehension monitoring; (b) question generation; (c) question answering; (d) story structure; (e) summarization; (f) the use of graphic and semantic organizers; and (g)

cooperative learning. However, the results of the NRP (2000) are not without critics. Before discussing each of above mentioned best practices individually, valid criticisms of this study must first be addressed.

Several highly regarded and prominent literacy scholars (for example, Richard Allington and Michael Pressley) objected to the research study selection criteria of the NRP Report. Critics argued that limiting research studies to experimental or quasi-experimental designs resulted in both conceptual and methodological narrowness (Allington, 2002; Pressley, 2006), and failed to recognize the contributions of other designs such as causal comparative, correlational, and qualitative to the research body on reading instruction (Pressley, 2006). They argued that this narrowness resulted in critical research findings that might have been reported prominently and nationally remaining unreported (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006).

In an effort to address the critics' concerns about the NRP report, Almasi et al. (2006) undertook a comprehensive analysis of other types of research on reading comprehension instruction. They, too, established carefully stipulated criteria used for selection of research studies, which included:

- Investigating reading comprehension instruction of normal readers;
- Published in English in a refereed journal;
- Focusing on reading development from preschool to grade 12; and
- Using qualitative designs or methods (e.g. case study, ethnography, narrative, descriptive, observational, interview, grounded theory) (Almasi et al., 2006, p. 42).

The research analyzed focused on reading comprehension instruction and was published between 1979 and 2002. From the original pool of 115 studies, evaluation narrowed the total to eight. Researchers then manually searched through *Reading Research Quarterly* and identified an additional four research studies that met pre-established criteria. From the 12, it was ascertained that the qualitative studies were more recent than the quantitative research reviewed by the NRP, and that the studies also better supported the NRP's recommendation for implementation of strategy use (Almasi et al., 2006).

Many of the same comprehension strategies identified in the quantitative studies were also identified in the studies evaluated by Almasi et al. (2006). These include mental imagery, meaning-seeking using multiple strategies, graphic organizers, and summarizing text. However, more importantly, descriptions of how to implement these strategies instructionally were rich and deep. This had been noted as a missing piece of information in the NRP's study (Almasi et al.). In the qualitative studies, explanations of instructional implementation were explicit. The details of step-by-step practices that were used by teachers in classrooms were reported. This provides a more complete picture of instructional comprehension strategies, how they are best implemented, and descriptions of how classrooms that produce a high degree of cognitive processing are structured.

In the qualitative studies examined (Almasi et al., 2006), researchers noted that learning environments included:

- An integrated curriculum that is rich in authentic literature;
- Explicit instruction related to using multiple strategies;
- Opportunities to verbalize about one's cognitive processing; and

- Introduction of tools that help students identify text structure and organize thoughts produced in the meaning construction process (p. 61).

This additional information pertaining to implementation of instruction in the classroom helps to form a more complete picture of what is involved in reading comprehension instruction and how to go about implementing such instruction. With this information in mind, the NRP can be regarded as a report that identified many effective practices to improve reading comprehension. These practices included both comprehension strategies and instructional practices.

Though each of the comprehension strategies and instructional techniques identified by the NRP will now be discussed individually, it is not the intent to teach these in isolation. The most benefit is gained when multiple strategies are introduced simultaneously during instruction (Shanahan, 2005). Multiple strategy instruction is most beneficial in reading comprehension instruction, since it reflects what readers actually do as they are reading, and transfers to standard comprehension test results (NRP 2000).

**Comprehension monitoring.** Comprehension monitoring is actively thinking about whether or not something that is being read is understood: the metacognitive piece that occurs with comprehension of text (Cross & Paris, 1988). As previously discussed, skilled readers routinely monitor their comprehension and use a series of fix-up strategies when they notice comprehension deteriorating (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; RRSg, 2002). These strategies might include, but are not limited to: (a) rereading; (b) slowing down; (c) summarizing; (d) asking questions; and (e) taking notes.

A summary of 22 studies showed reading comprehension growth in control groups when comprehension monitoring was taught to students as part of a multiple



strategy method to improve reading comprehension (NRP, 2000). These studies overwhelming indicated that students in grades 3 through 6—including struggling readers—could be taught to monitor how well they comprehended what is read and to make adjustments as necessary to improve comprehension (NRP, 2000). Additionally, struggling readers' comprehension, as noted on post test measures, showed significant improvement when compared to pretest measures. Thus, comprehension monitoring was recommended as a practice to be taught during reading comprehension instruction.

**Question generation.** The ability to generate questions about reading is an important comprehension-fostering skill (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996). Of the seven strategies identified by the NRP for improving reading comprehension, question generation had the strongest scientific support for its effectiveness. Students who ask questions and infer about what they are reading are stronger comprehenders than readers who do not (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Twenty-seven studies, conducted in grades 3 through 9—which included struggling readers—were evaluated by the NRP (2000). Findings indicated that teaching students to generate questions about their reading results in reading comprehension gains. The overall effect size when using standardized tests was .36 while experimenter-authored tests for reading comprehension resulted in an overall .86 ES (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996). Again, the NRP (2000) recommended question generation as one strategy to use in a multiple strategies instructional plan for reading comprehension instruction.

**Question answering.** Teaching students how to answer questions and inferences in reading can improve reading comprehension. The NRP (2000) reviewed 17 studies,

predominantly in grades 3 through 5. Results are based on experimenter-designed tests rather than standardized or other general tests. The panel suggested that teachers use question answering in students as a way to guide and monitor their students' comprehension (NRP).

**Story structure.** Narrative text has a structure that when understood, helps students to comprehend story and make logical predictions about what might be coming next. Narratives have a plot or course of events, characters with goals, actions and feelings, and a setting(s). Generally, children learn from a young age, even before entering school, the attributes of stories or narrative text. Researchers call this story structure or story grammar and agree that a basic understanding of such aids comprehension and recall (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001). The NRP (2000) is in agreement with this thinking.

A review of 17 studies that measured the effects of the use of story structure instruction with narrative text in grades 3 through 6 was conducted (NRP, 2000). Half of the studies focused on struggling readers. Results indicated that struggling readers benefit more from instruction in story structure when answering questions and recalling information than do non-struggling readers. With this in mind, story structure was identified as a practice to use during reading comprehension instruction with narrative text.

**Summarization.** To summarize effectively, readers must determine what is important, discard unimportant details, and synthesize what remains. This synthesis acts as a synopsis that captures the essence of the reading. Summarization then, results in

information that is recreated by the reader as an accurate and cohesive representation of the original material (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991).

The NRP (2000) analyzed 18 studies related to summarization and concluded that this comprehension strategy is effective in improving reading comprehension particularly as it relates to memory and identifying main ideas in the reading. Though some of the studies focused on written summarization, 11 showed positive effects on information recall and on answering questions orally. Based on these results, the NRP recommended summarization as part of an instruction approach using multiple strategies to improve reading comprehension instruction.

**Use of graphic organizers.** As the subheading implies, graphic organizers are used to aid readers in the organization of reading information and to build understanding (NRP, 2000). The NRP reviewed and analyzed 11 studies, predominantly in grades 4 through 6, in social studies and science content areas. They found that graphic organizers resulted in near transfer of memory information about content material and that the use of a systematic visual graph organized information in a way that aided students in remembering what had been read. It, therefore, became a practice recommended for use in reading comprehension instruction.

**Implications.** As the NRP reported, many actions should be occurring as students read. Comprehending is an active process requiring constant thought, analysis, and synthesis by the reader. As readers read, they should be asking and answering questions to inform, extend, and clarify their comprehension (Guthrie, Taboada, & Coddington, 2007; Kintsch & Kintsch, 1996; Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Additionally, they should be noting the structure of a narrative to fully understand how the story is unfolding through

plot, characterization, setting, and other story elements (Raphael & Au, 2005; Vaughn & Klingner, 2004; Vaughn & Lonan-Thompson, 2004). Finally, comprehension monitoring involves summarization of reading periodically throughout the text and awareness that comprehension is proceeding effectively or requires some kind of “fix-up” strategy when a break down is noted (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). The NRP (2000) advocated that teachers become proficient in these comprehension strategies in order to instruct students outright in them.

### **Instructional Frameworks**

Three instructional frameworks found to improve reading comprehension were also identified by the NRP (2000). These are: (a) reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984); (b) direct explanation (Duffy & Roehler, 1989); and (c) transactional strategies instruction (Pressley et al., 1991). Each has its foundations in constructivist or social constructivist thinking and the notion of meaning evolving as information is applied and reinterpreted (Rosenblatt, 1995).

All three instructional frameworks use a combination of discussion, instruction, and independent reading in each of their structures. Though they differ somewhat in *how* each of the frameworks is implemented, all focus on scaffolded learning of specific strategies during reading which includes teacher modeling, student practice, and finally a lessening of instruction with the ultimate goal of strategies internalization.

Foundationally, each contains a direct instruction approach to teaching the strategies. Logical steps—or a sequence of actions followed—in these frameworks include: strategy explanation, strategy modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and reflection on use of the strategy (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002).

**Reciprocal teaching approach.** In 1984, Palinscar and Brown created an approach that teaches students how to use multiple comprehension strategies during reading. Termed reciprocal teaching, strategies include: predicting, questioning, seeking clarification when confused, and summarizing. Over a period of 20 lessons occurring in reading groups, students learn how to use these strategies in a systematic sequence of events. Each reading group has a designated student leader who is responsible for supervising the group's creation of predictions, questions, and summaries of the reading. The leader begins by posing questions after an agreed upon length of text is read by all.

Additionally, should individuals in the group need clarifications of text, the leader either provides them or solicits them from other group members. This highly structured reading group gets support from the teacher only as needed. Scaffolding is carefully structured to provide support as needed but not to hamper students' independent formulation of text meaning (Brown & Palinscar, 1989). This approach builds on the idea of strategic reading and active learning. Learning is scaffolded, teachers and peers continually model the processes, multiple strategies are used simultaneously, and best practice strategies are targeted.

However, critics have noted shortcomings during some observational evaluations. Researchers found that: 1) literal questions can be the mainstay of the discussions; 2) lessons can take on an air of rigidity through the predetermined sequence of events; 3) there can be awkward and long pauses as the teacher hesitates to jump into the discussion for fear of stifling responses; and 4) few clarification questions make it hard to monitor comprehension in some of the lessons (Hacker & Tenent, 2002). Conversely, reciprocal teaching's flexibility in whole class, small group, and independent reading settings is a

benefit that adds to a versatile approach that can easily be combined with other strategies instruction (Oczkus, 2003).

A review of 16 studies of reciprocal teaching concluded that it is an instructional method that does improve reading comprehension, particularly in grades 4 through 7 (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Standardized comprehension test scores found an average effect size of .3 though more direct instruction resulted in higher comprehension effect sizes; an effect size of .50 or larger is considered an important finding (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Further, tests administered a year after the intervention concluded indicated that comprehension levels are maintained, providing additional evidence of the framework's effectiveness (Palincsar & Klenk, 1991).

**Direct explanation.** At about the time that Palincsar and Brown (1984) were creating their reciprocal teaching approach to reading comprehension, Duffy et al. (1986) proposed a model of teaching based on mental modeling with teacher explanations. They called this model direct explanation (Duffy & Roehler, 1989). In this framework, the emphasis is on teaching students to view comprehension as a problem solving task that necessitates strategic thinking. Teaching students to think strategically about solving reading comprehension problems is a mainstay of direct explanation (Duffy et al, 1986).

In the model, the teacher first explains the strategy to the student and then models its process by thinking aloud as he/she is using it. For instance, the strategy might be visualizing text. The teacher would tell the students that good readers often visualize a story in their minds as they are reading. He/she would then read a story, stopping periodically to explain the visuals he/she is constructing as the story unfolds. Then the teacher would have students try to model their own visualizations, providing feedback

and reinstruction as necessary, and slowly diminishing the feedback as students' skills in the strategy grow stronger. Studies indicate that struggling intermediate readers benefit from this approach to reading comprehension, making gains in both long and short term transfer on standardized reading comprehension tests (Duffy et al., 1986; Duffy et al., 1987).

**Transactional strategies instruction.** Pressley and his research group observed the direct explanation approach to reading comprehension instruction in several classrooms (Pressley & El-Dinary, 1993). Their observations uncovered much more than just direct explanation of strategies, and they decided that further investigations were necessary to identify all that was occurring in reading classrooms.

One school using transactional strategies instruction—a term not coined at this point—is the Benchmark School in Media, Pennsylvania (Pressley et al., 1991). Although the students are high performing, they have experienced reading difficulties during their first two years of schooling, and therefore are at higher risk for failure than other students. They are struggling readers. Interestingly, unlike other schools across the nation, almost all of these students finish high school.

Pressley's research team was interested in closely examining the instructional reading practices of these teachers. At Benchmark, students are taught reading strategies across the curriculum from the primary grades through middle school. Through in-depth interviews and data analysis across 31 teachers, commonalities surfaced.

The research team was noticing a give-and-take between the teachers and students that was new but typical of classrooms implementing strategy instruction (Pressley, 2006). It seemed that a transaction was occurring between the students and the text,

between the students and the teachers, and between the students and other students in the reading groups as they practiced the comprehension strategies and actively engaged in building meaning from texts. Thus, Pressley decided it most appropriate to label these practices, transactional strategies instruction (TSI).

Over the course of many years and several studies, using mostly mixed methods designs, Pressley has shown that TSI results in measureable reading comprehension gains (Anderson, 1992; Brown, et al., 1996; Collins, 1991). When teachers use TSI in reading comprehension instruction, students are also more willing to: (a) attempt to understand more difficult material; (b) collaborate with classmates to discover meanings in text; and (c) react to and elaborate on text (Pressley, 2006). Additionally, Pressley notes that students taught to use transactional strategies become self-regulated readers who begin to independently use the comprehension strategies identified as those use by skilled readers (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

**What this means.** This research indicates that there are instructional frameworks that can be used to improve comprehension instruction. The three noted above use multiple strategies in flexible, naturalistic environments. Two—direct explanation and transactional strategies instruction—are endorsed by the NRP (2000) and advocated as sound and well-tested approaches to use during reading comprehension instruction. The third, reciprocal teaching, though not specifically endorsed by the NRP for intermediate level readers, is indicated time and again as an effective approach for learning disabled, struggling, and proficient readers (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Also, the NRP recommends all reciprocal teaching strategies, as well as multi-method comprehension instruction, a component of reciprocal teaching. Effective use of each of these



frameworks with struggling readers by classroom teachers proficient in their implementation results in students' improved reading comprehension.

### **Instructional Techniques**

In addition to identifying effective comprehension strategies and instructional frameworks for comprehension strategy instruction, several instructional techniques were also identified in the NRP (2000) report. These include: (a) cooperative learning; (b) mental modeling; (c) direct and explicit instruction; and (d) scaffolded instruction.

Several of these techniques were also identified by the What Works Clearinghouse in a best practices synthesis of reading comprehension research (WWC, 2008). It identified several practices found to be effective for use during reading comprehension instruction for grades 4 through 12. Included in those identified best practices are mental modeling, direct and explicit instruction, and scaffolded instruction.

**Cooperative learning.** Cooperative learning involves students working together in a specified group to accomplish a shared goal (Siegel, 2005). It includes these components: positive interdependence, individual accountability, personal responsibility, positive interactions, use of interpersonal skills, and multi-level group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1997).

The NRP (2000) noted that 10 studies using cooperative learning showed positive effects for improved reading comprehension for students in grades 3 through 6. Further, they noted that when peers interact and instruct one another using reading comprehension strategies in a cooperative learning environment, the outcome is students who use and internalize the strategies and participate in intellectual conversations. Cooperative

learning is a strategy indicated to improve reading comprehension, in both struggling and proficient readers.

Since the publication of the NRP (2000) report, several studies have been conducted that corroborate the initial findings. Students who participate in cooperative learning help one another construct meaning and to clarify ideas that are confusing (Pressley et al., 2006; Pressley et al., 2007). Each student contributes to the learning of others while at the same time constructing individual understanding (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008; Stevens, 2003). In other words, meaning and understanding are co-constructed within the cooperative learning environment (Allington et al, 2002).

Equally important, discussions between students in a cooperative environment are noted to be of high quality. Focus is on higher level thinking as opposed to literal level questioning and answering (Pressley et al., 2006; Pressley et al., 2007). Additionally, the construction of meaning occurs in a more collaborative, supportive environment (Pressley et al, 2004).

As noted by the NRP (2000) and reconfirmed in numerous and more recent follow-on research studies, there appears to be a correlation between cooperative learning and reading comprehension achievement. Since working cooperatively to build meaning effectively increases comprehension, students should have opportunities to work in a cooperative environment (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008).

**Mental modeling.** When teachers think aloud they provide cognitive or mental modeling for students (Duffy, 2003). Effective teachers use think aloud in their classrooms to model what they are thinking about as they making meaning while reading (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002; WWC, 2008). This modeling is intended to serve as examples

of practices that help to create meaning from text. For example, a teacher who is modeling comprehension monitoring might think aloud in this manner:

Well, I just finished that last paragraph, and I'm a little bit confused. Why is the girl crying? I must have missed something in the reading. Okay, I'll go back and reread the paragraph. It says that she was feeling blue. How can you feel blue? That's a color. Let me reread that one more time: "Tyne was feeling blue because her brother was critically ill." I know that critically ill means really sick because my granddad was critically ill and he died. So she was really worried about her brother and began to cry. Feeling blue must mean that someone is feeling sad or unhappy. Okay, now that makes sense!

Several studies indicate that mental modeling is one instructional technique used routinely by schools with excellent literacy programs (Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002; Pressley et al., 2006; Pressley et al., 2007). Research findings illustrate the importance of showing students how to construct meaning by thinking out loud about how predicting, asking questions, clarifying, and other strategies that proficient reader use routinely help them to understand reading (Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Pressley et al., 2006).

Mental modeling is a routine practice used by effective reading teachers (Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002; Pressley et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2003). These demonstrations by teachers help to demystify the comprehension process, making it more overt and giving struggling readers a procedure to emulate as they are reading, with the ultimate goal being improved reading comprehension. Interestingly, the three effective instructional frameworks identified by the NRP (2000)—reciprocal teaching, direct

instruction, and transactional strategies instruction—each incorporate some degree of mental modeling into the instructional practices used within them.

**Direct and explicit instruction.** Just as cooperative learning and mental modeling are identified by the NRP (2000) and RRSB (2002) as positively impacting reading comprehension growth, so is direct and explicit instruction (DEI). What Works Clearinghouse (2008) also notes that effective teachers use a direct and explicit instruction lesson plan for teaching students how to use comprehension strategies. DEI includes a programmatic sequence of steps which teachers follow during reading comprehension instruction. These steps include

- Explain the strategy, skills, and processes to students;
- Mentally model their use to students;
- Help students use these strategies, processes and skills during guided practice;
- Lessen assistance as student proficiency increases; and
- Students use strategies independently (Duffy et al., 1987).

The majority of the studies in this literature review point to DEI as an instructional practice that is important for use in effective classrooms.

Struggling readers benefit from explicit, directed instruction in prediction, summarization, and question generation when instruction is provided sequentially and understanding is measured before a second strategy is introduced (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). Struggling readers show greater achievement in classes that spend more time in teacher-managed explicit reading comprehension instruction activities than those

in which instructional time is spent more in child-centered explicit instruction—for example, sustained silent reading (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2004).

Benchmark School teachers are trained in and use a small group of reading comprehension strategies. These strategies are, in turn, taught to students over their years at the school in an explicitly structured series of steps that include: explanation, demonstration, modeling, and practice. Students are expected to slowly incorporate these strategies into their repertoires of reading practices until their use becomes transparent (Pressley et al., 2006). Studies have shown the effectiveness of this practice in increasing reading comprehension in struggling readers (Pressley et al., 1991; Pressley et al., 1998).

Each of these studies highlights the importance of DEI in reading comprehension instruction. DEI provides students with the tools that they need to become successful independent readers. It allows them to slowly internalize practices with teacher oversight to ensure correct learning occurs. This, in turn, ensures the strategy or practice is correctly learned and even more importantly, can be correctly implemented as needed by the reader.

**Scaffolded instruction.** When teachers scaffold instruction, they help struggling readers to become skilled readers (Pressley et al., 2007; Pressley et al., 2004, Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2003). Scaffolded instruction helps a child to achieve a goal that would be impossible without assistance (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). It is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist view of learning, which contends that every mental function in a child's development first occurs with the assistance of an adult. With this assistance, the child slowly becomes able to complete this mental function

independently. This explanation of scaffolding by Pressley (2006) is particularly descriptive:

The scaffolding of a building under construction provides support when the new building cannot stand on its own. As the new structure is completed and becomes freestanding, the scaffolding is removed. So it is with scaffolded adult-child academic interactions. The adult carefully monitors when enough instructional input has been provided to permit the child to make progress toward an academic goal, and thus the adult provides support only when the child needs it. If the child catches on quickly, the adult's responsive instruction will be less detailed than if the child experiences difficulties with the task (p. 103).

Instructional scaffolding is used extensively by highly effective reading teachers (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). However, though it plays an important role in fostering reading comprehension, it is not frequently observed with most teachers (Clark & Graves, 2004; Taylor et al., 2000). Research indicates that teachers play a critical role in student success when they scaffold instruction to meet students where they are and help them to attain new learning goals (Pressley, 2006).

Scaffolded instruction during reading comprehension must take into consideration three factors: the student who is reading, the purpose for reading, and the text to be read (Graves, Graves, & Braaten, 1996; WWC, 2008). Based on these factors, the teacher then determines the scaffolds needed to help students achieve their reading goals. There are many types of scaffolded instruction that can be implemented during reading comprehension instruction (Pressley et al., 2004). Scaffolded instruction can include: (a)

instructional reading levels; (b) flexible grouping; (c) graphic organizers; or (d) other techniques.

*Instructional reading levels.* In reading comprehension instruction, scaffolding can take several forms. For instance, through formative assessments, students' instructional reading levels are determined and provide a zone of proximal development (ZPD) for instruction during reading comprehension lessons (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that learning occurs in the ZPD, which lies just beyond what the student is able to do independently. A book at a student's instructional reading level is just above what that student can read independently with success; thus, it is within his/her ZPD.

With assistance from teachers, peers, or the instructional environment, students are challenged but supported and learning occurs (RRSG, 2002). Allington et al. (2002) found that high levels of engagement and reading success were at least partly the result of fourth grade students' access to reading materials of appropriate complexity. Importantly, because students were challenged but assisted, they were not overwhelmed by the demanding curriculum or task. When scaffolding is successfully implemented, frustration is rarely experienced, and students gradually increase their reading proficiencies (Pressley et al., 2004).

*Flexible grouping.* Another technique used to scaffold reading instruction is flexible grouping. This type of grouping is used on an *as needed* basis. Groups are formed to strengthen an area that may need more emphasis, and when the objectives have been successfully accomplished the group is disbanded. For instance, a group might be formed to strengthen knowledge about story grammar. Once students in that group can

successfully interpret story grammar while reading literature, the purpose of the group has been met and the group dissolves (Pressley et al., 2007).

*Using graphic organizers.* Graphic organizers were identified by the NRP (2000) as one of seven categories of comprehension strategies that improves reading comprehension. Graphic organizers effectively help students to classify and organize information, which helps to foster understanding. Intermediate struggling readers benefit the most from graphic organizer scaffolded instruction (Ermis, 2008). To assist students understanding of narrative text when needed, the use of story grammar and story mapping before, during, and after reading is an effective practice (Allington et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2007).

In each of these three examples of scaffolded instruction—instructional reading levels, flexible grouping, and graphic organizers—teachers used techniques to scaffold instruction to help students build meaning and understanding. However, these are not the only ways to scaffold learning during reading instruction.

*Other scaffolding techniques.* Because scaffolding during reading comprehension instruction considers the student, the purpose, and the text (Graves, Graves, & Braaten, 1996) the possibilities for scaffolding instruction are endless. Some practices, to name just a few of myriad possibilities, that can be classified as scaffolding include: activating background knowledge, teaching vocabulary and concepts, suggesting comprehension strategies, guided reading, oral reading to students, modifying the text, teacher modeling, strategic and targeted teacher think alouds, discussions, writing, and reteaching (Graves, Graves, & Braaten, 1996; Block et al, 2009). Any strategy or practice can be classified as scaffolding if it provides the supports necessary to help readers gain proficiency.



**Other Aspects of Effective Reading Instruction.** Two of the findings in the literature relevant to this study are more global in application than specific to reading comprehension instruction. Though they do apply to other than just reading classrooms, they are still identified as having an effect on reading comprehension levels. It is for this reason that they are included in this literature review.

Engaged students who are on task most of the time are observed routinely in effective schools and with effective reading teachers. These concepts are closely intertwined and will be discussed together. Two additional findings are identified as contributing to increased reading comprehension. They are student interactions and communication, and higher-level questioning and thinking skills.

When students are allowed to discuss text and interact with each other they are likely to be more engaged and on task. This is also the case when students are challenged with higher-level questions which results in increased reading comprehension. Thus, each of these instructional practices—engaged students, time on task, student interactions and communication, and higher-level questioning and thinking skills—will be discussed in detail.

### **Engaged Students and Time on Task**

Engaged students who spend the majority of their time on the task at hand are students who are learning. The most accomplished teachers manage to engage almost all of their students in the work of the classroom. Individual student measures show students engaged and on task 96% of the time in effective classrooms. This is contrasted with less effective teachers whose students average on task behavior and engagement 63% of the time (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). More specifically, teachers who

maintain high levels of on task behavior have students who achieve significantly greater reading comprehension growth over the course of the academic year (Taylor et al., 2003).

Effective teachers provide much instruction to their students. Teaching begins the moment students enter the classroom and continues up to the end of each period (Pressley et al., 2004). However, all studies do not overwhelmingly demonstrate a positive correlation between reading comprehension and engaged, on task student behavior.

Results of a study by Bitter, O'Day, Gubbins, and Socias (2009) did not demonstrate a significant positive relationship between the percentage of students on task and reading achievement. The researchers did point out that limited observation times at the schools may have skewed results as students were only observed on certain days and at the same time of day each observation. By and large, studies indicate that students who are on task and engaged during reading instruction are more successful than those who are not.

### **Student Interactions and Communication**

Students must be actively engaged for learning to occur (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001; NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002). They must have opportunities to discuss new ideas and to hear others' ideas as they construct new knowledge and explore unfamiliar concepts (Pressley et al., 1998). Overwhelmingly, the studies that were analyzed point to the importance of student interactions and conversation as an integral part of reading comprehension growth (Allington et al., 2002; Chinn et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 2007; Slavin et al., 2008; Wolf et al., 2005). Those teachers who supported and encouraged in-depth conversations about reading were teachers identified as effective reading teachers (Allington et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2003). Because research indicates that quality discussion leads to comprehension gains (Almasi, 2009; Palincsar & Brown,

1984), it seems reasonable to assert that more time, rather than less, should be devoted to literature discussion and meaning-making, particularly with struggling readers.

However, discussion is not the norm in most reading classrooms. More specifically, effective discussion that leads to comprehension growth is largely absent (Chinn et al., 2001; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997). With struggling readers, the numbers are particularly disturbing. These students spend the majority of their time in learning that is lacking coherence and cohesion. Struggling readers spend reading time immersed in worksheets, grammar exercises, and completion of multiple choice or true/false questions. For these students, lecture is the mode of instruction and is used 40% more of the time than by teachers in classrooms with high-achieving learners (Nystrand et al., 1997).

When discussion is used in classrooms, it is typically structured traditionally as teacher-led discussion, also referred to as recitation (Almasi, 2009). The format of this structure is identified in the literature as IRE: a teacher-initiated question, followed by a student response to the question, and concluded with a teacher evaluation of the student response (Mehan, 1979). In this format, questions are most often literal and the teacher is seen as the authority figure who decides the correctness of the response. This typical discussion format, utilized in classrooms across the nation, tends not to lead to individual student interpretations because the teacher evaluation discourages further discussion that might amplify ideas and create new understanding (Almasi, 1995). In essence, the teacher is looking for the correct answer to her question and once attained, the dialogue is logically terminated (Wolf et al., 2005). Because the teacher's purpose in this type of

discussion is to ensure that students “know the story” once the correct answer is elicited, the purpose of the discussion has been achieved (Chinn et al., 2001, p. 383).

However, there is another type of discourse that leads potentially to deeper discussions, and thus, improved comprehension (Almasi, 2009). This discussion, labeled *dialogic*, is typified by:

- Conversations that are interactive;
- Meaning making that is collaborative;
- Alternative interpretations of text that are accepted or encouraged; and
- Participants who are actively engaged in the discussion (Almasi, 2002).

Research indicates that dialogic, student-centered discussion is superior to teacher-led discussion in promoting significant growth in reading comprehension (Almasi, 2009). Perhaps this is the case because dialogic discussion requires students to think in ways that elicit deep thinking. They must evaluate, synthesize, question, and create new meaning while also considering others’ thoughts and judgments, ideas, and interpretations of the text. This critical thinking application helps students to achieve higher comprehension levels (Almasi, 2007).

Dialogic discussions are characterized as engaging, requiring higher-level thinking skills, and are cooperative by design. Several research studies have been conducted that focus on dialogic conversations and their impact on reading comprehension (e.g., Allington et al., 2002; Block et al., 2009; Saunders & Goldberg, 1999). Struggling intermediate grade readers participated in a student-dominated, teacher-led, whole class, open-ended discussion, called transactional learning by the authors (Block et al., 2009). Results indicate that these readers scored significantly higher

on comprehension subtest scores than their more able peers in summarizing and retaining information, two skills necessary for making meaning (NRP, 2000). Additional reading time, coupled with student-dominated whole class discussion, resulted in significant reading comprehension gains in these struggling readers.

Similarly, research has been conducted in fourth and fifth grade classrooms to investigate how instructional conversation (small group discussion) impacts reading comprehension (Saunders & Goldberg, 1999). The impact has been both positive and significant. This is also the case when observers study exemplary teachers and their classrooms (Allington et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2006; Pressley et al., 2007). Findings indicate that the amount and nature of classroom discussion among students and between students and teachers is a distinguishing feature of these classrooms. Conversations permeate the learning environments. Even during instructional talks, teachers seek to engage students conversationally about their understandings and confusions, while simultaneously encouraging fellow students to engage each others' ideas. Additionally, teachers encourage students to think metacognitively, expecting them to be able to explain how and why they arrived at their conclusions.

This idea of fostering comprehension through student elaboration and explanation is further supported with research results (Nystrand et al., 1997; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Students who are encouraged to elaborate are more highly engaged in discussions because they must also build coherence into their explanations by weaving bits of information together that ultimately forms the whole of their thinking (Allington et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 1992). This building of new explanations by coupling prior knowledge with others' ideas leads to learning that emphasizes student thinking and

interpretation rather than recitation and remembering (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993; Nystrand, et al.). This is in keeping with Rosenblatt's theory of transactional learning, in which the transaction among the student, the text, and the teacher combine to create new and unique interpretations of the text.

Discussions in which students are required to provide evidence for conclusions drawn or ideas postulated (accountable talk) lead to reading comprehension gains (Bitter et al., 2009). Student-oriented rather than teacher-oriented interaction styles result in higher student reading comprehension test scores. Teachers who use these techniques less often with their students have lower reading comprehension class scores (Bitter et al.; Wolf et al., 2005).

However, some argue that question types and/or classroom genre discourse (lecture, discussion, etc.) are not the determiners of student learning outcomes (Nystrand et al., 1997). Rather, they assert that effective discourse is largely in the hands of teachers, who ensure students are challenged with and by roles that cause them to think; create; and synthesize for deeper learning and comprehensive understanding. The importance of how dialogues are structured is critical. Discussions structured to generate higher-level thinking by students leads to improved comprehension and learning (Bitter et al., 2009; Nystrand, 1997; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, Taylor et al., 2003).

The importance of discussion in meaning making, first voiced over seventy years ago by Rosenblatt (1934) in her transactional learning theory, has a firm foundation of research to undergird her assertions (Allington, et al., 2002; Bitter et al., 2009; Chinn et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 2007). Students build comprehension through discussion, which is a transaction among students, teachers, and text. This transaction serves to create an

interpretation that is unique, though never static. As new understandings are brought to bear on prior knowledge by virtue of dialogue, interpretations continue to evolve.

Discussion is a catalyst for comprehension and increased understanding.

### **Higher-Level Questioning**

What teachers teach is important. But as important is how teachers teach.

Questions that require students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information are higher-level questions. Time and again, studies of effective schools noted that those teachers who use higher-level questioning and thinking skills have students who perform better on reading comprehension tests than those who do not (Taylor & Pearson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000). Higher-level questioning has emerged as a significant predictor of reading growth in the intermediate grades (Taylor & Pearson).

Effective teachers in the most highly effective schools ask higher-level questions when discussing texts. (Bitter et al., 2009; Pressley et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2003). Conversely, less effective teachers use fewer higher-level questions, relying mostly upon low-level questioning and literal recall. Higher-level questioning about text after reading is correlated positively to student growth (Taylor et al., 2002). However, it is important to note that overall, researchers have observed limited higher-level questioning going on in any of the classrooms observed, no matter the grade level (Taylor et al., 2003).

There is a positive relationship between higher-level questioning and higher levels of reading comprehension. Additionally, effective teachers more often employ this technique than their less effective counterparts. Unfortunately, not enough higher-level

questioning is occurring in classrooms across the nation (Taylor et al. 2003; Taylor et al., 2002).

Research abounds about what can and should be occurring in elementary classrooms regarding reading comprehension instruction. Comprehension strategies, instructional frameworks, instructional techniques, and other aspects of effective reading instruction have been enumerated and expounded upon here. However, as noted earlier, reading scores remain stagnant, as do reading disparities based on race and gender. Many students in the intermediate grades are failing to comprehend proficiently what they read.

### **The Problem**

It is clear that much scientific evidence exists to inform reading comprehension instruction in intermediate grades and with struggling readers. However, research also indicates that reading comprehension instruction is lacking at those grade levels. In both the content and frequency/duration of comprehension instruction, many students are not getting what they need to become successful readers (Pressley, 2006; NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002).

The opening sentences at the beginning of this chapter state: “To be successful academically, children must comprehend or derive meaning from what they read. Many of our children are failing to comprehend.” Why is this the case when so much is known about effective reading comprehension instruction? There are several possible explanations.

In the primary grades, both historically and today, the focus for reading instruction has been on skilled reading, or decoding of words, rather than reading comprehension. The result is that comprehension is de-emphasized, while word calling is



emphasized, practiced, and evaluated more (RRSG, 2002). No doubt this has an impact on many struggling readers, and is an area for further study. However, primary reading programs are not the focus of this dissertation; the focus is on intermediate struggling readers and poor comprehenders who have difficulties comprehending what they read.

As explained earlier, when children enter third grade, the emphasis for reading instruction becomes reading to learn (Chall, 1991). Thus, comprehension instruction should be an essential component of intermediate-level reading instruction (NRP, 2000; RRSG, 2002; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). As has been discussed, in many classrooms across the United States this appears not to be the case. After ten years of studying fourth grade reading instruction, Allington (2002) asserts that when teachers think they are teaching, they are more often assigning work and assessing its completion. There is a lack of active teaching with explicit instruction and explanation to build comprehension.

Stated succinctly:

People often confuse teaching comprehension skills with testing comprehension. This common practice persists in schools despite decades of research indicating that comprehension is a proactive, continual process of using prior knowledge, metacognitive awareness, and reflection to make sense of a text (Ivey & Douglas, 2005, p. 13).

Research results are not being translated into classroom teaching practices; teachers still spend little time on reading comprehension instruction (O'Connor et al., 2002; Pressley et al, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). Perhaps a lack of sound comprehension instruction that incorporates research-based information and

practices, is related to the large number of struggling students in reading classrooms across the country and the stagnant reading scores of fourth-graders nationwide.

### **Conclusion**

Research results indicate that many comprehension strategies and instructional techniques implemented during reading comprehension instruction can increase reading comprehension levels in struggling and proficient readers alike. The NRP (2000) identified seven strategies for increasing reading comprehension in the intermediate grades: (a) comprehension monitoring; (b) cooperative learning; (c) question generation; (d) question answering; (e) story structure; (f) summarization; and (g) the use of graphic organizers. Scaffolded instruction was implicit in these strategies' implementation. Additionally, three effective instructional frameworks were identified: (a) direct explanation (Duffy & Roehler, 1989); (b) reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984); and (c) transactional strategies instruction (Pressley et al., 1989).

Research completed since the NRP's publication (2000) identifies other practices that also improve reading comprehension, particularly for struggling readers and poor comprehenders. They are: engaged students and time on task, student interaction and communication, and higher-level questioning.

But are today's effective reading teachers routinely implementing these practices in reading classrooms, particularly with struggling readers, and poor comprehenders? Is there a symbiotic relationship between reading comprehension instruction research and what is occurring in effective teachers' classrooms during reading comprehension instruction? That is what this research study seeks to discover. Once again, the research questions I seek to answer are:

1. Which comprehension strategies and/or instructional practices are implemented by effective reading teachers in their classrooms during reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers and poor comprehenders?
2. Why do effective reading teachers choose these strategies and/ or practices?
3. What, if any, are the differences between current reading comprehension research results and the instructional practices and strategies used by effective reading teachers during reading comprehension instruction? Why are they different?

The answers to each of these questions can provide important information to the reading community.

The next chapter delineates the design and methods to be used during this research study. I also discuss why these particular design parameters and methods are best suited to answering my research questions.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Approach and Rationale**

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, reading comprehension instruction is a complex topic. To understand the subtle nuances and elements of effective comprehension instruction, a thorough study of all of the reading comprehension instructional practices used by effective teachers is necessary. Thorough, as used here, means both a broad and a deep approach to studying these practices, and suggests a study that is designed to accomplish both. By doing this, my hope is to be able to fully encapsulate what occurs during effective reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers and poor comprehenders in the classrooms observed. Qualitative research provides an appropriate vehicle for this interpretation of the notion of thoroughness.

In order to gain and build understanding of a social science phenomenon, it is necessary to understand people's lived experiences systematically (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Building a balanced and comprehensive understanding of what effective reading teachers do during reading comprehension instruction requires stepping into the participants' worlds as they currently exist to generate as much data about those worlds as possible. With this in mind, interpretivism was the paradigm of choice for this study.

#### **Interpretivism**

Interpretivism assumes that actions themselves convey meaning; that meaning is inherent in the act itself (Schwandt, 2007). The researcher's task, therefore, is to derive or

extract meaning from the actions described and/or observed; or said another way, to interpret those actions by ascribing meaning to them. Interpretivism is grounded in a subjectivist epistemology (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Subjectivism holds that people interpret their worlds uniquely based on the factors that make them individuals: their prior experiences, backgrounds, and value systems. Thus, truth is relative and knowledge is individually created. One person's reality might differ markedly from another's, even in the same context.

As will be explained in detail below, the teachers participating in this study are nationally board certified in literacy and are therefore considered to be effective reading comprehension teachers. However, there were both similarities and differences in their instructional practices and beliefs regarding reading comprehension instruction, expressed via their expressed views, experiences, and interpretations. As an interpretivist researcher, I sought to uncover their unique creations of knowledge by understanding their socially constructed realities (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This entailed studying a phenomenon—in this case reading comprehension instruction—in context. However, while context is critical to interpretivist research, it is also ephemeral, as perception exists only in a particular way at a particular time (Spinelli, 2005). In other words, meaning is not held constant over time; it changes as people and contexts change. I report about the phenomenon under scrutiny (effective comprehension instruction) at a particular point in time, and in the contexts of my participants' schools and classrooms.

I studied participants' lived experiences as teachers of reading comprehension in classroom contexts through extensive observations and several interviews. This provided the breadth and depth, alluded to previously that was necessary for a comprehensive

understanding of a phenomenon. Studying multiple participants who may have different views of effective reading comprehension instructional practices with proficient readers, struggling readers, and poor comprehenders furthered my understanding, as multiple voices added to the richness of meaning made from my interpretations of the data that was collected and generated.

I did not study just any reading teachers. I selected, specifically, those teachers who are nationally board certified in literacy. Their experiences in gaining this credential have resulted in recursive reflection and assessment to identify the capabilities and needs of their students. I focused specifically on interpreting their communicated knowledge and exploring the meanings they constructed about reading comprehension instruction. They provided the data needed to build the interpreted, information-rich cases that appear in the next chapter. The cases were formed using a phenomenological research strategy, which focuses on how people perceive their worlds (Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007).

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology was the strategy I chose to explore how effective reading teachers help readers to comprehend. Phenomenology is a “focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Rather than a search for one correct or final interpretation, phenomenology recognizes that an ultimate reality does not exist. There are always alternatives to the meanings and interpretations that we have ascribed to something. What some assume to be truths or universal laws might actually be nothing more or less than judgments influenced by culture and consensus groups, even without our conscious awareness (Spinelli, 2005). In the end, though we

may think our interpretations of phenomena reflect truth, ultimately, they remain interpretations.

This is not to say that our interpretations are entirely subjective, however.

Phenomenology proposes that:

...our experience of reality is always made up of an interaction between the raw matter of the world, whatever that might be, and what might be broadly called 'our mental faculties.' We never perceive only raw matter; just as, similarly, we never perceive pure or 'raw' mental phenomena. We always experience the interpreted reality that emerges from the interaction or inter-relatedness between the two (Spinelli, 2005, p. 12).

It is the melding of the two—the raw matter and our mental faculties—that form the interpretation that gives meaning to phenomena or experiences of peoples' lives. Often, people go through their lives immersed in their experiences, rather than being aware of them explicitly. According to Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009), experience can be expressed in a hierarchical fashion. Sometimes we are immersed in the experience but unconscious of it. As we become aware of the experience and what is happening, it becomes *an* experience—heightened in our consciousness—rather than just experience.

To capture these experiences accurately requires careful and thorough work on the part of the researcher. In this proposed study, for example, first I worked to uncover how the teachers in my study's sample experienced the phenomenon of reading comprehension instruction. Then I worked to convey this knowledge in a way that depicted accurately how they experienced it through their own perceptions, descriptions, feelings, judgments, and discussions about it (Patton, 2003). I sought to make sense of

what effective reading teachers did to improve reading comprehension in proficient readers, struggling readers, and poor comprehenders, and how they affected reading comprehension proficiency with these learners. I did this by observing them and by asking them to discuss their experiences of reading comprehension instruction, helping them to recall and reflect upon their understandings of practices and instruction actively . I did this within the framework of transactional learning theory, which is described below.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

My study is grounded in transactional learning theory—also called reader response theory—and its constructivist roots (Rosenblatt, 1979). This theory postulates that when reading, a transaction occurs between the reader and the text, and that transaction results in meaning that is unique to each reader. Louise Rosenblatt's work from the 1930s was incorporated into a later work, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* that was published in 1979. At this time, many educational researchers were considering reading comprehension to be constructivist in nature.

Schwandt (2007) writes of two strands of constructivism: radical constructivism and social constructionism. Radical constructivism is focused on the individual and the inner construction of knowledge. Individual knowledge is under a constant state of revision as new understanding is brought to bear that necessitates a reformulation of prior meaning. Radical constructivism is in keeping with constructivism as defined by Crotty (1998). Constructivism is internal to the individual. Individuals create meaning and understanding independently of others, in their own minds, based on unique individual



experiences. We all create our own unique meanings; each of these creations is as valid as any other, and equally worthy of respect (Crotty).

Social constructionism, on the other hand, focuses on processes and interactions within a social context (Schwandt, 2007) and meaning that is made through both of these; it is similar to Crotty's (1998) explanation of constructionism. According to Crotty, constructionism is a social act. People build meaning and knowledge together through social exchanges and in conjunction with and from their particular cultures. These exchanges within a cultural context help to shape individuals' understanding. While it might be argued that transactions that occur with others (teachers and students) are social in nature, ultimately, Rosenblatt (1979) argued that meaning is made by each reader, at each point in time. In other words, individual meaning is the product of these transactions.

Since the focus of Rosenblatt's theory is upon individual meaning making, rather than socially constructed meaning, it is more in line with Crotty's explanation of constructivism (1998) and Schwandt's explanation of radical constructivism (2007). Rosenblatt contends that through these individual constructions of meaning, readers routinely interpret the same text differently by virtue of the unique experiences and background knowledge they bring to the text. Therefore, constructivism—a uniquely individual process of meaning making—provides the foundation for this theory.

While working with students, Rosenblatt (1979) noted an exchange that occurs between reader and texts, calling it a transaction. This transaction produces a unique interpretation or meaning that she labeled the poem. She explains the poem in this way:

Poem presupposes a reader actively involved with a text and refers to what he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols. 'Poem' stands here for the whole category, 'literary work of art' and for terms such as 'novel,' 'play,' or 'short story.' This substitution is often justified by the assertion that poems are the most concentrated form of the category, the others being usually more extended in time, more loosely integrated (p. 12).

Prior to Rosenblatt's theory formulation, reading of texts was thought to be much more objective: that there was only one way to interpret text—from the author's point of view—which was believed to be correct. Rosenblatt changed this thinking by reintroducing the notion that the reader, by virtue of his/her experiences, brings a unique and individualistic interpretation to a text that potentially results in slightly different interpretations of the same text read by multiple readers. Simply put, Rosenblatt believed that a generic reader or a generic interpretation was an impossibility, since each reader develops a singularly unique relationship with the text (Rosenblatt, 1995).

In her description of transactional theory of reading, Rosenblatt (1979) differentiates between what she terms aesthetic and efferent reading. These differentiations result in the production or nonproduction of the poem, previously discussed. Said more simply, aesthetic reading results in the poem while efferent reading results in information. The reader's stance or focus of attention in large measure determines the resultant outcome. If the reader's purpose is to answer a question or solve a problem then that reader is reading from an efferent stance. Conversely, in aesthetic reading, no particular outcome from a reading is considered or sought. Rather, immersion in the text and all of the accompanying feelings, ideas, and attitudes evoked—that is, the

lived-through experience of transacting with the text—is the poem that is created.

Caution should be taken in viewing these stances in isolation, however. The reality of reading is the continuum that logically exists with aesthetic stance at one end and efferent stance at the other. Gradations between the two occur at every point. Additionally, Rosenblatt further asserts that the same text can be read from either an aesthetic or efferent stance. A poem read aesthetically for the sheer beauty of the images evoked can also be read for syntax or poetic structure.

Transactional theory of reading—or reader-response theory— (Rosenblatt, 1979) was adopted by many in the late 1970s through the 1980s, when much research was being conducted about reading comprehension and how individuals construct meaning (e.g. Duffy & Roehler, 1989; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pressley et al., 1992). This theory is a vehicle for understanding how meaning is constructed by individuals when reading text, and how meaning is further broadened or refined through teacher-led discussion. Readers first comprehend text using their personal experiences and backgrounds. Then, the teacher helps students to revisit that experience through discussion, which helps to build connections among initial meaning making, ensuing discussion, and the text (Rosenblatt, 1982). In this way, meaning is constructed more fully in a particular moment. Rosenblatt states that meaning is made at a moment in time with the knowledge available at that time. Thus, meaning is time-specific, transforming when new knowledge is brought to bear on previous meaning.

I studied how teachers help students to build meaning as they interact with texts. Specifically, I hoped to identify practices and procedures used by teachers to build, clarify, or broaden understanding as their students transacted with the text, with other

students, and with their teachers. Effective reading teachers are an important ingredient in this meaning construction, particularly with struggling readers. Careful selection of effective reading teachers to form a sample was a critical component of my study.

### **Participant Sample**

Time and again, research indicates that effective reading teachers are committed to their students and their students' learning (Pressley, 2006). They know how to teach all aspects of reading effectively, and manage and monitor their students' learning both formatively and summatively (Allington & Johnston, 2000; Taylor, Pearson, Clark & Walpole, 1999). Reading comprehension instruction—one of five components under the reading instruction umbrella—is an important part of any effective reading program (NRP, 2000). Effective teachers of reading comprehension comprised my sample of participants.

The sample is a purposeful one, meaning that I selected participants because they fit specific selection criteria. In this case, “effective reading teachers” were identified and selected so that information-rich cases provided depth, thus strengthening my study's design and results (Patton, 2002). Because I sought to understand what effective reading teachers do to build comprehension, it was necessary to define the term “effective reading teachers,” identify those teachers, and select those teachers who met the identified criteria. With this in mind, I targeted nationally board certified teachers who teach reading to students in grades 3-5. More specifically, I identified those who are board certified in Literacy: Reading-Language Arts/Early and Middle Childhood, which includes grades 3-5.

According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2010), board-certified literacy teachers excel in three pertinent areas of literacy instruction:

- preparing the way for student learning
- advancing student learning
- supporting student learning

National board certification is a comprehensive process. Teachers who meet NBCT standards successfully acquire an advanced teaching credential valid for ten years. Applicants are required to assess and evaluate their teaching practices in terms of five standards called core propositions. These propositions are:

Teachers are committed to students and their learning, teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students, teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 2010, “The Five Core Propositions,” para. 1-5).

To become certified, applicants participate in a series of ten assessments. These are reviewed and evaluated by previously certified teachers in the particular specialty area. Additionally, teachers are required to submit four portfolio entries focusing on teaching practice and six constructed response exercises which assess their content knowledge.

NBPTS core propositions one through four are identified in reading research as practices of effective reading teachers (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley, 2006). Therefore, board certified teachers can be deemed effective. Nationally board certified

teachers have demonstrated their effectiveness in reading instruction, of which reading comprehension instruction is a subset.

To locate potential participants, first I visited the website for nationally board certified teachers. Within the site is a directory of teachers searchable by location and specialty. I conducted a search of five school divisions within the region of the southeastern state in which I would be conducting this study. Table 1 is a graphical depiction of the NBCTs in literacy listed in this region. Twenty-two teachers are listed. I contacted their school divisions to find out the grade levels at which the teachers were working, and requested permission to conduct my study with those working at upper elementary levels. Of the 22 teachers identified, nine fit the eligibility criteria: they were teaching in grades 3-5.

I hoped to have a sample size of between four and seven teachers. Because this study sought to construct an in-depth understanding of effective reading comprehension teachers' practices, the sample size was kept comparatively small (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Since the purpose of this research was in-depth description, interpretation, and understanding of effective reading comprehension instruction and practice, selecting information-rich cases to observe and analyze deeply lends itself more to meaningfulness than does a larger sample size (Patton, 2002). When I contacted the eligible teachers to ask them to participate in this study, four of them from three school divisions were willing to do so.

*Table 1. Nationally Board Certified Teachers in Literacy*

<b>School Division</b>	<b>Number of NBCTs in Literacy</b>	<b>Eligible to Participate</b>	<b>Willing to Participate</b>
<b>School Division 1</b>	7	4	1
<b>School Division 2</b>	2	2	1
<b>School Division 3</b>	9	3	2
<b>School Division 4</b>	1	0	0
<b>School Division 5</b>	3	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>

Again, my participants were selected purposefully. They met the criteria that I established for effective reading instruction, of which effective reading comprehension instruction is a subset. The goal was to look deeply at what each teacher does to help readers become competent and proficient in reading comprehension. This provided the richness of information that is possible to attain from a smaller number of people (Patton, 2002).

The teachers who participated in this study worked with students at varying reading levels. For practical purposes, 'struggling readers' and 'poor comprehenders' are, to some extent, relative terms in this study. The range of reading comprehension competence varied both within and among the groups of students observed. The lowest

readers were third graders comprehending on a beginning second grade level. They were poor comprehenders. They decoded at grade level and were fluent readers, but they all comprehended at least one grade level below their current grade level assignment.

Another teacher worked with struggling readers in both a whole-group and small guided-reading-group structure. A third participant was a fifth-grade classroom teacher. She had ten struggling readers in her classroom and worked with them during small group guided reading. Finally, one of the participants worked with readers who were classified at her school as “minimally competent,” meaning that these students were within competency, but at the lowest level. Within the school in which they were enrolled, these students struggled more with comprehension in comparison with their same-school peers. At another school, they would be considered competent readers. Table 2 depicts the structures.

*Table 2. Lesson Structures*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Whole Group Lessons</b>	<b>Small Group Lessons</b>
<b>Ashley</b>	6 - Third grade observations	6 whole class lessons with 17 students	1 lesson with 3 students 2 lessons with 4 students 3 lessons with 5 students
	6 - Fourth grade observations	6 whole class lessons with 24 students	1 lesson with 7 students 2 lessons with 5 students 3 lessons with 6 students
<b>Connie</b>	7 - Fourth grade observations	3 whole class lesson with 22 students	1 lesson with 10 students 1 lesson with 12 students 1 lesson with 5 students 4 lessons with 9 students
	5 - Fifth grade observations	4 whole class lesson with 20 students	2 lessons with individual students 1 lesson with 5 students
<b>Katie</b>	12 - Third grade observations	N/A	12 lessons with 3 students
<b>Missy</b>	12 - Fifth grade observations	3 whole class lessons with 19-23 students	19 lessons with up to 5 students



## Data Generation and Collection

Data were generated and collected over the course of three months. This included open-ended classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. It also included the gathering of material culture. Since phenomenological studies seek to understand what people experience, the only way to do this was to immerse myself in the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews and persistent, prolonged observations provided the means to experience the phenomenon of effective reading comprehension instruction.

**Observations.** Observations were open-ended rather than prefigured, which is consistent with phenomenology's primary purpose of description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In my case, I described what was observed in the classroom during reading comprehension instruction (Appendix A). Open-ended observations helped to ensure that I generated the data as it emerged, rather than fit the data to a pre-configured conception of reading comprehension instruction. My plan was to conduct observations every day during reading instruction, from Monday through Friday. After each teacher had been observed for one week, I planned to allow several weeks to elapse and then observe teachers again for an additional week or two. I thought that this length and continuity in days would uncover multiple and varied practices during reading instruction. Additionally, observations over the course of consecutive days would provide the breadth that would lead to identification of different practices.

In reality, observations did occur over the course of several weeks. However, I was unable to observe any of the teachers from Monday through Friday during any of those weeks. Changes in their projected schedules necessitated revising my initial plan.

Even though the *plan* for observations and the *reality* of the observations differed somewhat, I was still able to observe each teacher for a total of 12 lessons that occurred over some consecutive days. Therefore, the breadth and depth of the planned observations were not compromised. Table 3 depicts the actual days of observations that occurred.

Table 3. Participants Roster of Interviews and Observations

<b>Name Certification Year</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Times</b>
<b>Ashley</b>  NBCT - 2008	Division 1	Reading Specialist	Interviews - 2/23 - Wed 4/12 - Tue Observations 1. 2/28 Mon 2. 2/28 Mon 3. 3/1 Tue 4. 3/1 Tue 5. 3/2 Wed 6. 3/2 Wed 7. 3/3 Thu 8. 3/3 Thu 9. 3/3 Fri 10. 3/7 Mon 11. 3/8 Tue 12. 3/9 Wed	2:30 2:45  3 - 7:45-9:05 4 - 12:00-12:55 3 - 7:45-9:00 4 - 11:55-1:00 3 - 7:45-10:30 4 - 11:50-1:00 3 - 7:45-9:00 3 - 9:00-10:30 4 - 12:00-1:00 4 - 12:00-1:30 3 - 9:00-10:30 4 - 12:00-1:00
<b>Connie</b>  NBCT - 2008	Division 3	Reading Resource Teacher	Interview - 3/8 - Tues 4/14 - Thu  Observations 1. 3/22 Tue 2. 3/23 Wed 3. 3/24 Thu 4. 3/28 Mon 5. 3/29 Tue 6. 3/31 Thu 7. 4/4 Mon 8. 4/6 Wed 9. 4/6 Wed 10. 4/7 Thu 11. 4/7 Thu 12. 4/8 Fri	3:15 3:15  5 - 10:30-11:30 5 - 10:30-11:30 5 - 10:30-11:30 4 - 12:30-1:30 4 - 12:30-1:30 4 - 12:30-1:30 4 - 12:30-1:30 5 - 10:30-11:30 5 - 12:30-1:30 5 - 10:30-11:30 4 - 12:30-1:30 4 - 12:30-1:30

Table 3

*Participants Roster of Interviews and Observations*

<b>Name Certification Year</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Times</b>
<b>Missy</b>  NBCT - 2009	Division 3	5th grade LA	Interview - 3/14 Mon 4/11  Observations 1. 3/15 Tue 2. 3/16 Wed 3. 3/17 Thu 4. 3/18 Fri 5. 3/24 Thu 6. 3/25 Fri 7. 3/30 Wed 8. 4/1 Fri 9. 4/4 Mon 10. 4/5 Tue 11. 4/6 Wed 12. 4/7 Thu	3:00 3:15  1:00-2:30 1:45-2:45 1:00-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:00-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45 1:45-2:45
<b>Katie</b>  NBCT - 2004	Division 2	Reading Specialist	Interview - 3/10 Thu 4/16  Observations 1. 3/16 Wed 2. 3/17 Thu 3. 3/18 Fri 4. 3/21 Mon 5. 3/30 Wed 6. 3/31 Thu 7. 4/1 Fri 8. 4/11 Mon 9. 4/12 Tue 10. 4/13 Wed 11. 4/14 Thu 12. 4/15 Fri	3:30 3:30  9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25 9:50-10:25

I had planned to observe participants for one week and then allow a couple of weeks to elapse before the next scheduled observations, to permit time to analyze the first

generated data set. In this way, I would be able to see whether or not data saturation had been achieved and if repetition was beginning to occur (Glesne, 2006). Data saturation is described as a point of diminishing returns. When observations or interviews cease to reveal new information then data saturation has been reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2008). Though I did not always complete a full week of observations with each teacher at the beginning of my study as I had originally planned, I did have time between observations to reflect on the themes that were emerging, checking for data saturation and repetition as I did so. I can say with confidence that I did observe repetition of instructional practices. I was able to analyze each of these practices to inform its place and role in the whole of each participant's reading comprehension instruction (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

My observation field notes (see Appendix A) described settings, participants, events, and even gestures as much as was practical (Glesne, 2006). Field notes were taken to describe the context and to record observer comments. The field notes were as detailed as possible, and included feelings that were experienced, reactions to the experiences I observed, and my own personal reflections about what I was seeing, their meanings, and potential significance (Patton, 2002). As soon as possible upon completion of each observation, my field notes were expanded to include further elaboration and commentary. This was done in an effort to fully describe and analyze what was observed before impressions and associations slipped away (Glesne, 2006).

**Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore and understand how effective reading teachers teach struggling readers and poor comprehenders to comprehend better. I situated the interviews in the teachers' classrooms or offices

because this was familiar territory to them. This helped to make the participants feel more comfortable during the initial process of establishing rapport (Glesne, 2006). It was hoped that situating the interviews in the contexts in which the teachers teach might also help them to better discuss the specifics of their approaches to reading comprehension and to more fully elaborate on their understandings.

Interview guides (see Appendix B) formed the basis for somewhat structured, yet open-ended discussion (Patton, 2002), and to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions. Because phenomenology seeks to capture the essences of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002)—in this case effective reading comprehension instruction—it was important to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to address the same topics related to my study's focus. Questions pertaining to transactional learning theory (Rosenblatt, 1979) and how transactions between the reader and the text, and the reader and the teacher inform comprehension were included in the interview guide (see Appendix B).

Though topics and questions were formulated beforehand, time was allocated to ensure that spontaneous follow-up questions that might potentially provide rich explanation and elucidation were given equal emphasis. Before the observations occurred, I conducted a preliminary interview (see Appendix C). I wanted to build trust and rapport, and establish a positive relationship before entering the classroom for observations. I also wanted to build my own background knowledge about individual teacher beliefs and practices (Patton, 2002).

Prior to the beginning of the first interview, I asked participating teachers to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix D). I began the interview with a predetermined set

of interview questions and probed as needed to generate as much data as possible during the interview (See Appendix C). I used probing techniques and member checking—soliciting feedback from respondents on my understanding of their statements—that included: questioning to clarify any points that I did not fully understand, summarizing frequently so that the participants had an opportunity to rethink or elaborate on their answers, and even remaining silent in an effort to encourage further elaboration (Glesne, 2006). Following the interviews, I member checked with summaries of the participants' transcribed interviews (see Appendix E). One form of member checking is sharing interview summaries with study participants and asking for corrections and/or additions to ensure accurate representations of participants and their thoughts (Glesne). I did this (see Appendix F). Additionally, I asked follow-up questions in an effort to extract as much information as possible (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) about the experience of reading comprehension instruction. I audiotaped each interview and transcribed the conversations verbatim.

During the interviews, I sought to understand each reading teacher's background, teaching experience, and knowledge of reading comprehension instruction. Additionally, I sought to find out how the participants' beliefs relate to transactional learning theory. A premise of this theory is the importance of the teacher's role in helping to build meaning from text (Rosenblatt, 1986). Because discussion plays a critical role in this construction, I asked specific questions about how participants view the importance of discussion in helping struggling readers to build comprehension of text. These took the form of follow-up questions woven throughout the other interview questions as appropriate.

Some of the questions could have been perceived as more difficult to answer than others. Using an interview guide format (see Appendix B), I began with experience/behavior questions. These questions are typically the easiest for participants to answer, and helped to establish rapport, making participants feel more comfortable during interviews (Glesne, 2006). These were followed by knowledge questions that were worded such that participants did not feel like they were being tested (Glesne). Other questions that I asked included feeling questions, opinion/values questions, and sensory questions that served as follow-up questions when it seemed more information was attainable with further probing (Patton, 2002). In addition to interviews as a means of data generation, material culture was also collected to further describe and illuminate effective reading comprehension instruction.

**Material culture.** Material culture includes documents, artifacts, and archives (Patton, 2002). I asked participants to supply copies of various documents for content analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Items included teacher lesson plans used during the course of lessons observed (see Appendix G), any handouts used during instruction that I observed (see Appendix H), sample student work generated during or following the observed instruction (see Appendix I), and any notes taken about instruction (see Appendix J).

Lesson plans (see Appendix G) were consulted to further inform my understanding of teacher intent during reading comprehension instruction (see Appendix H). Lesson plans serve as roadmaps for what should be taught, how it is taught, and how the lesson should proceed (Lynch & Warner, 2008). I requested to see the teachers' lesson plans, and asked about these plans during interviews in an effort to fully



understand the teachers' thinking surrounding the lessons. This helped me to more fully deduce each teacher's intent for the lesson, and also served as amplifying information regarding reading comprehension instruction. Sometimes lesson plans were given to me after instruction had occurred, however, and I was unable to discuss them in any detail. This was due to oversight, but I do not think it hampered my understanding of the intended goals and processes of any of the lessons observed. Additionally, I wrote descriptive memos of these lesson plans. Descriptive memos are short notations describing material culture and the researcher's impressions regarding its contents (Patton, 2002). These notes were consulted along with the rest of the data analysis materials.

Similarly, handouts (see Appendix I) given to students for use during the reading comprehension lessons were also collected. These handouts were perused in terms of their relationships to fostering reading comprehension and to transactional learning theory. To further understanding, I also sought specific information about the handouts: why they were given during the specific lesson, when they were to be used, and how they were used. To the maximum extent possible, I asked participants to explain their thinking about these handouts as close in time to their instructional use as possible. Analyzing both participants' intentions and the handouts themselves provided more data for rich description: an aim of qualitative research. As with the teachers' lesson plans, I wrote descriptive memos referring to the handouts that were given to me by participants.

I also collected copies of student work generated during or after reading comprehension instruction (see Appendix J). Students' work was viewed to understand how the observed instruction informed the students' understanding. However, two of the

three school divisions did not allow collection of student work. The teacher in the division that did allow for collection did not have students create products during class time. She assigned work to be completed at home twice during the twelve observations. I collected this work, reviewed it, and wrote a descriptive memo about the work.

Finally, I requested to see any notes that participating teachers made about instruction and reading comprehension as it related to the lessons that I observed (see Appendix K). I read through the notes and thought about their instructional implications. I used these notes to inform my second round of interviews, particularly with regard to the teachers' practice of informal and ongoing assessment of students' learning needs and performance.

Again, any material culture collected during reading comprehension instruction was perused in light of transactional learning theory (Rosenblatt, 1979). Specifically, I focused upon how and if material culture was used to exploit transactions between the students and the text, the students and the students, and between the students and their teachers. Examining all of these documents served to further my understanding of the phenomenon of reading comprehension instruction.

**Triangulation.** I used two types of triangulation: methodological triangulation and triangulation of sources. Methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002) using observations, interviews, and material culture served to strengthen the study's results by providing multiple methods to gather and generate data. By using multiple methods, the intent is to reduce the potential for error that can result with a limited number of data collection methods, while increasing consistency as findings are identified across collected and generated data. Because interpretivist studies seek to uncover the meanings

inherent in the social worlds under study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), the more methods used to uncover meaning, the richer and deeper the understanding can potentially be. Interviews, observations, and material culture provided different types of data that were used together to fully inform the investigation of effective reading comprehension instruction in the classrooms observed. This, in turn, led to cross-data consistency (Patton, 2002), which strengthened confidence in the conclusions that I drew. A more complete understanding of effective reading comprehension instruction was the goal, and methodological triangulation was one of the tools I used to accomplish the goal.

Triangulation of sources helps to verify the consistency of different data sources consulted within the same study (Patton, 2002). In design of this study, the participants and the material culture sampled from their classrooms were the data sources. Because multiple participants comprised the sample for this research study, triangulation among the participants was possible. Though this type of triangulation can result in consistency, it can also provide greater heterogeneity of data, leading to richer findings (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began as soon as data were initially generated. Though not all-inclusive, this involved: categorizing, synthesizing, patterning, discovering themes and interpreting (Glesne, 2006). I used a constant comparative method throughout my data analysis (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). This entails first breaking the transcriptions into complete thoughts and determining a category for the first thought. This is also known as open coding, which involves "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Then the second thought is compared to the first thought. At this point it is either assigned to

the same category, or it is assigned to a new one. This same procedure was used throughout each interview transcript, with new categories emerging as necessary (see Appendix L). A codebook, which is simply a document with pages that identify major codes and corresponding sub-codes, along with the definitions of each, was kept (Glesne, 2006). In an effort to organize the voluminous data that was collected, this codebook served as a tool to help make a complex task more manageable (see Appendix N). Using this method of analysis requires staying close to the data, which is important during this stage of research. The constant comparative technique is a way to do just that. By continually referring back to data, I was forced to consider the data as they were: no more and no less. Because I compared each piece of data with every other piece, similarities and differences were revealed and new meanings were constructed based entirely on what data analysis revealed (Patton, 2002).

When open coding was complete, coding categories were compared and any relationships among them noted. This is referred to as axial coding (Corbin, 2008). Axial codes were created from observation field notes, initially analyzed interviews, and descriptive memos about the material culture examined (see Appendix M). By looking at the links among categories, a more complete explanation of reading comprehension instruction was created as patterns emerged and themes across data categories began to be revealed (Glesne, 2006). At that time, broader categories and overall themes began to emerge that informed my understanding about effective reading comprehension instruction in the four classrooms observed. These themes were analyzed in terms of how they potentially related to transactional learning theory.

Additionally, my reflexive journal (see Appendix O) assisted in capturing thoughts as the study progressed. A reflexive journal is a type of diary used to capture a variety of information about the study, from self-perceptions to methodology decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this diary, growing understandings about the study, study interpretations, and thoughts needing further reflection and/or clarification all combined to further my knowledge about the phenomenon. Questions that arose about the study found their homes in these pages. This was also the venue in which I included a complete record of actions that I considered and took during the study. Methodological decisions and the reasoning behind them were also detailed in my reflexive journal.

Because interpretivist research results reflect interpretations of phenomena, it is important that researchers use established evaluative criteria to assess the quality and rigor of such studies (Manning, 1997). Additionally, it is important to ensure that participants are treated ethically during the study. Two sets of criteria that do this are trustworthiness and authenticity.

### **Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

Trustworthiness is one set of criteria used to judge the methodological rigor and quality of a study's results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four criteria falling under the umbrella of trustworthiness. Additionally, there are criteria unique to qualitative research focused on ethical practices used by researchers with study participants. This set of criteria is labeled authenticity (Manning, 1997). Both sets of criteria were addressed throughout this study.

**Trustworthiness.** Evaluating the quality of a qualitative study's results is the focus of trustworthiness (Schwandt, 2007). It includes four dimensions: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility pertains to how well the findings of a study represent the perceptions of the participants. Because this was an interpretivist study and I interpreted the data to form the conclusions that I report in chapters four and five of this document, there could, in fact, be differences between participants' interpretations and those of the researcher. With this in mind, I did not address credibility as it was defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be used in constructivist paradigm research. However, as I wanted to understand my participants' points of view, care was taken to listen closely, to learn from my participants, and to try to understand their perceptions and experiences as thoroughly as possible.

Confirmability is the extent to which the interpretations reported can be traced to the participants, rather than to my own personal beliefs. Transferability is the extent to which findings can be extended to other contexts and with other participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is concerned with consistency. A dependable research study is characterized by logic, traceability, and careful documentation and each of these three trustworthiness criteria will be addressed (Schwandt, 2007). To address confirmability, I employed observations, interviews, and document collection as multiple methods of data collection. This helped to triangulate data to make certain that the data generated accurately represented the views of the participants, rather than my own beliefs and perceptions. Without planning for and implementing methods to ensure that research findings are representative of participants' experiences, researchers run the risk of

imposing their own opinions and values on their findings. To help to address this issue, I revealed my thoughts about effective teachers and reading comprehension instruction prior to the initiation of the study with a Researcher as Instrument statement (see Appendix P). Reviewing this document served to reduce potential confusion regarding my personal thinking on the topic of effective reading comprehension instruction, and what I observed with effective teachers as they worked with students to strengthen reading comprehension.

Further, I used member checks during data generation. Member checks are solicitations requesting participant feedback on researcher findings and help to fine-tune the researcher's understanding of what the participants have said (Schwandt, 2007). Member checking includes summarizing understanding of participant responses during the observation and interview process. It was conducted in three ways. During interviews, I asked participants to clarify confusions I had as they answered my questions. I summarized their responses orally and they either confirmed the accuracy of or corrected my statements. I also asked them to elaborate on topics that seemed unclear to me. In this way, I could understand their meanings clearly and was therefore more able to be accurate in my interpretations of those meanings. I also sent summaries of each interview to participants (see Appendix E) and asked them to make any changes that they felt were needed (see Appendix Q). Finally, as I created the descriptions of each participant in chapter 4, I asked each of them to read these interpretations, to comment on the accuracy of the information, and to make changes they thought were necessary (see Appendix R). This process helped also to ensure the accuracy and confirmability of my study's findings.

Peer debriefing also added to the strength of the study's findings. Peers challenge the researcher's hypotheses and also challenge that researcher to confirm that data actually reflect participants' views and are not tainted by researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer I relied on heavily for this assistance was my dissertation chairperson. I sought guidance from her as data were categorized, coded, and as themes were revealed to ensure that the data guided interpretation, rather than reflected my own personal beliefs and points of view.

I also solicited assistance from reading teachers and reading specialists with whom I had worked in the past and whose knowledge of reading comprehension and its instruction I respect. I met with them informally several times over the course of data generation/collection and analysis. During these meetings, I discussed my impressions and thinking regarding both participant interviews and observations. These former colleagues served as sounding boards for my musings, permitting me to verbalize my thinking in an effort to clarify evolving understandings.

To address transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1986) advocate the use of thick, descriptive language in the reporting of study results. This includes, in part, a thorough description of the contexts explored. Thorough description allows readers to decide whether or not a study's findings may have applicability to their own contexts, and the degree to which they might elect to use all or some of the findings elsewhere. In an effort to make my study's results transferrable, I have described my participants and the contexts of their teaching in detail sufficient to permit readers to make informed decisions regarding the applicability of this study's results.



To address dependability, I relied on trusted others (my dissertation committee members and a fellow doctoral student) to provide feedback on the processes involved in this research study. I solicited their assistance in helping to ensure that the process I developed and followed was sound. I discussed all facets of my study regularly with my dissertation chairperson, primarily through email messaging. I met with her to discuss my data analysis procedures, preliminary findings, and evolving overarching themes several times, both face-to-face and via messaging. I met to discuss the results of my analysis with both my committee chairperson and another member of my dissertation committee. Additionally, I discussed my study, my progress, and processes undertaken with a fellow doctoral student. We communicated regularly, both face-to-face and by message. This ongoing feedback resulted in important information that led to additional data gathering. It also led to the development of stronger and better-articulated findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Trustworthiness criteria are not the only parameters used to determine the soundness of qualitative research findings. A second set of criteria is authenticity. Authenticity criteria focus primarily on ethical issues related to a study's procedures. It is a way to ensure that ethical practices, particularly as they relate to participants, are kept active and in the forefront of a researcher's considerations during the study (Manning, 1997).

**Authenticity.** These criteria have five dimensions (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). They include: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

*Fairness.* This dimension ensures that all participants' voices in the study are heard (Manning, 1997). Particularly important is the notion of giving voice to all participants, even when those voices may differ from others. One way to do this is by member checking. Member checking played an important role in my study. Checking to make sure that interpretations are accurate from the participants' point of view is imperative and results in the co-construction of knowledge (Manning, 1997) so important in qualitative research, and particularly in an interpretivist study. Manning argues that member checking is more than just a cursory recheck of correctness. It holds the researcher accountable to participants for a fully developed interpretation of a phenomenon. I considered myself to be fully accountable to my participants, and owed them a complex interpretation of effective reading comprehension instruction. Member checking helped me to do this.

A study's fairness can be increased using several other techniques; prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and peer debriefing all contribute to fairness in a study (Manning, 1997). The number of observations that I conducted was designed intentionally to assure prolonged engagement, which is "lengthy and intensive contact with the phenomena" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). Persistent observation is the "in-depth pursuit of those elements found to be especially salient" (Lincoln & Guba). This was also built into my study through consecutive days of observation. By observing on consecutive days, I had multiple opportunities to witness instructional practices, how they were implemented, and how or if one informed another for helping students to develop better reading comprehension.

*Ontological authenticity.* When participation in a study results in increased participant understanding of themselves and their contexts, ontological authenticity is demonstrated (Manning, 1997). I fostered this in several ways. Follow-up questions that encourage participants to think more deeply about the topics being explored can result in new understandings about reading comprehension instruction and instructional practices. I envisioned and actually saw much participant reflection on instructional practice as I elicited information in interviews that followed observations, and other interviews that were independent of observations. It was my intent to build the relationships of mutual trust and respect that Manning suggests increases the likelihood for ontological authenticity. This was done through prolonged engagement and persistent observation, in addition to multiple participant-centered interviews.

During interviews, conversations served as a springboard for meaning making. When participants' answers did not provide the clarity that I sought, I asked for further explanation and attempted to listen actively and patiently as participants tried to bring voice to what sometimes were unformed understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). This, in turn, required more thinking and reflecting by participants. It was sometimes necessary to return later to a particular area of discussion when time had been taken to think deeply about the questions. Since my intent was full understanding, a concerted effort was made not to rush the process to completion. My hope is that this led to increased understanding of both the art and craft involved in reading comprehension instruction. Closely related to ontological authenticity is educative authenticity. While ontological authenticity looks inward, educative authenticity is focused outward (Manning, 1997).

*Educative authenticity.* When an increase in participants' understandings of others' perspectives and constructions is a consequence of participation in the research study, educative authenticity is demonstrated (Manning, 1997). This can result in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as others' knowledge is added to self-knowledge. However, in my particular study, participants worked with me individually and were not privy to others' understandings until the end of the study. After this document has been defended and finalized, I will distribute copies of the research results to each participant. Each of the three school divisions in which this study's participants worked require researchers to submit reports of study results. The report formats vary among the different divisions, but all are due within 6-8 weeks of successful dissertation defense. I will send each participant a copy of a report of the study's results, formatted accordingly and by the deadlines specified by their divisions, at the same time.

Some growth in reading comprehension knowledge may occur after this happens; however, I may or may not be aware of it. When growth in knowledge results in or leads to action, a study has catalytic authenticity for participants.

*Catalytic authenticity.* When participants' decisions and actions are inspired by participation in the research study, catalytic authenticity is achieved (Manning, 1997). As stated above, I plan to disseminate my findings to all participants. It is my hope that these findings might influence their future decisions and actions pertaining to reading comprehension instruction. Though no follow-up activities are planned at this time, I fully expect to remain in contact with my participants after finalizing this document. In this way, it may be possible to ascertain if and how these research findings helped to facilitate the participants' decisions and actions. Perhaps dissemination will result in

participants *using* the findings in ways that strengthen their instructional practice, too, which is the focus of tactical authenticity.

*Tactical authenticity.* Tactical authenticity empowers and causes participants to act as a result of study participation (Manning, 1997). Importantly, Manning states that researchers cannot simply usurp participants' meanings, since participants should be viewed as co-researchers working collaboratively with the appointed researcher. Therefore, much is negotiated between participants and researcher and can include: the use of data, participant cooperation, confidentiality, and data interpretation. In effect, the consent form serves as a testament to this negotiation.

In the study that I proposed, however, co-construction of interpretations is not consistent with my interpretivist paradigm. Though I did fully comply with the negotiations set forth in my consent form concerning confidentiality and respondent cooperation, I needed to use data that were collected and generated without limitations on how or what was used. Member checking was used extensively to ensure participants' understandings were accurately reflected. However, interpreting those understandings in light of themes that emerged and within the context of transactional learning theory necessarily resided with the researcher in this study. Whether or not my efforts resulted in participants' empowerment is not something that I can control. Only the study participants can truly empower themselves within the research design that I proposed. Likewise, whether or not participants are moved to act as a result of this research is also something outside of my control. Only the participants themselves can decide to act. If they do, I may or may not know about any actions they might decide to take as a result of their participation in this study.

My aim was to increase the trustworthiness and authenticity of my study's findings to the maximum extent possible. Though all of the dimensions of trustworthiness and authenticity could not be addressed in this study due to some of its design parameters, I structured and conducted the study in ways that led to adequately trustworthy and authentic representations and interpretations of the perceptions and reflections of its participants.

### **Conclusion**

Thirty percent of intermediate age students are struggling readers (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2009). Many of these children are not identified as struggling until they reach third grade, when the emphasis shifts from decoding words and fluent reading, to reading for meaning, or comprehension (Pressley, 2006). Many of these students will become adults who struggle to comprehend (NCES, 2003). Effective reading teachers can impact struggling students, helping them to become proficient and competent readers who comprehend text (Almasi, Garas-York & Shanahan, 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). Ascertaining what they do and how they do it was the purpose of this study.

The foci of this study were threefold: the nature of teachers' reading comprehension instruction, their professional decisions regarding those practices, and how the practices are related to current reading comprehension research results. Specifically, this study sought to uncover what effective teachers of reading comprehension are doing in their classrooms to help readers—struggling readers, poor comprehenders, and competent readers alike—improve and their reasoning behind these instructional choices.

Perhaps a quote from transactional learning theory (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26) is particularly apt:

The teacher of literature, then, seeks to help specific human beings discover the satisfactions of literature. Teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual's capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process. The starting point for growth must be each individual's efforts to marshal his resources in relation to the printed page. The teacher's task is to foster fruitful interactions—or, more precisely, transaction—between individual readers and individual literary texts.

Did the participants in my study—effective reading teachers—“foster fruitful interactions?” The answer is found in the chapters that follow.

## Chapter 4

### The Teachers

The four participants in this study have varied backgrounds, experiences, and teaching situations. What they have in common is their national board certification in literacy, their current positions working with intermediate grade readers in reading comprehension instruction, their belief that teachers significantly impact reading comprehension growth in struggling and competent readers alike, and their knowledge regarding reflective practice and its effect on student performance. I begin first with an introduction of each teacher. I include some basic background information, how each teacher defines reading comprehension, teacher beliefs, and information pertaining to their national board certification. Following the introduction, I discuss the teachers' beliefs and practices in terms of reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1982). This is followed by a discussion of overarching themes that surfaced as data were analyzed.

#### Connie

**Background.** In addition to the college degrees and national board certification certificate adorning the wall behind Connie's desk is this quote, "Each child is living the only life he has - the only one he will ever have. The least we can do is not diminish it" (Page, N.D.) This is Connie's teaching philosophy, and it permeates every aspect of her instruction.

When I enter her classroom, I am greeted with a warm smile. Connie is welcoming but reserved as she offers her hand to me. Everything about her is calm and



quiet; I will see this over and over again as I observe in her class. Connie never raises her voice. No matter what is going on around her, Connie exudes calm.

When students ask her a question, she turns it around for them to answer. I note this in our second interview, and Connie tells me that she learned early on in her teaching career that it was important for students to think independently and to learn how to form their own conclusions. She helps them to do this by directing their questions back to them.

Connie has been teaching for thirty years. She has been a reading specialist for eleven. Her undergraduate degree is in early childhood education, and she has spent the majority of her time teaching in the primary grades. What she loves most about teaching are the "light bulb moments" that occur with her students.

**Defining reading comprehension.** When asked how she would define reading comprehension, she responds:

Basically, that the child gains knowledge, information, pleasure, amusement, anything from written text. That they're able to not only decode the words, but also understand the subtlety of the language: the puns, the sarcasm. Any of that. I think it also means the child, the reader doesn't have to be a child, is interacting with the text in the sense that they feel, they question, they wonder about things that are happening in the text....I think it's like a total absorption of the child with what's going on in the book.

**Teacher beliefs.** Connie believes that teachers should use authentic literature when teaching reading comprehension with intermediate grade readers. In her mind, two things drive reading instruction: the text that student's are reading and the student's

reading needs. She also believes that pacing guide skills, standards, and objectives can be woven into a text rather effortlessly and that skills should be infused into reading rather than taught in isolation.

I usually let the text guide what I want to include. We have the SOLs and we have our city objectives but I've found, and it probably comes with age, that you can pretty well cover everything rather than trying to deliberately take one objective at a time and cover it with something. If you take your material, your reading material, you can find where all those objectives are going to come in.

She is concerned that too often teachers use scripted lessons to teach strategies that good readers use intuitively, i.e. inferencing, questioning, predicting, etc. Rather, she believes that when students are exposed to literature, they can engage at a deeper level, immerse themselves in the story, and grow as readers.

I think what's missing in our schools, and I think it has to do with the emphasis on the guided reading, is a real development of a love for literacy itself. The texts that are used often for those guided reading lessons to me are very low; many of them are very very short little books that are probably written specifically for that purpose. But I think if we don't let our children get into lengthier text and quality literature at an early age, say at least by third grade or third grade level...I think we have to move them into the good pieces of literature, the chapter books, the classics. And help them develop a love for reading itself.

Connie believes that struggling readers need to be taught to use strategies that can help them to comprehend text. However, she thinks this can and should be done within the context of reading rather than in isolated lessons. She also believes that each reader

has different strengths and weaknesses that are brought to bear on comprehension. She sees it as her responsibility to help readers grow by identifying how best to structure instruction that meets the needs of each of her students saying:

I think you have to figure out what each child needs, wherever the struggle is. We accentuate the strengths but from the strengths you can tell where they need to go, or if they got these, it means they might not be getting these. So then we've got to work on those some.

Each day that I observed Connie's reading instruction—both fourth and fifth grade students in whole class and flexible small groupings—the emphasis was consistent. Students spent the majority of their time either reading or discussing what was read. After reading a certain portion of the text or after group discussion time, students were given time to complete packets about the novel being read titled, "Chapter Notes." These notes consist of places for students to annotate information about each chapter to include: setting, characters introduced and role, vocabulary (new, interesting, unusual), a main idea summary, and a personal reflection or something the student is wondering about that particular chapter.

Though students keep up with these "notes," this is not the emphasis of her instruction. Connie thinks that in some classrooms too much writing about reading gets in the way of reading pleasure and becomes burdensome to students. She says:

I think we have to be careful...It doesn't become more about the writing...I just think in every chapter of a book I'm reading, if I had to write something about it, it would kill the whole joy of reading. And I don't want that to happen...I think,

too, we have to be careful about having too many responses that are written. I think...it becomes more about the writing.

Connie's is a student-centered approach to reading comprehension instruction. She lets student needs drive her direction, focusing on how she can best facilitate their learning. Connie's overall teaching philosophy can be gleaned from this statement:

I think that our goal as teachers is that every child meets with success. And to do that you've got to find the ways to each child or to bring the material to them in a way that they can enjoy.

**National board certification in literacy.** When Connie decided to pursue her national board certification in literacy she also considered a doctoral program in reading. Since she was within 10 years of retirement, she thought it best to become board certified. She found the process to be informative and beneficial. The reflective practice piece was particularly valuable in that it forced her to continually assess her instructional practices and evaluate their effectiveness. In her words, Connie describes:

It did really help me go to another level of being student-centered even though I already was. It was an excellent professional development activity. It reemphasized the differences between students. We have to figure out what works for the child. How can I figure out what he needs to be successful?

### **Missy**

**Background.** At our first introduction, Missy enters the room with a large smile on her face. She thrusts her hand out purposefully, firmly shakes mine, and quickly introduces herself. I instantly feel comfortable and welcome. I will find that this same demeanor infuses her classroom; she exudes confidence and competence. Her students do

not hesitate to ask questions or share their thoughts even if they are not sure of their "correctness." Hers is a classroom with a safety net; students are encouraged to risk failure and know that Missy will help them to achieve success.

From the time she was in high school, Missy knew she was destined to be a teacher. She began her teaching career as a special education teacher working primarily in a self-contained classroom teaching children with autism. She taught in this capacity for ten years. Following this, she took an administrative position for two years but realized that she wanted to be in the classroom teaching students. She returned to the classroom as a first grade teacher, and it was here that she became excited about literacy. When her principal asked her to move with him to her current school, Missy transitioned to the fifth grade classroom, teaching two sections of language arts. She has been in this position for four years and finds it to be the most rewarding classroom assignment she has had thus far in her teaching career.

Working in a designated Title 1 school that serves only intermediate level students, Missy is committed to the success of each of her students. Her strong, positive personality permeates the classroom; it is apparent that her students' success and achievement are her priority. High expectations and strict discipline are the culture of her classroom. Little time is lost to off-task behavior and transitions between activities are smooth and rapid. Students are comfortable in this environment, understand the routines and procedures, and quickly engage in each instructional task with minimal delay. Missy is conscious of all that goes on around her, even when engaged with small groups during guided reading instruction.

**Defining reading comprehension.** When asked for her definition of reading comprehension, similar to Connie, Missy said:

Reading comprehension is not the actual reading of words, it's being able to take what you've read, summarize it into your own words, and to have a nice understanding of what you just read. I want them to think more critically about what they're reading and understanding those words, and you know, being able to relate it to their own lives, or to the world, or to those kinds of things that are getting them richer understanding, getting them deeper into the literature.

**Teacher beliefs.** Like Connie, Missy believes that instruction should focus on the specific needs of individual students. She routinely assesses their progress as she meets in guided reading groups daily. She identifies student needs and incorporates those needs into whole class, small group, or individual one-on-one instruction.

In addition to a student-centered focus during reading instruction, Missy also believes that students must be able to think critically about what is read and then be able to discuss their thinking. Similar to Connie, she believes in the importance of discussion following assigned reading during guided reading instruction. It is in this context that students' understanding is created, clarified, and even changed. She says students should:

Get in verbal discussions about what they're reading so that, because everyone's not going to read something the exact same way. You can have, you know, discussions about what's being read and the broader understanding about how someone interpreted what was read.

Missy believes that students are better served with instruction that is positive and encouraging. This was demonstrated throughout each of the observations. Missy

routinely congratulates students on their responses, insights into the reading, and persistence in decoding or use of context clues to deepen understanding. She personalizes her comments, telling students she notices their growth in a particular area and telling them how proud she is of their progress. It is typical to observe smiling students after a discussion with their teacher.

Missy uses small group guided reading instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers. When a student is struggling to comprehend during guided reading she says, "Typically I'll say, 'Let's go back and look at it together.' So the student and I will read it together, talk about it together, and discuss it together." This team approach to reading comprehension instruction serves Missy well. Students feel comfortable even while struggling to read. They understand that Missy is on their team and wants them to succeed. To Missy, the importance of her guided reading time cannot be overestimated. She tells me that small group reading instruction:

...affords a couple of opportunities. It affords time for me to get to know them better as a reader and how to help them progress. It also allows me to get them into literature that is on their level and that they can enjoy...If they have positive experiences with reading then that will hopefully, especially with those struggling learners, it will hopefully transition their opinions about reading into a positive one.

Missy has four reading groups in her classroom. To compose these groups, she uses data from observations, anecdotal notes, interest inventories, and more formal assessments that are given at the beginning of the year and thereafter on a quarterly basis. During guided reading group instruction, Missy uses novels at the students' instructional

reading levels because she believes that a well-developed story is one way to get students interested and motivated to read. During my observations, I saw students who were engaged in their reading and also anxious to discuss it with one another. Missy believes:

It's just powerful thinking when you can teach them life lessons and how to appreciate good literature and how to get through it when you're struggling. And how to select appropriate text...those kinds of things. I think a teacher can make or break a struggling reader or any kind of reader.

**National board certification in literacy.** Missy became a nationally board certified teacher in literacy in 2005. Like Connie, Missy likes to be challenged. She viewed board certification as a new challenge and "thought it was important to do. It was the next step professionally." The process was "incredible." Now Missy analyzes everything she does, and she says that she is "a better teacher because of it." The reflective piece was very important because it forced Missy to question why she was doing what she was doing in the classroom. Watching the videos of her instruction was enlightening in terms of both instructional practices and student performance. The reflection and the video viewing impacted how she teaches literacy and what she teaches. From the certification process, she learned to evaluate every activity from two perspectives: 1) why she was doing it; 2) and how it impacted learning. This type of detailed assessment was invaluable to her.

### **Katie**

**Background.** Walking into Katie's office/classroom, I am immediately struck by the neatness and the organization of her area. Instructional spaces within the area are filled with colorful rugs, stuffed animals, and cozy reading spots. There is an air of



invitation about it; I am comfortable upon entering. Above her desk is her national board certificate framed and displayed and a professional reading council Reading Teacher of the Year plaque.

Katie is intense and focused, leaning into me when she talks about reading. She speaks quickly; I have to listen carefully to catch it all. Her enthusiasm about reading instruction seems to know no bounds. She tells me that she has been "connected with" struggling readers throughout her teaching career. She has been a classroom teacher, a Title 1 math and reading teacher, a kindergarten teacher, and a Reading Recovery teacher. She became a reading specialist in 2000 and finds it to be a good fit.

As the school's reading specialist, Katie shares her space with reading interventionists. Her classroom is full of books: many leveled and labeled in baskets; others displayed on shelves; still others identified by interest and theme. It is like a mini-library: bright and inviting and open for teachers to use. Instructional materials are neatly arranged for teacher checkout. Her area is also a repository for reading materials used by classroom teachers. She has only been at this school for a year, and the boxes of new materials seem to arrive daily. She tells me the resources that were available to her when she first transferred were old, in poor shape, and completely outdated. As a result, few teachers ever ventured in to check them out. She is hopeful that all the new resources and the training she will conduct to accompany them will be the catalyst for a robust circulation.

**Defining reading comprehension.** When asked to explain what is meant by reading comprehension, like Connie and Missy, she elaborates on the idea of making meaning. Katie says:

Reading comprehension is making meaning of text. It is huge, you don't just comprehend text, there's so many nuances to it....It's whether or not you can make connections to it, it's whether or not you can go on inference, whether or not you can come up with conclusions...We all come to it in different ways. And that's that trick to teaching children.

**Teacher beliefs.** Katie believes that "knowing" students well as readers is a precursor to helping them to become better readers who understand what they read. Similar to both Connie and Missy, she believes that only by understanding a student's strengths and weaknesses can you begin to structure instruction in a way that meets the student's needs and helps build proficiency:

You have to really know the children. You have to know their strengths and weaknesses to be able to build from the strengths. You're not just to focus on weaknesses. That gets you nowhere. What you have to do is build off of what they know.

Katie builds her understanding of readers in a variety of ways: classroom observations, informal and formal assessments, interest inventories, and talking with teachers and assistants who work with the students. Like Connie and Missy, Katie believes that ongoing assessment drives instruction. She uses the assessment data just mentioned to build her reading groups. As she works with her students, she continues to assess their understanding while also assessing her instruction. When she sees that lesson revision or refinement is needed, she changes directions, modifies her course, or even goes in a different direction instructionally when necessary.

Katie also believes in the ability of effective teachers to transform struggling readers into proficient readers. When Katie first started teaching in New Jersey, she went from junior high to elementary school. She related a story to me about a little girl, Lisa M., who struggled to read. She worked with that student all year long. The next year, Lisa M. came back to the school and said, "Mrs. B., I want you to know I can read. I'm in a regular reading group, and I don't need any help." She speaks of that as a "life-changing moment for me." Since that time, she has always worked with students who struggle to read.

Similar to Connie and Missy, Katie views every reader through a unique lens. Each comes with specific strengths and weaknesses. It is her responsibility to know what those areas are and to then develop strategies to build those weak areas. She believes in explicit instruction, quoting Gerald Duffy and his ideas about explicit comprehension strategies instruction. She says:

One of the interesting things about strategies is...we test strategies, but we don't explicitly teach them. So, in other words, I might test you about drawing an inference, and I want to know if you can do it, but I never really take you step-by-step through the process. So when I talk about strategic thinking, I'm talking about making your thought process explicit to the children so they understand how you did that. It's not magic. I'm going to show you how to draw an inference. This is what I think; this is what I do. Now you do it.

Katie believes that she is the most important element in helping a struggling reader to achieve. This becomes clear in my interviews and observations over the course of several weeks. Katie videotapes most of the lessons that I observe. She goes home and

analyzes both herself and her students' responses. After this analysis, she might amend her lesson or change it entirely. She uses this ongoing assessment to guide her instruction and believes that all benefit from this practice. Of this she says:

I'm going back and I'm looking at the lessons, I'm looking at the videotapes, and even I'm looking at my notes. Then I'm planning from that to meet their needs. It's like today's lesson was. If you would look at that in comparison to the first one...you know they've progressed and I've progressed. A lot of their learning or a lot of what they can show me is because of what I do. It goes back to my practice.

**National board certification in literacy.** Like Missy, Katie describes herself as a life-long learner. After four years at her former school, Katie felt like she was starting to stagnate. She wanted to stay with her principal but needed a new challenge. So, she decided to become nationally board certified in literacy. She saw this as the perfect vehicle for new growth. Katie says the process was a "huge challenge" and it changed the way she teaches. Her perception of teaching changed; she became much more student-centered. She says:

National board changes your life because it's *what, so what, now what*. So what you're doing, what about it, and what are you going to do with it? It's all based on you really looking at the child, you gather the data, and you have a goal in mind and you can move them forward.

### **Ashley**

**Background.** When I interact with Ashley, I am immediately aware of her high energy level. She buzzes about her office offering me a chair at the table and making me feel welcome and comfortable. She asks me if I would like something to drink. Her smile

never leaves her face. I quickly realize during the observations that follow that she also does this with her struggling readers; they are comfortable with her and don't hesitate to ask for assistance.

Similar to Katie's classroom, I notice the organization of Ashley's environment. Her office, shared with two others, is neat and orderly. Three ring binders line a shelf with instructional materials ready for the taking. Though compact and crowded, everything has a place and is in it. When she refers to materials during our interview, she is able to locate them without hesitation, even though her shelves are full.

Ashley began her teaching career in the 1970s in an Ohio middle school. She taught Spanish to eighth graders and was appalled when she realized that many of them could not read. It was from that experience that she made the decision to become a reading teacher. When she reentered the teaching field after an absence to raise her children, she decided to become a reading specialist. Her goal was to help middle school students who were struggling readers to become proficient. She did this for 19 years.

Seven years ago she moved to a Title 1 designated elementary school where she has worked with all grade levels. The school did not make *adequate yearly progress* (AYP) so they are under scrutiny by the state department of education. Currently, Ashley works with intermediate students in a "push-in" rather than "pull-out" environment; instruction is handled in the classroom rather than in a more private location. Though she was leery of this structure initially, she finds that it works quite well. Ashley feels that students are able to focus and engage during small group instruction.

During the first interview, Ashley spent much time talking about her reading instruction schedule. She works with third, fourth, and fifth grade struggling readers in

the classroom. Most of her time is spent reinforcing skills that are deficient as measured by weekly assessments and her school division's quarterly reading benchmark test. She explains:

I still basically work with the children who have been designated as focus students...they just need extra help. And basically I'm doing the same skill. We have pacing guides and they're certain skills they're supposed to do every week. I do work with that skill but in the context of something, not their book, but in the context of something else.

**Defining reading comprehension.** When I ask Ashley what is meant by reading comprehension, she responds:

To me reading comprehension is not just saying words but really being able to understand what you read, to get something out of the reading, to be able to apply it, or at least to understand it. I mean there's a lot of children over the years who are very good at saying words. They can read nicely and maybe read fluently. They have no idea what they're reading. So reading comprehension is really being able to understand what you read is what I think.

**Teacher beliefs.** Unlike Connie, Missy, and Katie, Ashley feels frustrated by her school's instructional approach to reading comprehension instruction. Had she the latitude—which she feels she doesn't—she would do things differently. She confides:

Well we have this philosophy. We say it doesn't matter if the kids know how to read or enjoy reading. That doesn't matter anymore as long as they can pass the test. And I feel bad telling you that. It's like we are bound to do certain things whether we agree with them or not.

Ashley is enthusiastic about a reading workshop she recently attended. Reading comprehension strategies are taught through the use of picture books. Ashley found the demonstration engaging and is hoping to implement some of the lessons in her small group instruction. The workshop uses activities to teach students to use different strategies. Ashley likes to use activities in conjunction with reading comprehension instruction. In our interviews, she talks often about hands-on activities to keep students engaged. As she explains her planning process, she talks about looking "through my book of activities." In Ashley's mind, and in the context of her school, skills drive instruction and activities are used to teach the skills. This is in sharp contrast to the practices of Connie, Missy, and Katie.

Ashley believes that small group instruction is beneficial for struggling readers. It is in this structure that Ashley says she can keep them more engaged. In whole group instruction, struggling readers "get lost and they just rely on other people to answer." It also allows Ashley to "see what the child is doing. I can monitor it better."

Like the other study participants, Ashley believes that discussion of reading is important. If she could, she would integrate more discussion into her reading instruction because she sees the benefit to the students. She thinks discussing the story, the characters, their motivations, and possible story outcomes add to deeper meaning. However, she finds there is not enough time in the third grade schedule for discussion. Though she can sometimes have discussions in fourth grade guided reading groups, they often use that time for reinforcement of skills. She speaks longingly of her middle school days when discussion was a normal daily activity during reading.

If it were up to Ashley, she would do more reading with the struggling readers, and she would use authentic literature that is engaging. She would incorporate strategies and skills with this literature, in the context of reading, rather than focus on short passages with accompanying questions as is the current practice. When Ashley speaks of current practice, there is an air of frustration and resignation in her responses. Ashley feels powerless to make any changes. As she states, "This division has a lot of constraints. The division specifies when you do whole group and when you do guided reading." Though Ashley would like to incorporate her beliefs about reading into her daily practice, she feels the battle is too big to wage.

**National board certification in literacy.** Ashley earned her national board certification in literacy in 2008. Like the other participants, Ashley was looking for a new challenge. It was time for a change in life when she decided to pursue the certification. She wanted to "prove to herself" that she could do something of this magnitude. She partnered with a fourth grade teacher in her school, and they went through the process together. Ashley found the process to be "rigorous." She had to repeat two parts—reading comprehension and speaking, listening, and viewing—before she was certified. When she earned the certification, she says she was prouder of it than anything else she had ever done in her life. "Earning that distinction" was a peak experience in Ashley's life.

**In summary.** Each of the teachers in this study has a similar view of reading comprehension. During their interviews, each spoke of understanding as the key component. However, for three of the four teachers, reading comprehension is more than simply understanding.



Connie speaks of interacting with the text and approaching it from the affective domain as well as cognitively. In her mind, the two are interwoven. Readers question and wonder as they read. Yet pleasure, amusement—all the emotions that can emerge when reading—are also part of the reading experience. Missy, too, speaks of the affective domain as readers relate what is read to personal experiences in their own lives and to the larger world. She talks about deeper understanding as a result of these transactions with text. Katie echoes Connie's thoughts about the "subtle nuances" of understanding and the complexity of comprehension. Like Connie and Missy, she believes that readers must make connections to the text in order to understand. Katie also believes that readers come to comprehension differently and it is the teacher's job to ascertain how best to meet individual learners' needs. In contrast, Ashley speaks of reading comprehension as strictly understanding what is read. Hers is a simpler view of comprehension. She differentiates among decoding, reading fluency, and comprehending, but does not elaborate further.

Three of the four teachers—Connie, Missy, and Katie—speak often of the importance of their instruction to the success of their students. They view their impact while teaching as instrumental to their students' learning. They believe that what they do during reading comprehension instruction is crucial, and they are intentional in how they design and conduct instruction. They also believe that knowing their students as readers is key in designing effective instruction.

Connie, Missy, and Katie talk of individual student needs. They believe that instruction must incorporate these needs to the maximum extent possible. Differentiation

is the norm in their classrooms. Ashley does not mention individual students. Rather, she focuses on reading groups.

Connie believes that literature should drive instruction; all other instructional aids—such as pacing guides, district learning objectives, and standards of learning—can be woven into the fabric of text-based instruction. Missy and Katie, too, choose texts first and design their instruction with this in mind. They weave instruction of comprehension skills and strategies within the pages of whatever is read. Ashley would like to use authentic literature in her instruction and believes it beneficial to students. However, she is driven by her district's pacing guide, which specifies what is used for instruction. During my observations, the basal reader, with accompanying leveled readers and/or reading passages were the texts used for comprehension instruction.

All of the teachers believe that reading and discussion are at the heart of reading comprehension instruction. During my observations, Connie, Missy, and Katie spent the majority of their time with students reading and discussing what was read. Ashley spent most of her time on skills instruction in the context of activities that complemented the reading passages or basal reader. Regardless, each teacher spoke of the importance of reading and discussion time in helping to build reading comprehension. The transactions that are an outcome of reading and discussion play an important role in these teachers' reading comprehension instructional programs.

When students read and discuss, they are transacting. Be it between the student and text, the student and teacher, or between student and student, transactions are exchanges that help to build meaning. It is through transactions that understanding is born. As a result of further transactions, meaning continues to evolve (Rosenblatt, 1984).

### **Transactional Theory of Reading and Effective Teacher Beliefs and Practices**

In transactional theory of reading (reader-response theory), meaning making is viewed as a series of transactions that occur as the reader reads (Rosenblatt, 1929). These transactions result in meaning that is unique at any given point in time. Because the reader chooses what to consider or disregard and how to ascribe meaning in the text, the reading comprehension process is one of continuous self-revising. As new information is brought to bear on previous meaning construction, updates are made in the form of new understandings; "reader and text are involved in a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction" (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1371).

Within transactional theory of reading is the idea of stance. Stance reflects the reader's purpose for reading and Rosenblatt (1929) identifies two along a continuum: aesthetic and efferent stances. As previously discussed, efferent stance is concerned primarily with gleaning information from a text. Conversely, an aesthetic stance is an immersion in the reading and the accompanying ideas. Stances are not designated based on the text itself; how the reader interprets or transacts with the text determines the stance. For instance, an assumption cannot be made that a novel will be evoked—and thus, an aesthetic stance taken—from *Anna Karenina* rather than sociological facts about eighteenth century Russian society—an efferent stance. Stance is invoked by the reader's purpose rather than the text that is read.

As I interviewed and observed study participants over the course of several months, it became apparent from data analysis that each believes that transactions are the basis for meaning making. Because of this, opportunities for students to transact are embedded in participants' instructional practices. These transactions take several forms

and are based on the beliefs each participant holds about reading comprehension instruction. There are transactions that occur between the reader and the text, transactions that occur between the reader and the teacher, and transactions that occur between students who have read the same text. Each has important implications for reading comprehension and reading comprehension instruction.

### **Student and Text Transactions**

Before any other transaction can occur, the student must first transact with the text. It is in this interchange that individual meaning is initially made. Creation of meaning is never static; it is ever evolving. The same text read by the same reader may elicit different meanings depending on reading context, reader attitude at the time of the reading, and myriad other influences affecting comprehension (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Consider, for example, the practice of rereading. Rereading is used seamlessly—sometimes unconsciously—by effective readers (NRP, 2000; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). In rereading, the same words are read, but oftentimes, new meaning is the result of rereading (Rosenblatt, 1982). The multiple transactions that occur with rereading can result in clarified meaning, extended meaning, or even a completely new meaning derived from the same text. Therefore, meaning from reading is always unique.

How do teachers ensure that students transact with text? First, they provide the opportunity for reading time in the classroom. This means prioritizing uninterrupted reading time so that transactions can occur during the reading event (Atwell, 2007; Gambrell, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2004). Second, they provide an environment that is conducive to reading (Allington, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Shanahan et al., 2010). Finally, they ensure that students have books available that are interesting to them and that they

are able to read independently or instructionally depending on the instructional setting and purpose for reading (Krashen, 2004; RRSF, 2002; Shanahan et al., 2010).

**Reading time.** Before students can make meaning, they must be given time to transact with text (Rosenblatt, 2004). In both interviews and during my observations, participants voiced their beliefs about the importance of reading in helping readers—struggling or otherwise—achieve. Ashley is concerned that students in her school no longer have opportunities to read independently. Hers was a school that implemented Accelerated Reader for six years. With this program, students read books at their independent reading level and then take a short test to measure comprehension. She mentioned that parents had contacted her to tell her how this program, and the additional reading both at school and at home, had helped their children. They were building reading proficiency and getting "turned on" to reading. When the school was designated as "Title 1," the division discouraged the use of this program. As Ashley states, "We're a Title 1 school this year and they don't believe in AR. It doesn't have to be AR, it could be Drop Everything and Read...getting the kids hooked on reading and then improving the reading with practice." This is important to Ashley and something that she thinks should be a priority.

Currently, Ashley says there is little time devoted to independent reading. She attributes this to a lack of any overall school-wide reading initiative and a school division focus on state mandated testing. She says that those in leadership think, "How could we possibly help them to pass these tests reading books? So, it has gone by the wayside." When asked what she would do if she had the latitude to change the reading instructional program, she told me—without hesitation—that she would "do more reading." Ashley

understands the need to have time during the school day devoted to independent reading so that students have opportunities to transact with text to improve comprehension and to enjoy the process. Were it up to her, students would be given this time.

Ashley's situation is in sharp contrast to the practices I observe in Connie's and Missy's classrooms. When I visit both of these teachers, not a day that goes by that children are not reading: independently, in pairs, and in guided reading groupings. Students spend the majority of their reading class time reading or discussing what's been read. This helps them to build meaning from text (Block, Reed, Whiteley, & Cleveland, 2009).

Connie believes that students must be given time in class to read because they are too busy with other activities once they get home. She states, "I think it's important to give them time for reading in school, in class because I think there's so many demands on their time outside of the school day." Her students' lives outside of school are devoted to other pursuits: homework, recreational time, and other interests like sports or social activities. Connie recognizes this and does not want to force reading on her students outside of the classroom. She is fearful that this will result in stressed children who do not enjoy reading. Connie wants to help students "develop a love for reading itself. You know, a lot of people are not pleasure readers anymore. I think we're killing that."

Like Connie, Missy believes it is important to provide students with opportunities to read. She prioritizes it high on the list of language arts practices. During guided reading, the majority of the time—at least 25-30 of the 45-minute instructional block per group—is devoted to independent reading. While Missy works with her guided reading group, the rest of the class is working independently on assignments and reading

independently. They have at least two opportunities in the language arts block of time to read: once in guided reading and once independently. During whole group instruction, teacher read aloud is used so that all are transacting with the story. Because Missy has an inclusion class with six special education students, reading levels range from second grade to sixth grade. Read aloud is a way to ensure text understanding by all students so the lesson objective remains the focus rather than decoding text (Rosenblatt, 2004).

Katie works with three third grade poor comprehenders. Similar to both Connie and Missy, the majority of their instructional time is devoted to reading and discussing what's been read. Before students begin to read, Katie always sets a purpose for their reading; with this particular group, she takes an efferent stance with reading comprehension instruction (Rosenblatt, 1978). This makes sense for her lessons as these particular students are reading only nonfiction text, and she wants them to gain information from it.

Before beginning to read, Katie takes time to have students scan their text. They look at titles, captions, graphics and charts, and paragraph headings. Once the scanning is complete, Katie gives her students further instructions. For instance, in the first lesson I observed, she said, "I want you to read the 'Recipe for a Rainbow.' Stop once in a while and ask yourself if you knew how to do this." This is in keeping with transactional theory of reading which "emphasizes the teacher's ability to provide explicit explanations of thinking processes" (NRP, 2000, p. 16). Once directions are given, the students read. When they are finished, Katie tells each of them to read it again and to think about what they have read so that they will be ready to talk about their understandings. She is explicit in her instructions (Duffy & Roehler, 1989). She knows that for these poor

comprehenders, rereading is a strategy that must be taught; it is not one they use automatically to make meaning (Pressley, 2006).

Time for reading is not the only factor affecting student transactions with text. Providing a conducive environment is also important. When students are in an environment that is conducive to reading, they are more apt to engage in reading.

**Conducive environment.** Providing a conducive environment for reading helps students to transact with the reading (Allington, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Shanahan et al., 2010). This is observed time and time again in Missy's classroom. Because her routines and procedures are well-established and clear, expectations for behavior during guided and independent reading are understood. Students know that they are not to disturb her group during guided reading instruction and almost all of the students abide by this. I note engaged and on task students during every observation of guided reading instruction. Even when Missy is listening to a student read aloud to her in the group, other group members are not distracted from their reading.

In addition to reading time, Missy also devises ways to help her students read more easily. Since "some students read when you give them some kind of ruler or something to help keep their place while they're reading," Missy has these tools available and encourages her students to use them if needed. Students have white boards available to them to use as they are reading, should they be so inclined. When they have confusions or questions, white boards serve as tools upon which to annotate their thoughts so they are not forgotten.

Rather than white boards, Connie's students have sticky notes handy for marking anything that interests them. In this way, when discussions come up, students can refer to



their sticky notes at that time. Like Missy, Connie is intentional in the creation of an environment conducive to reading. She states:

And, of course, I think an environment...with carpet pillows, couches...where they can get comfortable...I always like having the music on, classical music that is just soothing and calming...you could hear a pin drop because they're all engaged.

Connie believes that it's not just the physical environment that is important to encourage reading engagement. It's also the tone that the teacher sets: "It's the mental comfort; too, that if they have a question they feel they can ask it. And it's not going to be ridiculed, whether it's from another student or the teacher." She sets a tone that invites risk and allows students to feel safe and comfortable in a nurturing environment. In doing this, Connie encourages students to question freely without fear of embarrassment or reproach.

Katie, too, creates an environment in which reading is taken seriously. When she is instructing, no interruptions are allowed. From the outset, Katie lets it be known that her students' time with her is important and that any questions they might have are considered seriously. As a result, as they become more comfortable, they do not hesitate to ask. During my observations, expectations are clear and routines established. Students know what is expected and, by and large, do what is expected.

Though Ashley must establish an environment within the classroom where she is instructing, she tells me that it is not distracting for the students. However, in my observations, I notice students are engaged erratically and some are easily distracted:

But now Title 1 insists that you go into the classroom—which it works. I do have a table in there, I brought my cart and file with my stuff so I have everything I

would need. It works. People might think it's noisy, but it's really not...But it's not loud loud, it's workable.

While an engaging, motivating environment helps students to transact with text, the text selection itself is an important piece in comprehension (Shanahan et al., 2010). It is also important in engaging students in reading (Allington et al, 2002). When students are engaged in reading they are transacting with text (RRSG, 2002).

**Text selection.** Selecting appropriate text for instruction can provide a motivating context for reading comprehension instruction and encourage student to text transactions (Krashen, 2004; RRSg, 2002; Shanahan et al., 2010). Equally important for student engagement is providing texts at students' instructional reading levels (Allington et al., 2002). Three of the four study participants take great care in selecting texts. Connie, Katie, and Missy all speak of the importance of text selection in helping readers to become more proficient. They consider texts in terms of reader interest, instructional reading level, content, and text quality.

Since three of four of Missy's guided reading groups are composed of below grade level readers, using the grade level basal readers would not meet the needs of these students. Instead, Missy chooses to use novels that are high interest and at the instructional reading levels of the students in each of her guided reading groups. During the course of my observations in her classroom during guided reading instruction, students read an historical fiction novel tied to social studies content. They also read Newbery Award winning books, realistic fiction, and fantasy. This is in keeping with Missy's philosophy on choosing texts: "I take interest inventories to see the types of text that they might be interested in. I think that good teachers should give them a variety of

genres so that they're not just focusing on one specific thing." She also tries to integrate social studies content into the reading by periodically selecting historical fiction. Because Missy is focused on student success, she ensures that whatever the reading choice, it is something that will be challenging but rewarding and engaging.

Similar to Missy, Connie believes that students should be reading novels. She feels strongly that leveled readers used in guided reading are too often bereft of rich language, fully-formed characters, and intricate plots that are characteristic of "quality literature." She selects texts carefully. While I was observing fourth and fifth grade classrooms, they were reading historical fiction correlated to social studies units. Connie thinks it is important to introduce intermediate grade readers to this genre, stating:

We found that the kids end up loving historical fiction by the time they're through with it in fifth grade....And they love reading about historical figures....Even if the main character is not real, they know that they are a representative of that time, and they get so they just love it. They truly seem to enjoy it, even the reluctant readers.

Likewise, Katie chooses text carefully when planning for instruction. Knowing that she would be working with her students for a finite amount of time, Katie decided that nonfiction, easily decodable text was the correct choice for her third grade struggling readers group. These short passages addressed topics that interested these students. She chose these particular pieces because even though they are easily decodable, they are challenging in terms of comprehension for poor comprehenders. However, when working with other students, Katie takes the time to talk with them about their interests. Then she

carefully chooses books that will spark an interest and perhaps even ignite a love for reading:

You talk to them about what they like to read. Do you like nonfiction, the real thing where you learn stuff or do you like stories? Now if that child tells me stories, I'm not going work a lot with nonfiction. Not that I'll never do it, but I'm going to...start off with stories because it's something they're going to be engaged with.

Ashley, too, understands the importance of text selection in reading. However, the latitude she has in selecting reading materials is limited. Because she is primarily tasked to reinforce instruction, she chooses text from a narrower perspective than the others. For her fourth grade guided reading groups, she chooses text that complements the basal reader that the division mandates. She does this because it reinforces the story that the whole class is working on that week. She says:

I have ESL take home readers that go along with (the basal reader)...I use it a lot in 4th grade. So I feel like we're reinforcing a story but it's a little more motivating and it's small. But it goes along with their story, and I can still work with it like that.

In third grade Ashley uses the same reading materials that are used by the classroom teacher she works with. Though the text may be too difficult for her struggling readers—which was often the case during my observations—she scaffolds instruction by working with struggling readers in small groups. She also reads the text aloud to the students. During my observations, when Ashley worked with third grade struggling readers, she read most of the text to the students. When the students read, they did so by

reading aloud in round robin fashion, which does not serve struggling readers well (Pressley, 2006). I never observed the students reading silently in either the third or fourth grade classroom. I observed engagement only periodically during reading instruction.

After students have had an opportunity to transact with the text, the teacher can step in to help them comprehend more fully and completely (Rosenblatt, 1984). At this point, students and teachers begin to transact with one another. Discussion during guided reading is the logical place where this occurs.

### **Student and Teacher Transactions**

Student and teacher transactions about text are an important component of reading comprehension instruction (NRP, 2002; Pressley, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1995). Teachers help students to clarify and amplify meaning making through questioning and discussion (Block, Reed, Whiteley, & Cleveland, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1995; Pressley, 2006). With struggling readers, it is often necessary to explicitly teach students to use reading comprehension strategies that effective readers use intuitively when transacting with text (NRP, 2002; Pressley, 2006; RRSg, 2002). When explicit instruction is used, struggling readers' reading comprehension improves (Duffy & Roehler, 1989; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley et al., 1992). Transactions between teachers and students can occur in different settings. During observations, I observed three settings used by teachers for varying purposes: whole group, small group, and individual instruction.

**Whole-group transactions.** Proficient readers use comprehension strategies intuitively to transact with text (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Struggling readers do not (NRP, 2000; RRSg, 2002). When teachers introduce a comprehension strategy they

believe will benefit their whole class, explicit instruction (NRP, 2000) in a whole group setting is oftentimes the setting of choice. Reading levels can range significantly within a class. To ensure that all understand the text, many of the participants use teacher read aloud, audiotapes, or videotapes during whole group instruction. Missy, Ashley, and Connie all use teacher read aloud, audiotapes, or videotapes during whole class instruction. Since the objective of many whole group lessons is information that can be used to improve reading comprehension, this instruction evolves from an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Because listening comprehension is usually higher than reading comprehension, this helps struggling readers in transacting with text that might be too difficult if read independently (Gillette, Temple & Crawford, 2008). This is one way to scaffold reading instruction in a whole group environment. Scaffolding instruction helps struggling readers comprehend (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002).

When Missy introduces a new strategy or notes a deficiency with many students requiring direct instruction, she uses whole class instruction as the vehicle for lesson transmission. One lesson I observe during my visits to her classroom is a continuation from the week before. The objective is to identify main ideas and supporting details. The students watch a video of a book titled, *Flossie and the Fox*. All are engaged and eager to discuss what they have seen. After Missy and her students discuss the book, she poses a series of questions about the main idea of the story. She reads the question aloud to them. Each student has a class recording device that captures their answers as they are displayed on the Promethean Board in a bar graph format. Their responses are completely anonymous. After all the answers are displayed, Missy leads the students in a discussion

about main idea. Students are encouraged to justify their answer choices as they talk. At the end of the lesson, Missy knows who has understood the concept and who needs more lesson reinforcement. This whole group lesson format allows Missy to assess understanding quickly and efficiently. Ashley also uses whole group instruction as a means for student and teacher transactions.

Ashley both teaches and supports teachers during whole group instruction. During one observation, the focus of the reading is on summarizing—an efferent stance—to gain information. Summarizing is a strategy that good readers use to transact with text (NRP, 2000; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Ashley uses authentic literature, *Babe and I*, and the students are engaged with the story. As she reads portions of the text, she stops to question the students about the reading. Questions are both literal and inferential.

Ashley points out vocabulary that might be unknown and helps the children arrive at word meanings. For instance, one of the unknown words is *unemployed*. She tells her students that *-un* is a prefix and the root word is *employed*. Then she uses the word in a sentence. She says, “I am a teacher. I am employed. What might employed mean?” One of the students says that *employed* means having a job. Then Ashley asks the students to tell her what the prefix *un* means. They know that *un* means *not* so *unemployed* would mean not having a job. Ashley does this several times with the students as they encounter unknown vocabulary words. Each time, Ashley scaffolds instruction leading them to the word meaning. In this way, they are successful, using context clues to make meaning with unfamiliar words.

During the reading, Ashley also tasks the students to make predictions about what might happen next. She encourages them to draw conclusions about their reading. When

she asks the class why depressing newspaper headlines during the Great Depression might not sell newspapers, but headlines about Babe Ruth's homeruns quickly sells newspapers, several students are able to conclude that good news sells more than bad during this time in history. She praises children telling them they have thought hard about this topic. Although this is whole group instruction, Ashley uses this forum as an opportunity to build understanding with individual students by helping them to transact with the text (Pressley, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1984).

Connie uses explicit instruction to introduce new books to her reading groups (Duffy & Roehler, 1989; NRP, 2002). Fourth graders begin an historical fiction book set in Jamestown. Once the introduction to the book is complete, students are assigned to groups. Connie works with the group with the lowest reading level. This group is composed of nine students.

Connie begins this lesson—termed “Book Bits” because they read small portions of the text—by asking the students to define historical fiction. Several provide information. Connie summarizes what they have said. All are clear about the genre they will be reading. Then she gives them further instructions:

To start us off, I chose three little passages from the beginning, the middle, and the end of this book. Each of you will get a paper with those passages on it. After you've read about it, I'd like you to think about feelings, reactions, thoughts that come into your mind. Just jot notes beside it. I'll give you about five minutes per sample for a total of 15 minutes. Think about the implications of your reading. By implications, what I mean is, let's say you had a field trip planned for tomorrow. If you got up in the morning and it's raining, what might be an implication?



Student 1 - It's going to be wet.

Student 2 - You want to bring something for protection from the rain.

Right. As you're reading, you'll see the obvious, but I want you to go deeper to find the implications that might be underlying the literal ideas.

Connie is explicit and clear in her directions and expectations for her students and what they should be doing as they transact with the text (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002). Once directions are complete, students are allotted time to read each of the three passages. As students read, some raise their hands. Connie circulates that room to discuss students' thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the reading. She helps the students to clarify understanding or extend meaning from the reading (Pressley, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1984).

Whole group transactions are one way teachers and students discuss and transact while reading. However, this is not the only structure for teacher and students transactions. In addition to whole group teacher and student transactions, teachers can also help students transact with text through small group, guided reading instruction.

**Small-group teacher and student transactions.** Transactions between teachers and their students can help students build understanding (Rosenblatt, 1984). Oftentimes, teachers do this in small group settings. Missy organizes the instruction of her guided reading groups similarly regardless of reading level. Students know and understand the reading group routine. When they sit down, each is handed a white board. They begin with a short discussion of the reading from the previous day. Sometimes, in order to begin reading more quickly or if she thinks it is not necessary, Missy summarizes yesterday's reading in lieu of the discussion.

Next, Missy shows students a focus question she has created for the portion of the text they are reading that day. She tells the students that while they are reading she wants them to think about the question. Focus questions are usually inferential and they are always open-ended. In this way, discussion is enhanced (Chinn et al., 2001). For instance, with one of the struggling readers' groups, she asks students to think about the relationship between the main character and his uncle. She asks, "What do you think Uncle How and Martin's relationship is like?" The students then read. As they finish, they quickly write their answers to the question on their white boards. Missy reads the students' responses and oftentimes has a short interchange with them. Her comments are individualized to the student's response. For instance, with one student who answered the question about the relationship, she responded, "You are a nurturing individual. I can see how you would come up with that answer. I hadn't thought about that. Wow! Good job!" The student beams.

When all are finished, they discuss their answers and other parts of the reading that they might have found interesting, confusing, funny, or parts of the reading they just want to share with others. As they share their answers, Missy prompts them to elaborate or clarify their thoughts.

Like Missy, Connie also uses small group instruction to help students transact with their reading. During the Jamestown reading unit previously mentioned, after the initial whole group lessons, the class is divided into smaller groups. It is during small group instruction that Connie continues the work of helping students build understanding. While having a discussion about the Jamestown book, students begin to make connections between two of the characters. Connie asks students how they arrived at their

conclusions and further asks them to cite information from the reading to support their conclusions. Through this dialogue, it is apparent that Connie is helping the students transact with their reading on a deeper level. Requiring students to justify their assertions with evidence from the text ensures an understanding that is based on solid evidence (Rosenblatt, 2004). As Connie charts student comments, she points out when they infer, when they make connections to the reading, and when they use prior knowledge to form their answers. Once again, she demonstrates students understanding by explicitly pointing out their thinking (Duffy & Roehler, 1989; Pressley, 2006).

Katie, too, uses small group instruction to build reading transactions with struggling readers. It is within this instructional setting that Katie is able to focus on specific strategies she believes are deficient with these particular struggling readers. When I begin observing this small group, the first lesson Katie focuses on is the importance of rereading when something does not make sense (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). As Katie queries the students, it is quickly apparent that they do not understand why readers reread, and it is not intuitive to them to do this themselves. One student says, "It means you sound out words." Another student begins by saying, "If you don't know what the word is" and does not finish her thought. The third student says, "You track and you make it make sense." Their focus is on word decoding rather than reading for meaning.

Katie wants the students to understand that decoding is one part of reading, but the purpose of reading is to comprehend, which involves transaction with the text on a deeper level than simple text decoding. In this first lesson, students are unclear about the purpose of rereading. However, with subsequent lessons, Katie routinely tells students to

go back into the reading to reread—to transact with the reading. As they become more comfortable with this expectation and practice, they begin to see it has value. One student rereads a sentence and exclaims, “Oh, now I understand what they mean!” She smiles with delight. The light bulb has been illuminated. During my fifth observation, another student tells Katie that if something does not make sense she will reread it. She goes on to say, “I’ll think about what words mean when I read.” In other words, she will transact with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

When Ashley works with fourth grade struggling readers, guided reading groups follow whole class reading instruction. It is in these groups that Ashley helps students to transact with the text they are reading. However, Ashley must follow the pacing guide and skills lessons used in the fourth grade curriculum. This means that of the six fourth grade small group lessons I observed, three focused on guided reading. The other three focused on test taking strategies used to enhance the pass rate of the reading SOL test.

During guided reading, students read aloud in round robin fashion and are engaged in the reading. Before they begin to read, Ashley does a picture walk and asks students to talk about their thoughts. She does this to prepare students for the reading, to get them interested in the story to follow, and to activate their knowledge so that more understanding will occur during their transactions (NRP, 2000). They read half of the text and stop. Ashley asks the students a series of literal recall questions such as: 1) Where is the family from? 2) Where are they living now? 3) How many years ago did the story take place? She does this in an effort to ensure that students understand the plot of the story. Based on their answers, several of the students understand the basic sequence, but others do not. Although Ashley helps the struggling readers to understand the plot, there

is little in the way of higher level thinking or questioning that leads to higher levels of reading comprehension (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002).

As has been discussed, transactions between teachers and students can take place in several formats. Both whole-group and small-group instruction can be helpful in building reading comprehension (Rosenblatt, 2004). However, opportunities to work individually with students to help them transact with text are also beneficial (Rosenblatt, 2004).

**Individual teacher and student transactions.** One-on-one instruction can be invaluable when working with struggling readers (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). This allows teachers to capitalize on student strengths while working to strengthen weak areas. Missy, Connie, and Katie use individualized instruction often in their classrooms with struggling readers as they transact with text. During my observations of Ashley, I do not observe individual work with students. All instruction is either in a whole class or small group setting.

During guided reading, while the students are reading, Missy listens to several of them read aloud to her. As they read aloud, Missy sometimes asks questions about their thinking as they read. One student reads a sentence and substitutes a word. This word does not make sense in the sentence. Missy asks her about this. The girl replies that it does not make sense. She then says, "What can you do when something doesn't make sense to you?" The girl replies, "I can reread it." She does just that. When she self-corrects, Missy commends her. The girl smiles widely. Missy is using the practice of rereading to add clarity and understanding to the text. It is clear from this exchange that the student is familiar with this comprehension strategy. Missy has explicitly taught it in

the past, and today it is successfully implemented by the student. Had this student not reread, meaning would have been lost. However, it is also clear that this strategy is not yet used automatically by the student, which is the ultimate goal of comprehension strategy instruction (NRP, 2000; RRSB 2002). More practice and application is needed before the transfer is internalized and used automatically when needed.

Like Missy, Connie uses the small group structure as an opportunity to work individually with students. While others are reading silently Connie sits next to a student and asks him to read aloud to her. As he reads, she listens carefully and intently. She notes areas for instruction and moves on to another pair of students. When she sits down, they begin to discuss confusions with the text. She asks probing questions to make sure there are not vocabulary problems. When satisfied that this is not the cause of confusion, she continues in her questioning. Her probes slowly allow students to build more understanding and ultimately they are able to form their own conclusions. When asked about her method, Connie tells me that she learned early on in teaching how important it is to ask questions of students. She rarely gives a student a direct answer. Rather, she turns a student's question around and poses another. As I watch Connie over the course of 12 lessons, I realize how adept Connie is in questioning that informs student understanding.

Katie, too, works individually with students in her group while others are reading. She rotates around the group and asks each student to read aloud to her. She makes anecdotal notes as they read. She stops to ask questions to ensure understanding of the reading. As they read about a storm, she asks one student, "What's she telling you here? What is hail?" The student replies, "Ice." Katie then adds, "Yes. Oh my, it's a hot day

and it's full of ice. Hmmm." Then she moves on to the next student. She has planted a seed with her comment. The student needs to transact with the text to understand its significance.

Thus far, the focus has been on transactions of students with text and transactions between students and the teacher. However, another type of transaction is equally important. Transactions that take place between students can do much to inform understanding (Rosenblatt, 2004).

### **Student and Student Transactions**

Teachers should provide opportunities for students to transact about reading (Rosenblatt, 2004). When students are able to discuss what is read, transactions occur that increase reading comprehension (Chinn et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 2007; Slavin et al., 2008). Quality conversations between students lead to comprehension gains (Almasi, 2009; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Three of the four participants in this study prioritize discussion, believing it is instrumental in increasing reading growth in struggling readers. Though Ashley does understand the importance of discussion in increasing reading comprehension, little time is devoted to transactions between students. First, time is limited. This is observed over and over in the course of my observations. Second, she does not feel she has the latitude to create her own instructional plans, but must follow the plans of the grade level which allows little opportunity for deep discussion. As she explains, there is also a thought that the students she works with, struggling readers, might not be as capable of discussion as proficient readers. She says:

The children that I work with if I could get them to really understand you know what they're reading and be able to discuss it...not only should they be able to

understand it they should be able to apply it to something else or create something or to really have a deep discussion on it. But I don't really work with that many children like that.

Unlike Ashley, Missy uses discussion for all of her reading groups regardless of reading levels. She believes in the importance of discussion in guided reading groups to help students become better comprehenders. She states that students need, “to have that thought-provoking conversation with one another and evaluate what the author has done...and talk about the text critically.” Her words are backed up by actions. In each of the 12 observations, time is set aside so that students can discuss what’s been read. The discussion usually centers on the focus question presented at the beginning of the lesson, but talk often expands to other topics including: figurative language, author’s purpose, writing craft, character development, and other topics that can expand students’ understanding. For instance, in one discussion a student brings up the author’s use of double negatives and bad grammar in a book they had read prior to their current book. Missy asks the student why the author did this and the student replies, “Because that’s how some people talk. It’s real.” This leads to a brief conversation about how dialect adds realism to a story. The students agree that the story is more authentic when the language is real. In this interchange, and all exchanges, Missy is interested in much more than simple literal recall of reading. Missy wants her students to think deeply about what they have read, to make connections to their lives, to form their own conclusions, and to ultimately “love reading.” She thinks that discussion and student to student transactions are a way to do this.



Like Missy, Connie builds discussion into her instructional reading plan. She believes that conversations between students produce transactions that result in deeper meaning. About this, she says:

I think it gives them a lot of other ideas. And I think sometimes that they have that moment when they say, "Oh, is that what it meant? Oh, I didn't realize that." And they hadn't stopped to ask about it. They just went on. I think discussion is very beneficial....Some discussion clarifies. Sometimes they've glossed over it very quickly when they've read it the first time and they've missed that point....It's not only thinking about it ourselves, it's hearing other people's ideas as well. And everyone's background and perspective brings a different dimension to a text so depending on your experiences of what the author's written, it can almost mean totally different things to different people. So I think discussion is a very valuable part of the reading experience.

During observations, Connie ensures students have frequent opportunities to converse. Students are encouraged to pair up or form small groups while reading. This results in discussions during reading not just conversations after reading is complete. I observe fourth grade students talking about characters, vocabulary, and their impressions as they read the Jamestown novel.

When Katie initially structures her guided reading group to address the needs of her students, she decides that discussion might be the best way to build meaning for these students. Though each of the three students' oral reading is fluent and on grade level, their comprehension levels are below grade level. They are poor comprehenders (Oakhill & Cain, 2000). Katie says she wants to have:

Discussion at a lower (reading) level. It'll be interesting to see what their scores turn out like—whether it supports what I think or not. I have a feeling that a discussion with less complicated text than grade level text, with something that's easy for them is going to really improve their ability to tackle a more complex piece of text.

During observations, students are initially unable to discuss their reading understanding in any depth. By the end of the observations, students have extended conversations, build on each others' thoughts about the reading, and clarify their own thinking. Transactions between and among these students help them build meaning from the reading.

### **Overarching Themes in Reading Comprehension Instruction**

As I analyzed the data in terms of transactional theory of reading, themes emerged across and among the various transactions that occur naturally during effective reading comprehension instruction. These themes are: student-focused instruction centered on reading and discussion; continuous, deliberate assessment of learning and instruction; and teacher intention to strengthen reading interest. First, I address each theme separately and then discuss the relationships among them. Table 4 is a depiction of these themes and how they relate to participants' instructional beliefs and their observed instructional practices.

*Table 4. Overarching Themes and their Relationship to Participants' Beliefs and Observed Practice*

Participants	Student-Focused Instruction Centered on Reading and Discussion		Continuous, Deliberate Informal Assessment of Learning and Instruction		Teacher Intention to Strengthen Reading Interest	
	Beliefs	Practices	Beliefs	Practices	Beliefs	Practices
Ashley	X		X		X	
Connie	X	X	X	X	X	X
Katie	X	X	X	X	X	X
Missy	X	X	X	X	X	X

Three of the four teachers are consistent in their beliefs and instructional practices. Overarching themes are supported in both ways. Ashley's beliefs support each of the overarching themes. However, these beliefs are not consistently evident in her instructional practices.

#### **Student-Focused Instruction Centered on Reading and Discussion**

Many reading teachers across the country spend little time on reading comprehension instruction (Taylor et al, 1999). Effective teachers understand the need for comprehension instruction in whole class, small group, and even one-on-one contexts (NRP, 2000; RRSRG, 2002). Three of the four participants in this study spend the majority of their reading instructional block reading and discussing what has been read.

**Instructional beliefs.** All of the participants believe that reading and discussion are the means to strengthening reading comprehension. This fundamental belief permeates three of the four study participants' instructional practice. Their time is spent helping students to make meaning from reading.

Ashley believes that time spent reading is valuable. She wishes that more instructional time were devoted to reading and is concerned that the lack of time is detrimental to her students' reading progress. Additionally, in our second interview, Ashley talks about the importance of discussion of reading. She says that discussion helps students to:

...bring in their own examples or things that happened to them that are familiar, that kind of sparks what they just read. I just think that you open up the higher level thinking skills....I don't think because they're low level readers that they can't get into a really good discussion. They...can tell when something that they're reading really interests them because they talk about it. They talk about what they've read. They get excited about something that they read that was kind of out of the ordinary and things like that.

Connie believes in the power of discussion to clarify and even change initial conclusions. Because of this, she regularly precedes any kind of a written response with discussion. Connie finds that, oftentimes, if students wait to write until after a discussion, their writing has more depth of meaning. She says:

I find they do their best writing after they've discussed....Sometimes before discussion I'll have them write what they think. And then after discussion they'll be a question: Did you change your mind? Did you change your opinion? Was

anything said that caused you to feel differently? Or did you hear an idea that you hadn't considered before?...It's good for them to see that they can hear from others or rethink things from what someone else says.

In these questions posed to students, it is obvious that in addition to the meanings gleaned, Connie is also interested in the metacognitive aspects of reading comprehension. She wants her students to think about their thinking—to think about how their thinking can evolve as a result of discussion with others. She elaborates further about other reasons for the importance of discussion in making personal meaning from reading. Connie talks about clarifying misunderstandings that may have come up while reading and being reminded by others of text that might have been missed or read without thought. She thinks that discussion is beneficial because in some cases it clarifies meaning for students who may not have read carefully. Of this she says:

Sometimes they've glossed over it very quickly when they've read it the first time and they've missed that point. Sometimes those moments when you get to the end of the page and you think, "What did I just read?" We may go back and reread but there are moments when you don't notice it. Then when it comes up in the discussion it's, "Oh, I've never seen that part, but now it makes sense." ....It's another way we engage with text.

Students discuss what they have read daily in Missy's classroom. It occurs in different contexts. It might be whole class, it always occurs during guided reading, and sometimes she also discusses text one-on-one with her students. Missy believes that discussion has an important role to play in helping students, particularly struggling

readers, improve their reading comprehension. She says discussion is important because it:

...allows the children in the group who might not have reached that higher level in their response to hear that higher level response so that hopefully the next time they can maybe bump theirs up a bit or...at least gotten that information out of the text and thought, "I didn't even think of it that way."...They'll come up with things that I'll think, "Wow! I didn't think of it that way." And it was a really good thought.

Katie also believes in the power of discussion to create understanding and deepen meaning. She thinks that processing meaning by talking it through is invaluable to readers—struggling readers in particular. She also thinks that we do not give students enough time in our classrooms to process what they are reading and learning about. When I ask Katie to elaborate on how this happens and why it is important, she responds by saying:

And in the discussion group what I was able to do with them was that for 25 or 30 minutes during that timeframe...they were verbalizing their understanding of something....Conversation allows you to process....It's just like today with Bonnie and Shavonte. They're giving me facts and Jalisa pulls it together and goes, "but it's about sequence of important events." Oh, yeah!...it was her thought and the thoughts together that allows for that fuller comprehension.

**Instructional practice.** Three of the four participants' beliefs and practices about reading and discussion coincide. Missy structures her guided reading blocks so that students have extended time for reading. As previously mentioned, usually about 25-30

minutes of the 45-minute block of time is devoted to novel reading. Missy monitors the students while they are reading to ensure understanding. She normally asks three or four of the students to read aloud during guided reading so that she can assess their decoding and understanding.

As students finish reading, they begin to think about and write about the question posed by Missy prior to reading. When all are ready—which usually seems to coincide—discussion begins. Though they begin by addressing the question, discussion is allowed to diverge from the topic. In this way, any misunderstandings or interesting musings emerge and the discussion oftentimes is rich and deep.

Like Missy, Katie's instructional practices mirror her instructional beliefs. When Katie begins her first class with these poor comprehenders, she tells them, "The kind of reading you'll do with me isn't as complicated [as what they do with their reading interventionist] but we'll talk more about our reading." During my observations, students read each day. Katie monitors their reading. She has each of the three students read a portion of the text aloud to her and asks questions to ensure that they are understanding what is read. Students discuss what is read each day. No time is taken up with product creation or writing. Katie notes comments students make on a small white board, she creates Venn Diagrams when necessary, and other graphic organizers as appropriate or when Katie thinks they will heighten understanding. They are a means to an end—extending meaning.

Connie spends almost all of class instructional time in one of two ways: reading and/or discussing what has been read. It is clear from previous examples that Connie values and allots extended classroom time to reading be it in whole group, partner, small

group, or independent contexts. When students are reading, Connie circulates in the classroom, like Missy and Katie, asking students to read aloud to her. In this way, she can decide where assistance is needed and target instruction in these areas.

She also uses various instructional approaches when structuring discussions. While I observed, Connie used Socratic seminar, literature circles, and Junior Great Book discussion formats. She also simply poses questions to students during whole class discussions when a book is initially introduced. It is apparent that students are comfortable discussing in Connie's classroom. After a student makes a point another might say something like, "I'd like to piggyback off of what Martha is saying" and add to the response. They routinely cite page numbers and the text to justify their responses. They rarely interrupt one another. This is not to say that all were always on task and engaged during discussions. But, during my observations, I can say that the majority of students participating in these discussions were engaged and on task for the majority of the time.

Unlike the other three participants, Ashley's beliefs and practices do not coincide. She focuses on skills and product creation to build reading comprehension rather than reading and discussion. Students complete activities that complement the pacing guide skill of the week. During my observations of her third grade class, students were learning to create summaries with graphic organizers, to visualize text and annotate those visualizations using graphic organizers, and to identify main ideas in reading passages, and again, annotating them on graphic organizers. The product created was the learning goal and much time was spent creating this product. As a result, the time during guided reading instruction was teacher-centered and equally divided between reading—listening



to Ashley read aloud or round robin reading—and product construction. This is also the case with her fifth grade struggling readers. Again, Ashley creates activities that complement the division's pacing guide skill of the week and also teaches students to use test-taking strategies in reading. As Ashley describes, "And once again, it's still teaching them to read a passage, look at the question, annotate the question, and go back and find the answer."

In Ashley's case, teachers are "driven to get the third, fourth, and fifth graders to pass the SOL tests," and the pressure of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) looms large. Perhaps this is why the focus of instruction is reading in a context that is aligned with the reading SOL test format. This means that much time centers on reading short passages of text and then answering questions that are formatted like the reading SOL test. While answering the questions, students use test strategies designed to help them build accuracy in responses. Conversely, Missy, Connie, and Katie rarely use time during reading instruction to create products. Their time is spent reading and discussing the reading—making meaning from reading.

In both of my interviews with Ashley, she comments that she would like to have discussions with her students about their reading. However, this happens only once during my observations. It is during this observation of small group guided reading that her students are the most engaged and on task. Perhaps pressure from the division to increase pass rates on SOL tests explains why Ashley's instruction differs markedly from her beliefs and the practices of the other study participants.

The first overarching theme that surfaced during data analysis is a student-focused approach to reading comprehension instruction that emphasizes reading and discussion.

Three of the four participants devote much time to reading and discussion. They believe this to be the best way to help build reading comprehension proficiency. A second overarching theme that surfaced during data analysis is continuous, deliberate informal assessment of instruction and learning.

### **Continuous, Deliberate Informal Assessment of Learning and Instruction**

Three of the four participants deliberately conduct informal assessment of both student learning and their own instruction on an ongoing basis. It is an integral component of their teaching philosophy. During my observations, it appeared to be so ingrained in their teaching practice as to be automatic. Because of this, these teachers are aware of and knowledgeable about each of their students' individual strengths and weaknesses. This in-depth student knowledge was a critical component of planning for whole, small, and individual lessons. In addition, these teachers assessed their own instructional effectiveness by reflecting on lessons—the structure, the process, and the outcomes—and made changes to instruction regularly as a result of this reflection.

**Instructional beliefs.** To effectively plan for reading comprehension instruction, teachers must know and understand their student's strengths and weaknesses (RRSG, 2002). To monitor progress, assessment must be ongoing and deliberate (Primeaux, 1999). During my second interview, I asked each of the participants how assessment informed their reading comprehension instruction. Each spoke of the importance of ongoing assessment in helping readers to achieve.

Connie explains her beliefs about assessment. She starts by saying that she uses the DRAs at the beginning of the year as she plans for groups and instruction. Then she goes on to talk about informal assessment saying that it's done:

Informally, pretty much....But I think a lot of it is just from sitting down and saying, "Where are you right now in your book? Would you read that aloud to me?" And from what they turn in, too, from reading responses or written assignments. You can see what's lacking and go from there. I think it's pretty individualized. You can call groups together, small groups, but a lot of it is just helping the individual where they are.

Missy, too, thinks about assessment in terms of individual students. She uses whole class and small group structures to assess what each student needs instructionally. Then she decides how best to serve the student. If enough of her students are struggling similarly, she might form a small group to work on this particular area. If needed, she does not hesitate to conduct one-on-one instruction. She intentionally builds time into her day to do this, as she believes that sometimes the most effective way to teach is to do it one-on-one. In other words, Missy uses both formal and informal assessment to drive her instruction. She says:

The small group lets me get data on how to help them individually or skills that they might need to work on an individual basis. For example, you'll notice in some of my notes that I write to myself, I might see a kid struggle more than I like to see in a guided reading, and so I use that as an opportunity in another part of the day to talk to them one-on-one or to work on a certain skill one-on-one...if they're struggling. It's kind of a red flag for me. So...it just gives me information for how to drive my instruction.

Katie, too, believes that informal assessment is invaluable. She assesses both herself and her students as she instructs. She believes in the value of assessment to both

inform and then guide her instruction. When asked about assessment, she responds by saying:

Now the kids I've been working with are struggling readers. They're not struggling in decoding, they're struggling in understanding....I could present lessons to them and they would appear to be doing fine. But when you get down to the level we're at, you realize there are gaps in their learning and they don't own these strategies. They don't have ownership of all this stuff....The whole formative assessment...figuring out what's blocking their learning and then addressing it. So it's huge. It's always back to the teacher. Teachers have a huge effect on student learning.

While I observed, Katie videotaped lessons and evaluated her instruction. She also assessed student understanding. If she thought reinforcement was needed she did not hesitate to revise a lesson and incorporate what was needed based on her analysis. Before one lesson observation, Katie and I had a discussion about the previous lesson. She told me that she had gone home that night to review the lesson she had taught. As she watched, she noticed that two of the students had not really understood what she meant by rereading for understanding. She decided to change the lesson she had already planned to incorporate a thorough explanation and demonstration—by modeling—of what is meant by rereading for understanding. This is an example of how Katie ensures that her instruction is geared specifically to student needs. She explains it in this way:

And as I go along and I reflect on the teaching, the formative part of that is I become more and more effective because I'm looking at what I'm doing....I'm going back and I'm looking at the lessons, I'm looking at the videotapes, and even

I'm looking at my notes. Then I'm planning from that to meet their needs....The whole idea of the formative assessment is that it has to be ongoing to be effective.

Katie looks at the videotapes to assess not only her students but to assess herself. She knows that her instruction is paramount in their learning. She wants to be as effective as possible. This means that she must be vigilant, continually looking at instructional practice and evaluating its effectiveness. She understands the cause and effect relationship between the students and herself. Is she asking the right questions to elicit thoughtful responses? Is she scaffolding where and when needed for optimal understanding? Is she modeling, using think aloud, when appropriate? Only by assessing how and where she is most effective and least effective instructionally can she fully meet the needs of her students. She tells me:

It's not an assessment of just the students; it's my practice as well. What am I doing and what is the result I'm getting? If they're doing these things, why are they doing those things?...To get them where they actually have ownership of all this stuff. The thinking was to go back...to what they control, what they own....But it was taking what they knew and building off of that.

Ashley, too, believes in the importance of assessment. When asked about it during the second interview, she responds first by giving me information about formal quarterly benchmark testing cycles. She automatically relates assessment to something formal and outside of her control. She talks of imposed formal assessments. It is only when I clarify my question and ask her, more specifically, about how she uses assessment during instruction that she is able to respond personally with her views. She responds in this way:

I do use informal assessment while I am teaching. If I see that the lesson is going in the wrong direction because there is something misunderstood, I back up and approach the lesson in a different way. If at the end of the lesson, I feel that it needs to be retaught, then I will make sure that I touch on that skill or topic again in the near future.

It is clear that each of the teachers believe in the importance of continual, deliberate assessment. When asked specifically to describe how assessment informs instruction they are clear in their explanations of both assessment of student understanding and learning, and assessment of their own instructional practice. Additionally, three of the four participants transform their beliefs into practice during reading comprehension instruction.

**Instructional practice.** During my observations, three of the four participants routinely but informally assess students during all reading contexts—whole group, small group, and individual instruction. In Connie, Missy, and Katie's classrooms, I am able to observe just how much ongoing assessment influences follow-on instruction. Their beliefs mirror their instructional practices.

Missy monitors student understanding closely during guided reading. For example, during one guided reading observation, Missy asks one of the students to begin reading aloud to her. As he reads, Missy interrupts him and asks, "What's an overnight bag?" The student looks at her in a perplexed manner but remains silent. She tells him that she saw the look of confusion on his face when he read the sentence about the child carrying an overnight bag. She continues, "Do you ever spend the night with a friend?" He replies that he does and she says, "Okay. Well, what do you put your clothes in?" He

smiles and says, "Oh, now I get it. It's what he carries his stuff in." This is a short interchange between student and teacher, but it is representative of the continuous assessment that occurs seemingly unconsciously while Missy is working with her students.

This continuous assessment informs her instruction. Missy does not hesitate to move students from group to group as she sees a need. She tells me, "I move them to accommodate what the kids need. The students are used to it, and it's no big deal." Flexible grouping is very much a part of Missy's classroom construction.

While students are reading, Connie takes the opportunity to work individually but informally with students. When she is not working with a student, she is walking around the classroom, monitoring, assisting, and noting what is happening around her. She might sit next to a student and ask her to quietly read aloud. As a student reads, she listens intently, sometimes stopping to discuss a portion of the text. She uses this time to decide what is needed instructionally to help this student grow as a reader. I listen as Connie and students talk about specific vocabulary used in novels. I hear them discuss confusions they have and listen to Connie as she helps them clarify their thinking through rereading, through context clues, or through questioning techniques that serve to guide students in a more thorough transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1986). Because she knows her students as readers, she knows how to guide her instruction to meet their needs. In her view of assessment, "It's always, it's just ongoing. A willingness to say okay what do we do for that child. What can I do to help him?"

Katie, too, practices assessment on an ongoing basis. She can assess accurately because she, too, knows her students as readers. Before she forms a group, she spends

time looking at formal assessments, talking to teachers and interventionists, and observing the students during instruction. She takes the time to meet with students and discuss their reading interests. She says:

You have to be flexible when you're meeting the needs of the students who are sitting in front of you. And you have to know them. You have to know them as readers. And from that, knowing them as readers, you address the learning. That's why I feel really good about the lesson we did now. It's been a progression as far as with these kids. And they're starting to understand the requirements. I could have presented lessons, but because I'm meeting their needs you know they're learning.

After one observation, Katie went home that night and watched the videotape of the lesson. She tells me the next day that she noticed that she had diverged from her lesson objective when she did a mini-lesson on breaking words into chunks. Though this is valuable information, after deliberation, Katie decided that this is not the forum for such a lesson, and that in future lessons, she will not stray in this direction. Had she not assessed herself, she would not have reached this conclusion. By doing this, Katie reinforced to herself what she wanted and needed to do instructionally with these specific lessons to meet her students' specific needs.

Ashley, too, uses assessment to plan for instruction. Her assessment, however, is more geared to whether or not students have acquired skills—i.e., summarizing, identifying main ideas, sequencing story events—rather than reading comprehension. As has been previously discussed, Ashley's instruction tends to be skills-based and centers on completing activities around text that is read.



Each of the teachers in this study believes in the importance of continuous, deliberate, informal assessment of student learning and instruction. Three of the four actively practice this during everyday reading instruction. In addition to this theme, a third over-arching theme that emerged during data analysis is each teacher's intention to strengthen reading interest.

### **Teacher Intention to Strengthen Reading Interest**

Participants believe in the importance of choice, reading interest, motivation, and engagement in comprehending text. Allowing for choice in reading adds to interest and motivation (Gambrell, 1996). Interest and motivation lead to engagement (RRSG, 2002). Engagement influences student success (Atwell, 2007). Literature appreciation increases the desire to read which in turn influences reading comprehension (RRSG, 2002). All of the participants understand this. Three of the four insure their beliefs are translated into instructional practices during reading comprehension instruction.

**Instructional beliefs.** Each of the participants in this study is intentional in her approach to reading comprehension instruction. Each believes that she can positively or negatively impact reading comprehension growth. All believe that their instruction largely influences their students reading comprehension progress.

*Motivation, engagement, and choice.* Connie believes that effective teachers help students "a great deal." She says that good teaching is more than isolated strategy instruction; it is about helping them to "focus on writer's craft, figurative language and descriptive language, and seeing how the sensory imagery...brings the story to life for them. It can help them comprehend the text better." Connie also believes that reading instruction, "involves trying to get across the pleasure of reading, the joy of reading.

That, too, can help with comprehension." Instruction is twofold. It involves the cognitive and affective domains, and Connie believes each is equally important. If she can get students "hooked" on books, engaged in their reading, then comprehension is heightened.

One of the ways Connie hooks students on books is to allow for choice.

Whenever possible, Connie lets students choose: where to read, with whom to read, and how to read. Of choice, Connie says this:

So I do think variety is good. And I think choice, as many ways as possible for the child. Because they certainly take a lot more ownership if they have choice than if you just say do this. So I think that's important.

Missy, Connie, and Katie select materials deliberately and with careful thought.

Both Connie and Missy deliberately choose to use novels during reading comprehension instruction. As previously mentioned, they do this for several reasons. They believe that novels allow a depth of character development and plot complication that is sometimes missing in other, shorter formats. Conversely, Katie chooses short, nonfiction text for her poor comprehenders group. Her decision, though quite different than the others, is arrived at just a deliberately and thoughtfully. She wants to ensure that the text she chooses is engaging, is appropriate to students' instructional reading levels, and can be discussed by her participants.

Missy believes that reading selections are critical in motivating and engaging students. She believes this ultimately impacts reading comprehension growth. She selects books carefully and thoughtfully considering reading level, interest, genre, and whether or not the book is relatable to students' lives. Of this she says:

I think that children can understand literature more when they make those connections with the characters and the text. Like when my Group 3 was reading about the Gettysburg thing the other day and the kid went, "Uhhh!" I don't know if you heard him when he was reading. He clearly connected with that character and was like, "I can't believe they just sold his wife!" And I think when you put yourself in the position of the character, you're making some pretty good connections with literature and you're...able to develop a higher level of comprehension. And that's the goal.

Missy goes on to relate a story about one of her struggling students to further illustrate the importance of motivation and engagement in reading. A student tells her, "Sometimes I think that you be thinking I'm stupid." She reacts by saying, "How could you think that? Why would you think that?" And he said, "I just don't know the answers." And I said, "That's okay," and we talked about why that was okay. The student goes on to explain that his reading teacher did not teach them last year; "All she did was eat cereal, and when we went to the groups she made us read a little something and then we went back to our seats." Missy is obviously appalled as she tells me this story. She says:

So they never had an opportunity to read literature that was important to them or meaningful to them. They never had an opportunity to engage in dialogue about the things that they were reading. And so when you have teachers that don't work on those skills or don't make it a priority than you're showing the students that it's not a priority for you. That's what you're modeling to them. So I think that...even something as simple as what you're modeling back to them is very important. But

any opportunity that you can get them to talk about literature, they grow from that. They learn from it.

Katie believes that student understanding "always comes back to the teacher. Teachers have a huge effect on student learning." Because of this belief, Katie works hard to find motivators for struggling readers. In her words, "Engagement is huge. Engagement is huge because you can't motivate people; they motivate themselves. You have to find what triggers that." Katie works to find those triggers for motivation. Sometimes it is a specific book, sometimes it is the discussion that follows, and sometimes it can just be the interest and enthusiasm of the teacher. Whatever it is, Katie works hard to find it because she believes that engaging a student is the secret to improving reading comprehension in poor comprehenders. As I listen, Katie elaborates on the notion of engagement and how critical it is, particularly with struggling readers. She explains:

First of all, it's just personal...Having a true interest in them, finding out about them. And if you say to them, "Do you like to read?" and they say, "No," ask them what they like to do. Find out what they like to do or read. Whatever they like, my goal is when I meet them, is first to develop that relationship by finding out who they are so they know I care. And then it's finding what they like and finding reading material about that. Like NASCAR. Then it becomes, let's read it, let's do it together. Engagement is key. If you don't have that, it's just presenting lots of lessons. Some kids will be alright with that, but the struggling readers, no. They won't get it.

Ashley believes that she impacts reading comprehension in struggling readers but only to a certain extent. Her responses illustrate that she views this impact as less important than Missy, Connie, and Katie's beliefs about teacher impact suggest. Ashley believes that her impact is more passive than overt. She is less positive about her assertions than the others. She says:

I don't know how much I impact reading comprehension other than providing the children practice in reading passages, discussing them, and assessing how well they understand what they read. I would hope that more practice in reading would be the greatest catalyst in improving reading comprehension. In this sense, maybe my impact would be introducing good literature throughout the lesson by using picture books to teach the lesson. By letting the children see how much good literature is out there, by using it in the lesson and by providing books in the classroom for pleasure reading. Hopefully, this would encourage children to read, which in turn would improve reading comprehension.

As is illustrated by Ashley's response, she is less assured of her impact on struggling readers. Conversely, there is little doubt that Missy, Connie, and Katie's think differently about the notion of teachers affecting their students' reading comprehension growth. Each of these participants thinks that she greatly influences her students' reading progress.

*Instructional positivity and a climate of success.* Participants believe that a positive attitude toward students that celebrates strengths and builds weaknesses results in a positive classroom environment and leads to better reading comprehension—the ultimate goal of instruction.

Creating a positive classroom environment is important to Connie. She rarely fails to notice students using strategies successfully while reading or discussing reading. She might say, "So you're predicting or anticipating and good readers do that. That means they're engaged and they're actively involved in the text." The positive admonitions motivate students and build confidence. Connie believes it important to keep herself "available to give them whatever it is that they need so that they can get through the text." Knowing their teacher is there to assist creates positivity in the classroom as does providing books that they can relate to and successfully read. Connie says:

I just think if you help them enjoy the process of reading and laugh about what's going on...then get them engaged where they have problems and incidents that the kids can understand and help them laugh about it and connect it to their own life....And help them realize that books are like real life. They're experiences that happen to people, real people, even if they're fiction, it could be true, it could happen. And I think that if most children have that kind of support that they'll develop that love for reading, and it will help them overcome the problems and issues they have with it as a reader.

**Instructional practice.** As I observe each of the participants, there is not a doubt in my mind of each teacher's intention as she works with her students. She works to increase comprehension in each of her students. Each does this in various ways. Though these effective teachers believe that different factors influence successful reading comprehension, what three of the four believe in most fervently is their power to help students become better readers. Through intentional instruction, that is motivating, engaging, and positive, they help readers to better comprehend.

*Motivation, engagement, and choice.* Books are selected, plans are completed, and structures are in place. Missy, Connie, and Katie set the stage for student success. They work to structure instruction in a way best suited to student learning. I observed time and again students who are engaged and motivated to read more.

As Missy concludes her guided reading group just beginning the first chapter of a Newbery Award winning book titled, *Rules*, engagement is evident. One student continues to read, telling her, "I don't want to stop!" She smiles at him, but says nothing. She is happy to hear this student so enthused. The importance of a text selection cannot be overemphasized in Missy's view:

I think it's very important because if you, which I'm sure you have, if you've ever seen a child struggle through a text that they can't even read every other word...it makes learning, it makes reading something that they can't they don't put a happy feeling with it.

Missy understands the importance of connecting a *happy feeling* to reading. When she is successful, she is thrilled. She knows that when a student is enjoying the reading he is likely to want to read more. She tells me about students who choose to reread books they have finished in her reading groups:

I see all the time books that we've read, whether it's a simple read aloud or books in the guided reading. They go and check them out and reread them on their own. To me, that is pretty cool. It's cool that they are appreciating what we've read together. And especially if it's a series book. I feel like we'll introduce them to a piece of that series, and then they'll go on their own to others.

Observing Katie's guided reading group, I see their discussion growth over the course of the 12 observations. From the beginning lesson to the last, their discussions contrast sharply. Katie had to teach the students how to discuss. Frequently admonishing them to put their hands down at the beginning, they easily add to others' thoughts at the end.

Students do not hesitate to approach Connie with questions or confusions about their reading. She is quick to casually point out when they have used a comprehension strategy and to reinforce effort to understand the reading. Some of the students struggle with vocabulary while reading the Jamestown novel. Connie helps them to use context clues where appropriate. For instance, a student did not know the meaning of *gallows*. Though not obvious, it was possible to construct meaning by reading further into the section and making meaning connections between sentences. When Connie and the student worked together doing this, he was able to conclude that gallows was a device used for hanging people. This understanding clarified the student's understanding of what was happening in this sequence of the story.

*Instructional positivity and a climate for success.* All of the participants in this study are intentional as they plan for instruction. They select materials deliberately, form groups carefully, and decide on a lesson structure that they believe will best meet the reading needs of their students.

They prefer small group instruction for struggling readers. Reasons for this are fourfold: 1) this small group environment allows for frequent individual assessment; 2) students can discuss their reading in a more intimate environment than that of a whole group setting and participate more fully; 3) the grouping ensures that students are reading



text that is on their instructional reading level; and 4) teachers can focus on practices that are geared specifically to the needs of the individuals in the group. All of this helps these teachers meet the individual needs of each of their students (RRSG, 2002).

Connie makes sure that texts chosen are not based solely on instructional reading level. She wants to captivate her students with the story, to draw them into the "joy of reading." While I observe, fourth graders begin the Jamestown novel and are soon engaged with the characters and the story. As Connie explains:

They're very interested. And I think it is a very captivating text. It's a young boy, the protagonist. He's 13. He's a few years older than they are. They can relate to that. They've been to Jamestown. They know how close it is. They know they first landed at XXXX, just a few miles down the road. So they are very interested and of course the whole element of adventure and encountering the "savage" Indians just fascinates. They're pretty much into it.

Missy creates a classroom climate that invites respect for the practice of reading and the importance of guided reading instruction. She explains that she wants to:

show them that this time with them, when we have them in small groupings is important. It's time that I'd prefer to have uninterrupted. I think that shows the children that this is important. She takes this seriously, and I'm not supposed to interrupt her. Again, I think that's the time when they say, 'Wow! This is an important time of my day when I really need to be focused,' and that's the goal.

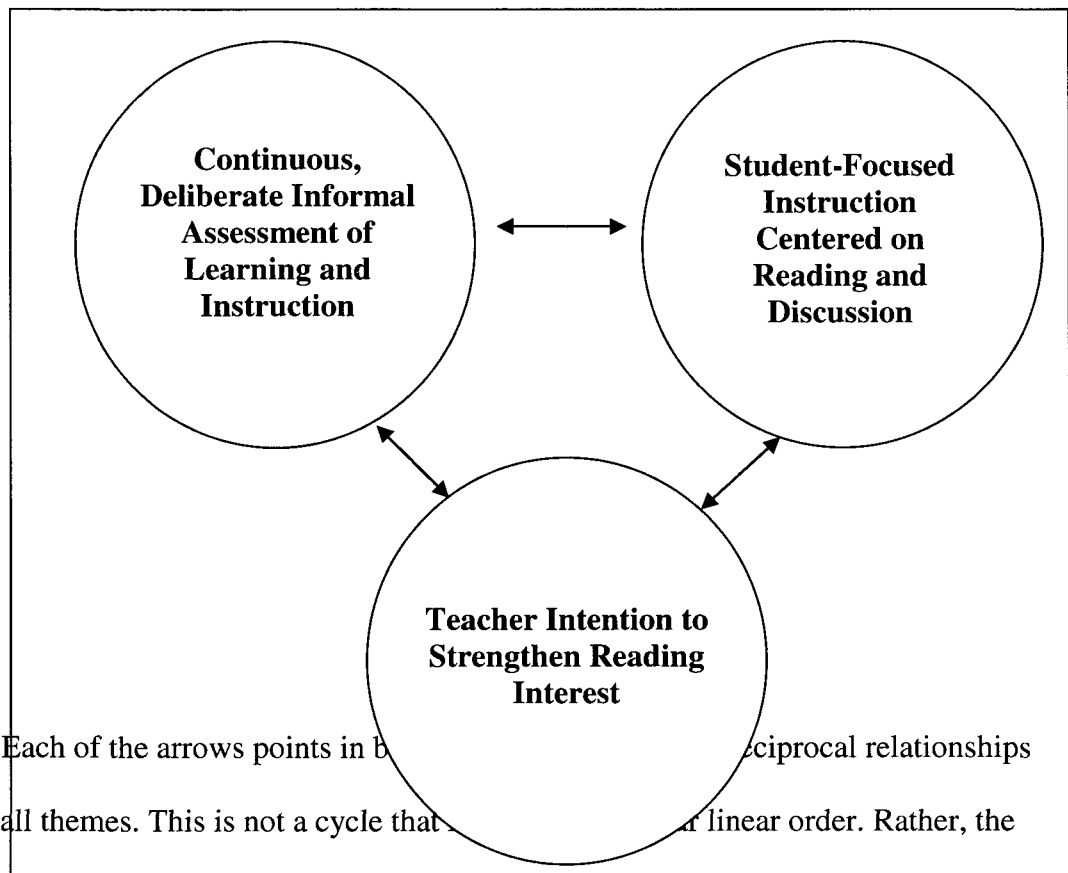
### **Relationships among Themes**

As I consider these three overarching approaches and their relationships to one another, it is apparent that each is part of a larger whole that makes for effective reading

comprehension instruction. Although each exists apart from the others, they inform one another, forming a cohesive instructional model. Figure 1 is a graphical depiction of that model.

Figure 1

*Relating Overarching Themes*



comprehension instructional practice. Participants engage in continuous, deliberate informal assessment of student learning and their instruction. This assessment can strengthen reading interest by guiding selection of texts that motivate and engage reading. Assessment is also used to guide instruction. Likewise, what is read and discussed

informs assessment of student learning and instruction. Finally, student-centered instruction that emphasizes reading and discussion can strengthen reading interest.

Effective teachers exhibit similarities in teaching styles and instructional practices (Pressley et al, 1997; Taylor et al, 2003). The effective teachers in this study believe that meaning making occurs as a series of transactions. They believe that assessment—of both students and teachers—should guide reading comprehension instruction. In three of the four participants' instructional practices, this is certainly the case. Assessment, a critical component of their instructional programs, is ongoing and deliberate. All participants believe that small group, student-centered instruction focusing on reading and discussion is the preferred way to increase reading comprehension in struggling readers. In three of four cases, reading and discussion take up the bulk of instructional reading time. Finally, all participants believe that increasing student interest in reading is also important in reading comprehension progress and they do this in a variety of ways.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

I began this research because of my interest in struggling readers and poor comprehenders in the intermediate grades. The statistics are not encouraging. Struggling readers and poor comprehenders tend not to become proficient readers (Pressley, 2006). Those who struggle to comprehend in the intermediate years often continue to struggle into adulthood (NCES, 2003). I wondered why there are so many children who struggle to comprehend in grades 3-5.

As I read the literature base, time after time, scholars noted a dearth of reading comprehension instruction. From Durkin's landmark study (1979) to those from more recent years, researchers expressed concern about the lack of reading comprehension instruction in reading classrooms across the nation (O'Connor et al., 2002; Pressley, 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). In chapter 1, I posited that "perhaps a lack of sound comprehension instruction that incorporates research-based information and practices, is related to the large number of struggling students in reading classrooms across the country and the stagnant reading scores of fourth-graders nationwide." In the classrooms in which I observed, this could not have been further from the truth. By and large, teachers who participated in this study are focused on reading comprehension, and their instruction reflects this.

My research began with three questions in mind. I wanted to know:

1. Which comprehension strategies and/or instructional practices are implemented by effective reading teachers in their classrooms during reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers and poor comprehenders?
2. Why do effective reading teachers choose these strategies and/or practices?
3. What, if any, are the differences between current reading comprehension research results and the instructional practices and strategies used by effective reading teachers during reading comprehension instruction? Why are they different?

It is time to answer these questions and to discuss findings from this research.

There are four primary findings. I begin with a discussion of the research questions and answers. Finding one is discussed within this section. After this, I move to a discussion of findings two through four.

### **Use of Research-Based Practices during Reading Comprehension Instruction**

In chapter 2, I wrote, "Research is not being translated into classroom teaching practices; teachers still spend little time on reading comprehension instruction," (O'Connor et al., 2002; Pressley et al, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). In this study, that was not the case. The effective teachers whom I observed and interviewed implement many of the identified best practices comprehension strategies and/or instructional practices in their classrooms regularly; sometimes, on a daily basis. This is the first primary finding of this study. Table 2 depicts which of these strategies and/or practices were implemented, by whom they were implemented, and the frequency of implementation observed.

Table 5

*Teacher Implementation of Reading Comprehension Strategies and Practices*

<b>Strategies and Practices</b>	<b>Ashley</b>	<b>Connie</b>	<b>Katie</b>	<b>Missy</b>
Comprehension Monitoring	S	R	R	R
Cooperative Learning	N	N	N	N
Direct Explanation	S	R (whole gp)	R	R (whole gp)
Engaged Students and Time on Task	S	R	R	R
Graphic Organizers	R	S	S	S
Higher-Level Questioning	SE	R	R	R
Mental Modeling	S	S	S	S
Question Answering	S	R	R	R
Question Generation	S	R	R	R
Reciprocal Teaching	N	N	N	N
Scaffolded Instruction	S	R	R	R
Story Structure	S	S	N/A	S
Student Interaction and Communication	SE	R	R	R
Summarization	S	R	R	R
Transactional Strategies Instruction	N	N	N	N
N = Never Observed SE = Seldom Observed S = Sometimes Observed R = Regularly Observed				

As evidenced in the table, these effective reading teachers do implement best practice strategies and/or recommended instructional practices during small—group and/or whole—group reading comprehension instruction. There is a similarity of use with three of the four participants in this study. These are discussed in further detail.

**Regularly used strategies.** Connie, Katie, and Missy consistently use the same strategies in roughly the same proportions. Each uses comprehension monitoring, higher-level questioning, question asking, question answering, scaffolded instruction, and summarization on a regular basis. However, they use these strategies somewhat organically, and as they deem them to be appropriate. By this, I mean that these strategies and practices are not written into lesson plans for inclusion in particular lessons. Rather, they are used as and when needed to extend comprehension. The decision to use them is based on individual student assessment; they are determined by perceived student need.

For instance, during a discussion of an historical fiction novel in one of Missy's struggling readers groups, it was apparent that students were not clear about a particularly important story sequence. As Missy became aware, she realized that moving ahead would be pointless without that understanding. At that point and as a group, they went back to reread that portion of the text. Then together, they orally summarized the sequence of events. Though this was not a part of the planned lesson, it was a crucial component of understanding. Missy made the decision during that lesson to ask the students to stop and reread in order to clarify. I observed similar instances regularly in Connie's and Katie's classrooms. These teachers seamlessly integrated particular strategies and practices based on perceived student needs. This conscious and deliberate integration aided student comprehension.

All of the participants use direct explanation during lessons (Duffy & Roehler, 1989). Katie uses direct explanation during small group instruction. She identifies strategies that 'good readers' use in her first lesson, and then she continues to emphasize these strategies in the rest of her lessons. For instance, Katie introduces the notion that good readers are aware of the author's message and purpose. Since this is nonfiction reading, it is important skill that students understand the author's purpose. Katie helps students identify it, then they continue to do so for every reading in the follow-on lessons. In this way, the strategy is embedded and reinforced on a regular basis.

Connie and Missy tend to use direct explanation more during whole group instruction when the focus of the lesson is more skill-based. For instance, Missy used direct explanation during a whole class lesson on identifying the main idea in nonfiction text. During this lesson, she used all components of direct explanation to include: explanation, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. I noticed in subsequent small group guided reading lessons that Missy talked and asked students about main ideas in their novel reading. In this way, she embeds strategies throughout her lessons. Connie, too, used direct explanation during whole group instruction. During one lesson with fourth graders, Connie focused on making inferences. Just like Missy, Connie uses direct explanation to demonstrate inferencing. I noticed that she asked students to infer as they are discussing in later lessons. She also identified inferencing by students to the whole class, congratulating students when they made particularly astute inferences.

Active engagement is a prerequisite to learning (Chinn et al., 2001; NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002). As evidenced in the research, the most accomplished classroom teachers manage to engage students for the majority of classroom time (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, &



Walpole, 2000). Additionally, in these effective classrooms, students are on task and doing what they are expected to do for most of the time in class (Taylor et al., 2003). This was the case during observations in Connie, Katie, and Missy's classrooms. It was common to see students begin working—whatever the task happened to be—as soon as they entered the classroom. They continued to work throughout the lesson. They were engaged and on task doing what was expected of them with little need for redirection or refocusing on the part of the teacher.

Student interactions and conversation are an integral part of reading comprehension growth (Allington et al., 2002; Chinn et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 1998). Three of the four effective teachers in this study structured small group guided reading instruction so the students had time to and were encouraged to discuss their reading. Teachers encouraged conversations in various forms: in pairs, in groups, and with themselves. While each of these strategies was observed on a regular basis, others were not observed as regularly.

**Strategies Used Sometimes.** Several of the effective strategies and/or practices were *sometimes* evidenced in these effective classrooms. Mental modeling (NRP, 2000; RRSF, 2002) was used when necessary and where appropriate. Each teacher decided how to use this instructional strategy in the context of her teaching. Connie used mental modeling to demonstrate inferencing to a student. Missy and Ashley used mental modeling to help a group with visualization. Katie, too, used mental modeling as she was teaching her group about the importance of rereading for understanding. These teachers understand that the most effective way to use this instructional practice is intentionally and selectively with students who can most benefit.

Using graphic organizers during reading can help students to build understanding (NRP, 2000). Ashley used graphic organizers with most of her reading lessons. As previously discussed, graphic organizers became a lesson outcome—a takeaway from the lesson. Conversely, Missy, Connie, and Katie used an intentional, value-added approach—meaning that the graphic organizers were used as tools to help the students increase reading comprehension.

For instance, Katie chose to use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast in several of the nonfiction reading lessons conducted with her poor comprehenders group because the texts geared themselves to comparing and contrasting. These teachers made conscious decisions about whether or not a graphic organizer would enhance comprehension. If thought to be beneficial, they were integrated into the lesson. Other than Ashley—more often than not—during small group instruction, graphic organizers were not used. During whole group instruction, when skill lessons were more prevalent, graphic organizers were used.

Story structure is another NRP (2000) identified practice that helps to increase reading comprehension in struggling readers. Understanding the structure of narrative text aids in comprehension and recall (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001). Three of the four participants in this study used fiction in small group instruction. Each of them incorporated story structure when and where appropriate.

Ashley and Connie used a graphic organizer to keep track of story elements—characters, setting, plot, etc. Ashley tended to have students copy the graphic organizer co-constructed onto their own personal copy. They did this as a group. Connie expected students to create their own inputs for their "reading notes." They did this individually.

Missy was more likely to have discussions incorporating story structure into the conversation. When confusions surfaced during conversations, Missy took the opportunity to get back into the text to clarify misunderstandings thus building a cohesive story structure. While mental modeling, graphic organizers, and story structure were sometimes used during instruction, there were several practices that were not observed at all in any of the classes.

**Strategies never used.** Three instructional practices were never observed during this study. They are: cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1997), reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), and transactional strategies instruction (Pressley et al., 1989). Though portions of each practice were observed, the practice—as specifically designed—was never instituted.

I observed students working cooperatively during both small group and whole group instruction. However, at no time were students assigned roles for their interactions with one another. Student interactions were organic and natural in the course of the lesson, rather than scripted.

Similarly, though students participated in predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing—all components of reciprocal teaching—this was done in an informal manner. There was no designated student leader who was responsible for ensuring that each of the four strategies was incorporated into the lesson. Students used each of the strategies regularly during small group instruction, but it was not in the context of reciprocal teaching. Sometimes teachers acknowledged a student's use of the strategy but other times no mention was made of strategy use.

Finally, though many of the comprehension strategies—which are part of transactional strategies instruction—were used in reading groups, the practice was not taught in isolated lessons to the students. Students were expected to use these strategies—rereading, visualizing, predicting, and summarizing—but these strategies were not taught independently, one-by-one by Missy, Connie, Ashley, or Katie. Rather, they talked about or modeled strategies in the context of small group reading, when appropriate and beneficial to do so.

### **Why These Identified Strategies and Practices Are Used**

In effect, these effective teachers do use the best practice strategies found to be effective in improving reading comprehension in struggling readers. They use these strategies because they believe in their efficacy. These teachers, by and large, use them with conscious, deliberate thought about their students and how they will benefit from the instruction. Missy, Connie, and Katie are intentional in their decisions to use particular strategies in particular contexts at particular times. They have a specific purpose in mind and decide when and how best they are to be integrated into their instructional plans.

When asked about her reasoning for choosing to use certain strategies, Missy told me, "I try to focus on research-based practices that are proven to be successful for students and that I have had success with in the past." She also uses assessment to guide strategy use. For example, when she sees a student struggling to infer, she will likely take that student aside at another time, and together, they will work on that particular weak area. She will do this until she sees student understanding and independent implementation. Katie does this as well. She says she "focuses strategies around student needs." When she sees a need, she addresses it. Connie, too, uses assessment to drive her

instruction and individualizes it to a large degree. In this way, each of these three participants is constantly differentiating instruction to meet their students' individual needs.

What makes these three effective teachers choose these particular strategies? They are in keeping with each teacher's concept of reading comprehension and its instruction. Missy, Connie, and Katie believe that reading comprehension is first understanding what is read through transacting with the text. Further, they believe that understanding or even enhanced understanding also occurs when readers transact with other readers and with teachers during reading comprehension instruction. This thinking corresponds directly to the ideas expressed in Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory (1982).

But beliefs must be translated into classroom practice. All but one of these teachers align their beliefs with their practice by using small group guided reading and discussion as the primary context for reading comprehension instruction. It is in this environment that transactions can be exploited for maximum student learning.

A discussion about the reading is the perfect environment in which to grow and extend meaning. It is where the reader, the teacher, and other students come together to talk—to interact and communicate—about initial understandings of texts. It is here that ideas and understandings are explored, accepted, discarded, and refined. In this small group structure, teachers can monitor understanding and quickly assess student needs. They can scaffold instruction where and when needed, and incorporate question asking and higher level thinking. Finally, in this environment, teachers can more easily

informally assess understanding, noticing when students are successful and when they need assistance.

### **Additional Research Findings**

Three other primary findings emerged from the research I conducted. As I observed and interviewed my participants, analyzed the data, and identified commonalities, the following conclusions surfaced. Due to the small sample size, these findings are stated tentatively and are related only to the teachers in my study. They are:

1. Three of four teachers in my study align instructional practices with their beliefs about reading comprehension instruction.
2. The teachers in my study focus on their students' needs. They identify these needs continually through ongoing informal assessment.
3. The teachers in my study create supportive classroom and small-group reading environments.

Each of these findings is fully supported by Rosenblatt's (1986) transactional theory of reading. The context of instruction, the focus of instruction, and the consistency of instruction all allow for maximum transactions among and between the reader, the text, and others. Each of the findings is addressed individually.

**Alignment of practices with beliefs.** Three of the four participants align their instructional practices with their beliefs about reading comprehension instruction. Because of this, there is continuity in their daily instruction. There is also a consistency of instruction because they are implementing practices following careful thought about their potential outcomes.

*Small-group reading instruction.* These participants believe that their instruction is instrumental in helping each of their students to better comprehend. The design of their reading programs reflects this belief. They construct small groups during guided reading. The small group forum helps participants to more easily identify and meet individual needs of the group members. Then, these needs can be addressed in this forum or at a later time individually, if that is more appropriate.

Small groups also allow students an opportunity to read at their instructional level. This is an important aspect of guided reading groups (Allington et al., 2002). In these groups, students are challenged but supported; the text is more difficult, but the teacher is there to scaffold instruction for student success (RRSG, 2002).

Rather than books specifically designed for guided reading, students read connected text using authentic materials. Two of the three participants used novels in these small groups because they believe that these texts are more interesting to students. The third participant wanted to focus on discussion in building understanding and decided to use expository text to do this. Regardless of genre, I regularly observed engaged students who enjoyed the reading and were anxious to discuss what they had read.

*Reading time.* Research indicates that struggling readers historically have fewer opportunities to read in class as compared to proficient readers (RRSG, 2002). Thus, they have much less background knowledge to apply to the text (RRSG). Additionally, more of their time is spent in remediation where skills lessons are the bulk of instruction (Primeaux, 1999). When children are given substantial time to read and have access to books they *can* read, valuable print experience is the outcome (Ivey, 1999b).

Each of the participants in this study believes that students need uninterrupted time to read. With these effective teachers, the bulk of small group reading instruction was spent reading and discussing what was read. As discussed in chapter 4, Missy's students regularly spent 25-30 of the 45-minute block reading novels that would then be discussed. Connie's students, too, spent most of their time reading in various groupings: independent, partner, and larger groups as decided by students. They were also given the choice of reading silently or aloud (quietly). Katie's students spent equal amounts of time reading and discussing their reading. In these effective classrooms, these struggling readers were not given fewer opportunities to read nor were they subjected to isolated skills lessons at the expense of reading.

*Discussion time.* Discussion promotes understanding (Chinn et al., 2001; Pressley, 2007). Higher level questioning after text reading is correlated to reading growth (Taylor et al., 2002). Discussions that require students to justify positions taken or to give evidence for conclusions drawn result in reading comprehension gains (Bitter et al., 2009). The participants in this study believe that students need to discuss their reading with others to help build understanding of unfamiliar concepts and construct new knowledge.

Three of the four participants ensured instructional time was allocated for discussion. Each expected students to support their assertions with evidence from the text. During my observations of Connie, it was common to hear her ask where a student had read something that supported his/her thinking. For instance, a student asserted that he thought the main character enjoyed working on the junk heap. When Connie asks if there was evidence from the text to support this, the student responded, "That's why I



said, 'I *think*.'" But he continued to discuss the episode and several other students joined in agreeing with his assertion. They cited a specific page from the text and then another student said, "If he was sad after the project was finished, he must have enjoyed doing the project." This is a valid inference.

I saw evidence of inferring several more times in this discussion. I also noted students taking the lead in discussions. Though Connie posed higher-level questions throughout the discussion, students took the lead in answering the questions with little input from Connie. This is not a typical initiation, response, and evaluation environment (Mehan, 1979). Nor is it typical practice in many effective classrooms (Taylor et al., 2003). In Connie's classroom, students built on one another's ideas and were not hesitant to disagree if they had different thoughts than others in the group. It was clear that much discussion had taken place over the course of the year. The students were confident and comfortable in this setting.

Missy and Katie, too, used discussion to foster meaning during reading comprehension instruction. Missy started the discussions with a posed question. Students then answered the questions and joined in on the conversation freely. Katie formed her poor comprehenders' group at the beginning of my observations. The quality of the discussions evolved over time. Initially, Katie had to remind students continually that they should not raise their hands during discussion. She tended to use the IRE format (Mehan, 1979) in the first lessons, but this changed as students became comfortable in this environment and more independently participatory. Toward the end of my observations, students were asking and answering questions of one another, adding to

others positions, disagreeing with one another, and generally discussing their reading with less and less direction from Katie.

These teachers clearly prioritize discussion during instruction. They believe that transactions build meaning and that discussions inform understanding. These effective teachers also believe in the value of assessment.

**Ongoing formative assessment.** The teachers in my study believe that individual, formative assessment is integral to reading comprehension instruction. They are knowledgeable about current best practices. They are knowledgeable about their students as readers. They use these three components—assessment, best practice, and reader knowledge—to build reading comprehension.

Research studies regularly compare one instructional method to another to determine effectiveness of one *over* another (Block et al., 2009). However, the teachers in this study did not use one instructional practice; they did not operate in an either/or fashion. They had a large repertoire of strategies in their instructional *bag of tricks*. They made conscious decisions about when, how, and with whom to use each practice/strategy. They chose to implement best practices selectively and intentionally during small group reading instruction to meet the needs of each of their readers. In this way, they continually differentiated instruction both within the reading group and individually as necessary. This deliberate, thoughtful instruction is based on the idea that continuous, formative assessment drives instruction (Primeaux, 2000). A need is identified, a decision about how best to meet the need is made, and instruction ensues. All of this occurred in the context of small group instruction. It is here that these effective teachers could most readily assess understanding on an individual basis.

As previously discussed in chapter 4, at the beginning of the year, each of the teachers reviewed past student performance. They reviewed SOL test results, formal assessments, and even talked to other teachers and the students themselves as they began to form pictures of their students as readers. In addition, Missy has students complete reading interest inventories twice a year. They used this preliminary information to form small groups for reading instruction. This all sounds fairly standard for beginning of the year group formation, and it is (Short, 2006).

However, what differentiates these teachers is the ongoing and continual assessment that drives their reading instruction throughout the year. They do not wait for data from formal quarterly assessments to make decisions. They use information gleaned from daily instruction to inform future instruction. Three of the four teachers in this study use anecdotal records—sometimes just thoughts—to guide their instruction. They look closely and listen carefully to their students in order to make decisions that will benefit them during reading comprehension instruction.

The recursive nature of their assessment and reflection guided whole-class, small-group, and individualized instruction. When these teachers noted an area needing more instruction, they reflected and decided how best to do that. Flexible grouping was often the strategy applied. This was followed by assessment of student understanding. A continuous cycle of assessment and reflection was noted throughout observations.

I regularly observed the teachers jotting notes during and after group instruction. They spoke to me of going home and reflecting on what they needed to do to help particular students based on what they had seen and heard during their instructional block. They were not waiting for a formal test to decide that a student needed help. They

knew this because of their daily reflections about student performance and progress. This careful, reflective practice resulted in these effective teachers being better able to meet the instructional needs of each of their students over the course of the academic year.

Published research involving ongoing formative assessment during reading comprehension instruction in grades 3-5 is lacking. A search of relevant material on the topic that pertained to reading comprehension instruction yielded minimal results. In addition, I was unable to find any studies that directly linked formative assessment to reading comprehension growth in struggling readers. Several studies mentioned assessment, but did so in a rather cursory fashion (Taylor et al., 2003; Pressley, 2006). This is most certainly an area for future research.

**Supportive classroom environment.** An environment that supports readers is likely to result in academic engagement (Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, & Vincent, 2003). Engagement is linked to reading achievement (Chinn et al., 2001). The teachers in my study created a supportive classroom and small group environment that promoted respect for individual students and the value and joy of reading. The result was students who enjoyed reading in class and were engaged in their reading. How did they do this?

*Accountability.* During my observations, it was easy to see that these teachers have high expectations for their students and held them accountable for past learning. They were expected to incorporate this into current learning; thus, continually building on current knowledge with prior knowledge. For example, when it was clear that a student was confused by the text, Missy asked, "What can you do when you don't understand something?" The student replied that she knew that she needed to go back and

reread the text. Missy expected her to come up with her course of action to resolve her confusion. When the student did this, she understood her former confusion.

Similarly, a student asked Connie a question about a character's motivation. Connie turned the question back on the student asking, "Why would he do that, Connor? Are there any clues that help you to understand his motivation?" After a period of silence—perhaps devoted to careful thought about evidence from the text—Connor was able to formulate several reasons for the character's actions. Connie congratulated the student on his deep thinking. These two examples serve to illustrate an environment in which students are not afraid to ask questions, voice confusions, or seek assistance.

*Safe harbor.* These effective teachers provide a safe harbor for their students. They are positive, encouraging, and provide frequent feedback. They believe that each one of their students can meet with success if provided with effective instruction, and they hold them accountable for learning. Focusing on reader strengths is a common thread running through all of their instructional practices. Time and time again, these teachers told me that building on strengths helped their students gain reading comprehension confidence and competence.

Missy, Connie, and Katie made sure to offer positive comments during small group reading instruction. However, these positive comments were not generic. They were specific to the strengths and abilities to whomever they were applied. These comments often focused on a student's effort and/or learning processes used, rather than on the correctness of an answer. In this way, the students were recognized for things other than products produced.

Unlike what was reported in much of the research on questioning during reading comprehension instruction, in these classrooms, open-ended, higher-level questions were the norm (Taylor & Pearson, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al. 2002; Taylor et al., 2003). There was not a right answer to these questions. The teachers encouraged—and willingly accepted—differences in text interpretation. In this environment, where differences are thought to be intriguing, the risk of being wrong is much lessened. Thus, risking a wrong answer with the accompanying correction is not there. Students willingly ventured into new territories and explored them through discussion. This more open and supportive environment seemed not as dangerous as in traditional classrooms where discussions tend to be more literal—one right answer being the norm. Additionally, because there tends to be no one right answer, students must consider alternate understandings and are, thereby, forced to think more deeply about reading topics. This resulted in animated discussions and engaged students.

*Structure.* The routines and procedures used in these classrooms were well-established and understood by the students. The teachers were more than competent classroom managers. They were competent to the point that management seemed almost nonexistent. It was only by observing keenly that I sometimes noticed a teacher's raised eyebrow, or enduring eye contact to indicate a message perfectly understood by the targeted student. Clearly, students understood expectations for performance and conduct. The vast majority of students observed were self-regulated. They knew what was expected and were able to successfully work independently. Because routines, procedures, and expectations were ingrained, little time was taken away from guided reading groups to correct or redirect other students.

In this study, I identified four primary findings. I found that these teachers do implement many of the best practices reading comprehension practices and strategies; some more so than others. I also noted that three of the four participants' practices are aligned with their beliefs, which resulted in effective instruction based on best-practice research. Additionally, these teachers routinely but informally assessed students' understanding, which served to direct the nature of follow-on instruction. They also provided supportive classroom environments, so that students felt comfortable taking risks and joining discussions regardless of whether or not they agreed with one another.

**The outlier.** Before discussing implications for practice, a discussion about Ashley's beliefs and instructional practices is in order. During our interviews and my observations, it became apparent to me that many of Ashley's instructional practices differed from those of the other three study participants. As has been previously noted, though Ashley's stated beliefs coincided with that of the other participants, her practices often did not. In other words, Ashley's beliefs did not undergird her observed instructional practices. This is a dichotomy. There are two possible explanations that suggest themselves, based upon the content of the interviews that we shared. The first is that Ashley feels compelled to *toe the line*; to do what is prescribed during reading instruction by the school division. The second possibility is that perhaps Ashley does not know how to transform her beliefs into instructional practices.

When a school does not make adequate yearly progress in consecutive years, both school and school division personnel are necessarily concerned. The pressure to pass the high-stakes standardized tests can be intense. When this happens, a school division may

become more directive in its instructional stance. Such is the case in this particular school division and in the particular school in which Ashley taught.

As she stated to me several times, Ashley felt that passing the end-of-year standardized reading test took precedence over everything else. The result of this instructional emphasis is lessons that are skills-oriented and evaluative. In other words, instruction becomes less about reading comprehension gains and more about passing the test. As Ashley explained to me, the process she uses often during reading instruction focuses on test-taking strategies, rather than reading comprehension instruction:

...teaching them to read a passage, look at the question, annotate the question go back and find the answer. I don't say that I don't necessarily agree with all of that. But it's very data-driven and that's exactly what they want us to do.

Ashley says that she would like her students to be able to do more reading during class time. She believes that reading and discussion are important components of reading comprehension. However, little time is devoted to this and much is devoted to skills lessons and standardized testing test practice. When I ask Ashley about planning for instruction, she tells me:

We meet as grade levels and we actually look at the data from the benchmark scores and we see what children have the most trouble with, the skill, so we create common lesson plans where everybody will do the same lesson plan....We get maybe the stories or passages from someplace and we create what we need to create for that *skill* [emphasis added] and then we have a common assessment at the end of the week.



The focus and emphasis of weekly instruction on Ashley's school is on skills; one per week that is listed in the school division's pacing guide. For instance, during one week of observations, the third graders were working on identifying main ideas and details using a reading passage about Clara Barton. The lesson began as a whole-class activity, but Ashley and the teacher whom she is assisting quickly decide that small groups will be more beneficial, as some students need more teacher support. They divide the class into three groups. Ashley works with the struggling readers, the teacher works with proficient readers, and a third group of the highest level readers works independently.

Ashley reads the passage aloud, stopping after each paragraph. She tells the students to use the graphic organizer provided to write a sentence that sums up the paragraph. The children write slowly and laboriously. When they finish, they share their answers with the group. As Ashley listens to their responses she sometimes tells them to add words to their sentences. For instance, one student has written, "She helped soldiers." Ashley tells her to add "during the Civil War" to her sentence. There is no discussion about the reading; it is teacher-initiated question, student responses to the question and an evaluation of the response (Mehan, 1979). Any interaction is teacher-directed.

After the students finish this summarization exercise, they again read the passage. This time, each child reads a paragraph in round-robin fashion. During the reading, students encounter two unknown words and Ashley scaffolds instruction by helping them to use context clues to understand their meaning. She is positive and clear in her instruction, encouraging the children to go back into the text and to reread. She tells them to continue to think hard about their reading and that they are doing a good job. However,

during the reading, I note that no discussion takes place and the three questions asked by Ashley are of a literal nature. Ashley answers two of the questions herself.

When they finish the round robin reading, working together as a group, the students read and answer the three SOL-formatted questions about the passage. As they work, they use the test-taking strategies—highlighting text, boxing paragraphs—they are expected to use whenever they encounter SOL-formatted questions. Student engagement in this part of the lesson is inconsistent.

In contrast to the other study participants, who teach the use of comprehension strategies and reading skills as a means to an end—enhanced reading comprehension—Ashley teaches them as an end in and of themselves. The product they produce is the goal.

During my first interview with Ashley, when I asked her what she would do if she had the latitude to teach reading comprehension in a way that she thinks best serves her students, she told me she would do more reading. She also told me she would use picture books to teach skills like she had seen demonstrated in a workshop that she had recently attended. She said:

We took a book like *Cowboy Camp* and you cut these [sentence strips] up and you stop it every so often and you ask the children, 'Now which one of these would be the summary of that part?' and they paste those and two of these are details and they write. It's just a wonderful way....That's what I would do. I would do that all of the time. And I would use the 78 pages of basically picture books and she has them classified as to what skill they can use with that: summarizing, inferring, fact and opinion. That's the way I would do it.

Unlike the three other study participants who embed comprehension strategies and skills into students' reading and use informal assessment to drive instruction, Ashley follows a prescribed pacing guide, and the skills seem to be the learning goals of her lessons. The passages chosen for students to read are short, have numbered paragraphs—as do SOL reading passages—and are accompanied with SOL-formatted questions. Reading comprehension progress is measured by how well the students are able to demonstrate use of strategies and skills in isolation on an end-of-week test.

In contrast to Missy, Connie, and Katie, Ashley does not connect the purpose of her instruction back to the reading. For instance, during my observations, I do not hear her tell the students why rereading is important, how a particular inference helped them to build understanding, or even why summarizing text can help in cohesion and coherence of understanding. There is no connection back to the reading itself. The lesson ends with the skill.

Missy, Connie, and Katie understand that strategies and skills should be taught to struggling readers on an as-needed basis. Rather than using the *strategy de jour*, they use assessment to decide who needs what and when it is needed. Ashley and her colleagues use the pacing guide with the accompanying skills list instead, as is the expectation in her school division.

Missy, Connie, and Katie understand that just knowing and understanding the strategy is not enough. If students do not incorporate the strategies into their reading, comprehension is not enhanced. Thus, each of these three effective teachers encourages students to use these strategies independently over time. Their expectation is that at some point, strategy use will become automatic and used unconsciously, just as proficient

readers use them. In my observations, Ashley did not take the last step toward independent use of strategies during reading.

In conclusion, when I compare Ashley's practice to that of the other three study participants, there are sharp contrasts. While reading and discussion drive instruction for Missy, Connie, and Katie, skills drive reading instruction for Ashley. Little to no time is allotted to discussion, and reading is for the purpose of incorporating skills and comprehension strategies. As a result, Ashley teaches skills independent of authentic reading acts, while the others incorporate skills into the reading organically, when and where appropriate. They use the skills to scaffold instruction in order to deepen reading understanding. Ashley uses skills instruction as an end in and of itself. The differences between her instructional practices and those of the others are marked. Ashley was selected as a participant in this study because she satisfied the sample's selection parameters. She is a nationally board certified teacher in literacy and teaches struggling readers in grades 3-5. Her beliefs about reading comprehension instruction coincide with research-based, recommended approaches. However, her observed and described instruction do not mirror most of the recommended strategies and frameworks for effective reading comprehension teaching. This is most likely due to her perception that she is not permitted to teach in the ways that she would like to teach because of constraints imposed by her school division. This is a frustrating paradox: an NBCT in literacy that knows effective strategies and frameworks, but feels prevented from using them.

## **Implications for Practice**

Reading comprehension and its instruction are complex issues; many variables affect reading outcomes. This study looked at the strategies and practices that effective teachers implement in their classrooms to improve reading comprehension. All of the findings potentially have implications for reading instruction. However, the small size of the sample makes applicability to other reading programs necessarily tentative. Based upon what was gleaned in this study, the following are practices that administrators, reading specialists, interventionists, and/or classroom reading teachers might want to consider implementing in their school-wide or classroom instructional reading programs to benefit their students reading comprehension learning.

**Implementing discussion during reading instruction.** Schools are under pressure to perform. Struggling readers are sometimes the measure of a school's success or its failure. Discussion helps students, particularly struggling readers, to make meaning from reading (Chinn et al., 2007). The effective teachers in this study used discussion regularly. Though their implementation varied, each allocated significant time to discuss what had been read.

Perhaps the reason that so few teachers use discussion in reading instruction is due to the complexity of its implementation. Teachers could benefit from professional development designed around how to best develop discussion in their reading classrooms.

**Reflecting on beliefs and practices.** Sometimes, reading programs are implemented from the district level with little explanation or minimal training. The research undergirding these programs is often not shared. When teachers use programs without thought as to why they are using them, they are teaching unconsciously.

This study highlights the value of aligning instructional practices with beliefs and teaching consciously with clear intent of purpose. Teachers should make the time to reflect on their beliefs about reading comprehension and its instruction. Then they should compare their beliefs with their practices, looking for conformity and dissonance. By doing this, they can become aware of whether or not they are practicing in accordance with their beliefs and make the changes necessary to become more intentional about reading comprehension instruction.

**Encouraging ongoing formative assessment during reading instruction.** This study highlights the importance of ongoing formative assessment in helping struggling readers to comprehend. These effective teachers were able to differentiate instruction because they understood their students' strengths and areas in which growth was needed. Knowing when and how to assess informally is a skill that can be taught. Perhaps it would behoove administrators to invest in staff development that addresses the importance of and need for informal, ongoing assessment during everyday reading instruction.

**Emphasizing the importance of a supportive classroom environment.** In today's environment of high-stakes testing and emphasis on student test scores, the importance of a supportive classroom environment can be overlooked. Administrators and teachers alike might benefit by assessing their school-wide and classroom environments to see whether or not they are supportive. This study illustrates how these effective teachers were able to meet the needs of their students in part by creating such supportive environments.

## **Conclusion**

When I began this study, I was intrigued by the idea of entering effective teachers' classrooms during reading comprehension instruction to see what was going on. I was intrigued by the idea of talking to them about the why's and what's of their instruction. I was not disappointed. In fact, what I discovered was heartening.

Three of the four participants are models of best practice. They use what they know about good instruction, consider the needs of their students, incorporate strategies strategically, and end up with engaged students who seem to enjoy time spent reading and discussing what they have read. Unlike the extant literature about reading comprehension instruction, they are not evaluating rather than teaching (Durkin, 1979). They are teaching: deliberately, thoughtfully, and lovingly. They seem to be making a difference with all of their readers. The fourth teacher in my study professed that she would like to practice more along the lines of the other three, but felt constrained by her school division to do so. Because her school has not made adequate yearly progress according to state standards, scrutiny is high and instructional independence is limited.

I wonder if what differentiates these teachers from other, less effective reading comprehension teachers is their national board certification in literacy? In interviews, each spoke of the rigorous and challenging process that is board certification. They talked about how their teaching practices changed as a result of becoming certified. They felt like they were much better literacy teachers after certification. The reflective requirements of their NBCT application work seems to have had some impact on their classroom practice. It would be interesting to see if similar conclusions in future studies might be found with other NBCTs in literacy. Perhaps their instructional effectiveness is

linked in some ways to the NBCT certification process itself. If so, what might be gleaned from that process that might help non-certified teachers of reading comprehension to improve their practice?

### **A Closing Thought**

I remember being struck by the quote on Connie's wall the day I walked into her classroom for our first meeting and interview. Again, it said, "Each child is living the only life he has—the only one he will ever have. The least we can do is not diminish it" (Page, N.D.). After much time spent talking with and observing these teachers as they worked with their students, I can say with certainty that their students' lives—reading and otherwise—were enriched.



## References

- Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P. D., & Paris, S. G. (2008). Clarifying differences between reading skills and reading strategies. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(5), 364-373.
- Allington, R. L., & Johnston, P. H. (2002). *Reading to learn: Lessons from exemplary fourth-grade classrooms*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Allington, R. L. (2002). What I've learned about effective reading instruction: From a decade of studying exemplary elementary classroom teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 740-747.
- Allington, R. L. (2002). Troubling times: A short historical perspective. In R. L. Allington (Ed.), *Big brother and the national reading curriculum* (pp. 3-46). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Allington, R. L., Johnston, P. H., & Day, J. P. (2002). Exemplary fourth-grade teachers. *Language Arts*, 79(6), 462.
- Allington, R. L. (2006). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs*. Boston: Pearson.
- Almasi, J. F., (1995). The nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher-lead discussions of literature. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 314-351.
- Almasi, J. F., (2007). Using questioning strategies to promote students' active comprehension of content area material. In D. Lapp & J. Flood (Eds.), *Content area reading instruction* (5<sup>th</sup> ed. pp. 487-513). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Almasi, J. F., (2009). Comprehension and discussion of text. In S. Israel & G. Duffy (Eds.), *Handbook of research on reading comprehension* (pp. 470-493). New

York: Routledge.

- Almasi, J., Garas-York, K., & Shanahan, L. (2006). Qualitative research in text comprehension and the report of the National Reading Panel. *The Elementary School Journal*, 107, 38-66.
- Anderson, V. (1992). A teacher development project in transactional strategies instruction for teachers of severely reading disabled adolescents. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8, 391-403.
- Armbruster, B., Anderson, T., & Ostertag, J. (1987). Does text structure/summarization instruction facilitate learning from expository text?. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22(3), 331-346. Retrieved from Education Research Complete database.
- Atwell, N. (2007). *The reading zone: How to help kids become skilled, passionate, habitual, critical readers*. New York: Scholastic.
- Baddeley, A. D. (1986). *Working memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bitter, C., O'Day, J., Gubbins, P., & Socias, M. (2009). What works to improve student literacy achievement? An examination of instructional practices in a balanced literacy approach. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 14(1), 17-44. doi:10.1080/10824660802715403
- Block, C. C., Parris, S. R., Reed, K. L., Whiteley, C. S., & Cleveland, M. D. (2009). Instructional approaches that significantly increase reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(2), 262-281. doi:10.1037/a0014319
- Brown, A.L., & Palinscar, A.S. (1989). Guided, cooperative learning and individual knowledge acquisition. In L.B. Resnick (Ed.), *Knowing, learning, and instruction: Essays in honor of Robert Glaser*, 393-451. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Brown, R., Pressley, M., Van Meter, P., & Schuder, T. (1996). A quasi-experimental validation of transactional strategies instruction with low-achieving second grade readers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 18-37.
- Buly, M. R., & Valencia, S. W. (2002). Below the bar: Profiles of student who fail state reading assessments. *Educational Evaluation and Policy*, 24(3), 219-239.
- Cain, K. (2003). Text comprehension and its relation to coherence and cohesion in children's fictional narratives. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 21, 335-351.
- Cain, K. (2006). Individual differences in children's memory and reading comprehension: An investigation of semantic and inhibitory deficits. *Memory*, 14(5), 553-569.
- Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (1996). The nature of the relationship between comprehension skill and the ability to tell a story. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 14, 187-201.
- Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (1999). Inference making ability and its relation to comprehension failure in young children. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 11, 489-503.
- Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2006). Profiles of children with specific reading comprehension difficulties. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, 683-696. doi: 10.1348/00070990X67610
- Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2009). Reading comprehension development from 8 to 14 years: The contribution of component skills and processes. In R. Wagner, C. Schatschneider, & C. Phuthian-Sence (Eds.), *Beyond decoding: The behavioral*

- and biological foundations of reading comprehension*, (pp. 143 – 175). New York: Guilford Press.
- Cain, K., Oakhill, J., & Bryant, P. E. (2004). Children's reading comprehension ability: Concurrent prediction by working memory, verbal ability, and component skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *96*, 31-42.
- Cain, K., Oakhill, J., & Lemon, K. (2004). Individual differences in the inference of word meanings from context: The influence of reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and memory capacity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *96*(4), 671–681. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.96.4.671
- Carretti, B., Borella, E., Cornoldi, C., & De Beni, R. (2009). Role of working memory in explaining the performance of individuals with specific reading comprehension difficulties: A meta-analysis. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *19*(2), 246-251. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2008.10.002
- Catts, H. W., Adloff, S. M. & Weismer, S. E., (2006). Language deficits in poor comprehenders: A case for the simple view of reading. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing research*, *49*, 278-293.
- Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Chinn, C. A., Anderson, R. C., & Waggoner, M. A. (2001). Patterns of discourse in two kinds of literature discussion. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *36*(4), 378. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2005). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *The Reading Teacher*, *58*(6), 570-580. doi:10.1598/RT.58.6.6
- Collins, C. (1991). Reading instruction that increases thinking abilities. *Journal of*

- Reading*, 34, 510-516.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Petrella, J. N. (2004). Effective reading comprehension instruction: Examining child X instruction interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(4), 682-698.
- Corbin, J. M. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Cragg, L. & Nation, K. (2006). Exploring written narrative in children with poor reading comprehension. *Educational Psychology*, 26(1), 55–72.
- Cross, D. R., & Paris, G. G. (1988). Developmental and instructional analyses of children's metacognition and reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80(2), 131-142.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspectives in the research process*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Daneman, M., & Merikle, P. M. (1996). Working memory and language comprehension: A meta-analysis. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 3, 422–433.
- Dole, J. A., Duffy, G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, P. D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of educational research*, 61(2) 239-264.
- Dolezal, S. E., Welsh, L., Pressley, M., & Vincent, M. M. (2003). How nine third-grade teachers motivate student academic engagement. *Elementary School Journal*, 103(3), 239. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Duffy, G. (2003) *Explaining reading: A resource for teaching concepts, skills, and strategies*. New York: Guilford Press.

- Duffy, G., & Roehler, L. R. (1989). Why strategy instruction is so difficult and what we need to do about it. In C.B. McCormick, G. Miller, & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Cognitive strategy research: From basic research to educational applications* (p. 133-154). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Duffy, G., Roehler, L., Meloth, M. S., Vavrus, L. G., Book, C., Putnam, J., & Wesselman, R. (1986). The relationship between explicit verbal explanations during reading skill instruction and student awareness and achievement: A study of reading teacher effects. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(3), 237-252.
- Duffy, G., Roehler, L., Sivan, E., Rackliffe, G., Book, C., Meloth, M., Vavrus, L., Wesselman, R., Putnam, J., & Bassiri, D. (1987). Effects of explaining the reasoning associated with using reading strategies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22, 347-368.
- DuFour, R. (2003). The leading edge. *Journal of Staff Development*, 24 (2), 71-72.
- Duke, N. K. (2000a). For the rich it's richer: Print experiences and environments offered to children in very low- and very high-SES first grade classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 441-478.
- Duke, N. K. (2000b). 3.6 minutes per day: The scarcity of informational texts in first grade. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35, 202-224.
- Duke, N., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. Farstrup and J. Samuels. *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 205-242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Durkin, D. (1978/79). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension

- instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 15, 481-533.
- Ehrlich, M., Remond, M., & Tardieu, H. (1999). Processing of anaphoric devices in young skilled and less skilled comprehenders: Differences in metacognitive monitoring. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, 29–63.
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ermis, S. (2008). Using graphic organizers to facilitate elementary students' comprehension of informational text. *College Reading Association Yearbook*, 29, 87-102.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Gambrell, L., & Bales, R. (1986). Mental imagery and the comprehension-monitoring performance of fourth- and fifth-grade poor readers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(4), 454-464. Retrieved from Education Research Complete database.
- Gambrell, L. B. (1996). Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(1), 14-25. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Gambrell, L. (2007). Reading: Does practice make perfect? *Reading Today*, 24(6), 16.
- Garner, R., & Taylor, N. (1982). Monitoring of understanding: An investigation of good and poor readers' awareness of induced miscomprehension of text. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 12, 55-63. doi: 10.1080/0270271820030102
- Gaskins, I., Anderson, R., Pressley, M., Cuncelli, E., & Satlow, E. (1993). Six teachers' dialogue during cognitive process instruction. *Elementary School Journal*, 93, 277-304.

- Gersten, R., Fuchs, L., Williams, J., & Baker, S. (2001). Teaching reading comprehension strategies to students with learning disabilities: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 71*(2), 279.
- Gillette, J., Temple, C. & Crawford, A. (2008). *Understanding reading problems* (7th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Graves, M. F., Graves, B. B., & Braaten, S. (1996). Scaffolded reading experiences for inclusive classes. *Educational Leadership*.
- Graves, M. F., Juel, C., & Graves, B. B. (2006). Teaching reading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L (2008). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82. doi: 10.1177/1525822X05279903
- Guthrie, J.T., Taboada, A., & Coddington, C. (2007). Engagement practices for strategy learning in concept-oriented reading instruction. In D. McNamara (Ed.), *Reading Comprehension Strategies: Theories, Interventions, and Technologies* (241-266). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hacker, D. J., & Tenent, A. (2002). Implementing reciprocal teaching in the classroom: Overcoming obstacles and making modifications. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94*, 699-718.
- Idol-Maestas, L., Illinois Univ., U., & Bolt, B. (1985). Group Story Mapping: A Comprehension Strategy for Both Skilled and Unskilled Readers. Technical



- Report No. 363. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Ivey, G. (1999b). Reflections on teaching struggling middle school readers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(3), 372-382.
- Ivey, G. & Fisher, D. (2005). Learning from what doesn't work: Older students can read with enthusiasm and understanding, especially when teachers avoid ineffective practices that promote disengagement. *Educational Leadership*, 63(2), 8-14.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1997). The effects of cooperative and individualized instruction on student attitudes and achievement. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 104(2), 207.
- Kintsch, E., & Kintsch, W (1996). Learning from text. In E. DeCorte & F. Weinert (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Developmental and Instructional Psychology* (pp. 541-601), Amsterdam: Pergamon.
- Kirsch, I. S., Jungeblut, A., Jenkins, L., & Kilstad, A. (2002). *Adult literacy in America: A first look at the findings of the national adult literacy survey* (NCES Publication No.1993-275). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93275.pdf>
- Knapp, M. S., Adelman N. E., Marder, S., McCollum, H., Needels, M. C., Madilla, C., Shields, P. M., Turnbull, B. J., & Zucker, A. A. (1995). *Teaching for meaning in high-poverty classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.)  
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- LaBerge, D., & Samuels, S. J. (1974). Toward a theory of automatic information processing in reading. *Cognitive Psychology*, 25, 459-476.
- Laing, S., & Kamhi, A. (2002). The use of think-aloud protocols to compare inferencing

abilities average and below-average readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 35(5), 436-437.

Landi, Nicole (2005). Behavioral and electrophysiological investigations of semantic processing in skilled and less-skilled comprehenders. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, United States -- Pennsylvania. Retrieved November 28, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3192974).

Leach, J., Scarborough, H., & Rescorla, L. (2003). Late-emerging reading disabilities. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(2), 211-224. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.95.2.211

Lee, J., Grigg, W., & Donahue, P. (2009). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009* (NCES Publication No. 2007-496). Retrieved from <http://nationsreportcard.gov/>

Levin, J., Pressley, M., & Wisconsin Univ., M. (1978). *Improving children's prose comprehension: Selected strategies that seem to succeed*. Theoretical Paper No. 72. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity naturalistic evaluation. In D. D. Williams (Ed.), *Naturalistic Evaluation* (pp. 73-84). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. doi: 10.1002/ev.223

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Lynch, S. & Warner, L. (2008). Creating lesson plans for all learners. *Kappa Delta Pi Record* (45) 1, 10-15.

- Manning, K. (1997). Authenticity in constructivist inquiry: Methodological considerations without prescription. *Qualitative Inquiry* (3)1, 93-115.
- Manset-Williamson, G., & Nelson, J. M. (2005). Balanced, strategic reading instruction for upper-elementary and middle school students with reading disabilities: A comparative study. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28, 59 – 74.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McLaughlin, M., & Allen, M.B. (2002). *Guided comprehension: A teaching model for grades 3-8*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Mokhtari, K. & Thompson, H. B. (2006). How problems of reading fluency and comprehension are related to difficulties in syntactic awareness skills among fifth graders. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 46(1), 73-94.
- Morrow, L., Gambrell, L., & Pressley, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Best practices in literacy instruction (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. New York: Guilford.
- Morrow, L. M., & Gambrell, L. B. (2000). Literature-based reading instruction. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol. 3, pp. 563-586). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nation, K., Adams, J. W., Bowyer-Crane, C. A., & Snowling, M. J. (1999). Working memory deficits in poor comprehenders reflect underlying language impairments. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 73, 139–158.
- Nation, K., Clarke, P., Marshall, C. M., & Durand, M. (2004). Hidden language impairments in children: Parallels between poor reading comprehension and specific language impairment? *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 47, 199–211.

- Nation, K., Clarke, P., & Snowling, M. (2002). General cognitive ability in children with reading comprehension difficulties. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 549-560.
- Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J. (1998a). Semantic processing and the development of word-recognition skills: Evidence from children with reading comprehension difficulties. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 39, 85–101.
- Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J. (1998b). Individual differences in contextual facilitation: Evidence from dyslexia and poor reading comprehension. *Child Development*, 69(4), 996-1011.
- Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J. (1999). Developmental differences in sensitivity to semantic relations among good and poor comprehenders: Evidence of semantic priming. *Cognition*, 19, B1-B13.
- Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J., & Clarke, P. (2005). Production of the English past tense by children with language comprehension impairments. *Journal of Child Language*, 32(1), 117-137.
- Nation, K., & Snowling, M. J., & Clarke, P. (2007). Dissecting the relationship between language skills and leaning to read: Semantic and phonological contributions to new vocabulary learning in children with poor reading comprehension. *Advances in Speech-Language Pathology*, 9(2), 131-139. doi: 10.1080/14417040601145166
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2010). *The five core propositions*. Retrieved from <http://www.nbpts.org/>
- National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009* (NCES 2010–458). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of

Education, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2010458.pdf>

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction-reports of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Development.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, P.L. 107-110, signed by President George W. Bush, January 8, 2002.

Nystrand, M., Gamoran, A., Kachur, R., & Prendergast, C. (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Oakhill, J., (1982). Constructive processes in skilled and less-skilled comprehenders' memory for sentences. *British Journal of Psychology*, 73, 13-20.

Oakhill, J., (1984). Inferential and memory skills in children's comprehension of stories. *British Journal of Psychology*, 54, 31-39.

Oakhill, J., & Cain, K., (2000). Children's difficulties in text comprehension: Assessing causal issues. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 5(1), 51-59.

Oakhill, J., & Cain, K., (2007). Issues of causality in children's reading comprehension. In D. S. McNamara (Ed.), *Reading comprehension strategies: Theories, interventions, and technologies* (pp. 47-71). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Oakhill, J., Hartt, J., & Samols, D. (2005). Levels of comprehension monitoring and working memory in good and poor comprehenders. *Reading and Writing*, 18,

657-686. doi: 1007/s11145-005-3355-z

- Oakhill, J. V., Yuill, N. M. & Parkin, A. (1986). On the nature of the difference between skilled and less skilled comprehenders. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 9, 80-91.
- O'Connor, M. C., & Michaels, S. (1993). Aligning academic task and participation status through revoicing: Analysis of a classroom discourse strategy. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 24, 318-335.
- O'Connor, R. E., Bell, K. M., Harty, K. R., Larkin, L. K., Sackor, S. M., & Zigmond, N. (2002). Teaching reading to poor readers in the intermediate grades: A comparison of text difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(3), 474-485. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.94.3.474
- Oczkus, L., (2003). *Reciprocal teaching at work: Strategies for improving reading comprehension*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Owens, R. E. (2008). *Language development: An introduction*. New York: Pearson.
- Palincsar, A. S., & Brown, A.L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1, 117-175.
- Palincsar, A. S., & Klenk, L. (1991). *Learning dialogues to promote text comprehension* (PHS Grant 059). Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Health and Human Development.
- Paris, S. G., & Oka, E. (1986). Children's reading strategies, metacognition, and motivation. *Developmental Review*, 6, 25-26.
- Paris, S.G., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1991). The development of strategic readers. In R. Barr, M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 609-640). New York: Longman.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Perfetti, C. A., Marron, M. A., & Foltz, P. W. (1996). Sources of comprehension failure: Theoretical perspectives and case studies. In C. Cornoldi and J. Oakhill (Eds.), *Reading comprehension difficulties: Processes and intervention*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pimperton, H. & Nation, K. (2010). Suppressing irrelevant information from working memory: Evidence for domain-specific deficits in poor comprehenders. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 62, 380–391.
- Pressley, M. (2000). What should comprehension instruction be the instruction of? In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.) *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 545-561). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. New York: Guilford.
- Pressley, M., & Afflerbach, P. (1995). *Verbal protocols of reading: The nature of constructively responsive reading*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Pressley, M., & El-Dinary, P.B. (Guest Eds.). (1993). Special issue on strategy instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 94(2).
- Pressley, M., El-Dinary, P.B., Gaskins, I., Schuder, T., Bergman, J.L., Almasi, J., & Brown, R. (1992). Beyond direct explanation: Transactional instruction of reading Comprehension strategies. *Elementary School Journal*, 92, 511-554.
- Pressley, M., Gaskins, I. W., Cunicelli, E. A., Burdick, N. J., Schaub-Matt, M., Lee, D. S., & Powell, N. (1991). Strategy instruction at Benchmark School: A faculty

- interview study. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 14, 19-48.
- Pressley, M., Gaskins, I., Solic, K., & Collins, S. (2006). A portrait of Benchmark School: How a school produces high achievement in students who previously failed. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 282 - 306.
- Pressley, M., Mohan, L., Raphael, L. M., & Fingeret, L. (2007). How does Bennett Woods Elementary School produce such high reading and writing achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(2), 221-240. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.92.2.221
- Pressley, M., Raphael, L., Gallagher, J. D., & DiBella, J. (2004). Providence-St. Mel School: How a school that works for African American students works. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(2), 216-235. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.96.2.216
- Pressley, M., Wharton-McDonald, R., Hampston, J.M., & Echevarria, M. (1998). The nature of literacy instruction in ten grade-4 and-5 classrooms in upstate New York. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 2, 159-191.
- Pressley, M., Wood, E., Woloshyn, V. E., Martin, V., King, A., & Menke, D. (1992). Encouraging mindful use of prior knowledge: Attempting to construct explanatory answers facilitates learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 91-110.
- Pressley, M., Yokoi, L., Rankin, J., Wharton-McDonald, R., & Hampston, J. (1997). A survey of the instructional practices of grade-5 teachers nominated as effective in promoting literacy. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 1, 145-160.
- Primeaux, J. (1999). *The journey of nine sixth graders: From struggling readers to strategic readers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana.



- Primeaux, J. (2000). Shifting perspectives on struggling readers. *Language Arts*, 77(6), 537-542.
- RAND Reading Study Group (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension*. Retrieved from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/2005/MR1465.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2005/MR1465.pdf)
- Raphael, T.E., & Au, K. H. (2005). QAR: Enhancing comprehension and test taking across grades and content areas. *Reading Teacher*, 59 (3), 201-221.
- Rapp, D. N., van den Broek, P., McMaster, K. L., Panayiota, K., & Espin, C. A. (2007). Higher-order comprehension processes in struggling readers: A perspective for research and intervention. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 11(4), 289–312.
- Ricketts, J., Bishop, D. V. M., & Nation, K. (2008). Investigating orthographic and semantic aspects of word learning in poor comprehenders. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 31(1), 117–135. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9817.2007.00365.x
- Rosenblatt, L. (2005). *Making meaning with texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1995). *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1994). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In R. B. Ruddell,
- Rosenblatt, L. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response: *Theory into Practice*, 68(1), 6-12.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory into Practice*, 21 (4), 268-277.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1978). The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the

- literary work. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rosenshine, B., & Meister, C. (1994). Reciprocal teaching: A review of nineteen experimental studies. *Review of Educational Research*, 64, 479-530.
- Rosenshine, B., Meister, C., & Chapman, S. (1996). Teaching students to generate questions: A review of the intervention studies. *Review of Educational Research* 66(2). doi: 10.3102/00346543066002181
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Ruddell, M.R. & Singer, H. (Eds.), *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, (4th ed., pp. 1057-1092). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Sanders, W. L., & Horn, S. P. (1998). Research findings from the Tennessee value-added assessment system (TVAAS) database: Implications for educational evaluation and research. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 12(3), 247-56.
- Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center.
- Saunders, W. M., & Goldberg, C. (1999). Effects of instructional conversations and literature logs on limited- and fluent-English-proficient students' story comprehension and thematic understanding. *Elementary School Journal*, 99(4), 277-301.
- Schwandt, T. A., (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

- Schwandt, T. A., Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation, 112*, 11-25.
- Shanahan, T. (2005). The national reading panel report: Practical advice for teachers. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates.
- Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, H. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: A practice guide* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [whatworks.ed.gov/publications/practiceguides](http://whatworks.ed.gov/publications/practiceguides).
- Short, K. (2006). Examining our purposes for grouping. *School Talk, 11*(1), 1-2. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Siegel, C. (2005). Implementing a research-based model of cooperative learning. *Journal of Educational Research, 98*(6), 339-349.
- Slavin, R. E., Cheung, A., Groff, C., & Lake, C. (2008). Effective reading programs for middle and high schools: A best-evidence synthesis. *Reading Research Quarterly, 43*(3), 290-322.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Stahl, S. S., Jacobson, M. G., Davis, C. E., & Davis, R. L. (1989). Prior knowledge and

difficult vocabulary in the comprehension of unfamiliar text. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24(1), 27-43.

- Spinelli, E. (2005). *The interpreted world: An introduction to phenomenological psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Taylor, B. (1982). Text structure and children's comprehension and memory for expository material. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74(3), 323-340.  
doi:10.1037/0022-0663.74.3.323.
- Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Clark, K. F., & Walpole, M. (1999). Center for the improvement of early reading achievement. *The Reading Teacher*, 53(2), 156-159.
- Taylor, B., Pearson, P., Peterson, D., & Rodriguez, M. (2003). Reading growth in high-poverty classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy learning. *Elementary School Journal*, 104(1).
- Tierney, R., & Readance, J. (2005). *Reading strategies and practices: A compendium* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Trabasso, T. & Bouchard, E. (2002). Teaching readers how to comprehend text strategically. In C. C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 176-200). New York: Guilford Press.
- USDOE/IES (2008). Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices. *What Works Clearinghouse*. NCEE 2008-4027 retrieved September 8, 2009 from [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/adlit\\_pg\\_082608.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/adlit_pg_082608.pdf)
- van der Schoot, M., Vasbinder, A. L., Horsley, T. M., Reijntjes, A., & van Lieshout, E. (2009). Lexical ambiguity resolution in good and poor comprehenders: An eye

- fixation and self-paced reading study in primary school children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *101* (1), 21–36 doi: 10.1037/a0013382
- Vaughn, S., & Klingner, J. (2004). Teaching reading comprehension to students with learning disabilities. In D. Stone, E. Silliman, B. Ehren, & K. Apel (Eds.), *handbook of Language and Literacy* (541-555). New York: Guilford Press.
- Vaughn, S., & Lonan-Thompson, S. (2004). *Research-based methods of reading instruction, grades K-3*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Mind in Society*. (Trans. M. Cole). 79-91. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weekes, B. S., Hamilton, S., Oakhill, J. V., & Holliday, R. E. (2008). False recollection in children with reading comprehension difficulties. *Cognition*, *106*, 222–233.
- Wharton-McDonald, R. & Swiger, S. (2009). Developing higher order comprehension in the middle grades. In S. Israel and G. Duffy (Eds.) *Handbook of reading comprehension*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Willis, J. W., Jost, M., & Nilakanta, R., (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Wolf, M. K., Crosson, A., & Resnick, L. (2005). Classroom talk for rigorous reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Psychology*, *26*(1), 27-53.  
doi: 10.1080/02702710490897518
- Wood, D. J., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem-solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *17*(2), 89-100. doi: 10.1111/1469-7610
- Yuill, B., & Joscelyne, T. (1988). Effect of organizational cues and strategies on good

and poor comprehenders' story understanding. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80(2), 152-158.

Yuill, N. & Oakhill, J. (1991). *Children's Problems in Text Comprehension. An Experimental Investigation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

## Appendix A

## Sample Observations

Missy  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Observation 1  
3/15/11

**1:00 – 1:20 -Whole Class Lesson - 19 students – 9 boys and 10 girls inclusion - Main**

**Idea**

“Flossie and the Fox”

1. Watch the video. Students are working on main idea and details. This is a continuation of a skills that were introduced last week. They should be comfortable with the concepts. They have class recorders and a graphic organizer is displayed on the Promethean Board. After listening to the story, the students must select the main idea of the story from four selections. Missy reads the four choices aloud to the students and they select the main idea. It is recorded for display to the class: one student chose A, one student chose B, one student chose D and the rest chose C. Missy explains to the students why C is best choice. **She will note who the 3 students were that selected the wrong answers and work with them individually (differentiating instruction).**
2. Next the students listen to a nonfiction video on pyramids. Four statements are displayed. None of the students select A. Several students selected B and Missy asks why students made that selection. One student points out it was only a detail. The whole passage was not about pharaohs. C – Most students were here. The pyramids were built thousands of years ago. Missy thinks aloud for the students – longest answer is not always the correct answer. You don't just choose the answer because it's the longest. D-

There are many pyramids in Egypt. This is the correct answer. All of the sentences had to do with the many pyramids in Egypt.

**Again, Missy will go back and address this skill with students who need additional instruction.**

3. They go back to fiction and listen to a short video, “Pete’s a Pizza.” She stops the video to ask, “How does the author make the reading come alive?” She tells them this is done through the words, the descriptive words chosen. Students are making predictions about what the ingredients really are that are being used.

**(Students are engaged the whole lesson. The texts chosen for the lesson are engaging. She uses videos because the reading level is appropriate for all and the pictures are engaging.)**

He was running like the gingerbread man or the Stinky Cheese Man – connections by students.

Students must choose the main idea:

Pete was happy again

Pete’s dad tried to make him into pizza to cheer him up.

Pete was in a bad mood

Dad worked the dough.

All students choose the correct answer.

### **1:20 – 2:00 - Center Work and Guided Reading Groups**

The students complete worksheets on main ideas and details. They are also working on functional text because they did poorly on a reading test.

Group 3 – Guided Reading with Struggling Readers *Never Wash Your Hair*



**This group has never passed a reading SOL test.**

Students pick out a marker color and a slate. Books are passed out. They are talking about character traits with the professor.

What is the issue? S. His mother is feeling like things are turning crazy. (A chart with traits and feelings is displayed on the wall for students to refer to) His mother is worried, embarrassed. (The students are making personal connections to text.)

Let's look at Ch. 4 – We will read pages 31-38. Here's your question. How is the plot developing? What's happening? You're going to describe the characters and the events. She has this written on a sentence strip so that students can refer to it.

M. asks a student to read aloud to her. She asks him what an overnight bag is. She says, "I saw the look on your face. What is an overnight bag?" He looks confused. She says, "Do you ever spend the night with a friend? Okay. Well, what do you put your clothes in?" Oh, now I get it. They continue to read together. She stops to question and clarify and help him to decode difficult words.

She moves on to another student. He has difficulty and is hesitant to read aloud to her. He covers his mouth with his hand. He begins haltingly. She encourages him. He gains confidence and reads more loudly and clearly. He stops on a word. "Come on, you've got this." He is correct. "Nice job." He reads another sentence. Does this make sense? They read it together. "There you go." She says to the student when he is finished reading aloud to her, "Stop getting stressed every time I ask you to read out loud. You're doing just fine."

(She is very positive with all of the students. She encourages them to use word attack skills and context to decode for meaning.)

When reading is complete, students address the answers on their slates. While they do this, Missy writes anecdotal notes about the students who have read aloud to her. Then the students share their answers with the group.

Missy - How do the scientist people get involved? Ss- There are no scientists. Missy - Okay, everyone open your books. Let's go back to page 32. She reads it out loud and asks, "If I had monkeys in my hair would I be like everyone else?" They discuss and decide a scientist would be interested in studying this boy with monkeys in his hair.

Each child picks something to share about how the plot and characters are developing. S- More characters are coming into the story and more things are happening. M - "Who is coming into the story?" The student says, "The scientists and the professors are entering the story."

"You guys did a nice job today although I don't think you were all awake."

### **Group 2 – Struggling Readers on the borderline - 2:00 – 2:20**

#### *The Personality Potion*

What is Martin pretending?

Let's look at the front cover and make some predictions.

"I think it's about a potion that changes a personality."

"He's going to use a potion to change someone's personality but they don't know it's happening."

"There looks like there's a mean person, maybe a bully, on the cover. Maybe he'll change his personality so he can fit in."

Okay, let's open up your books. We're going to read chapter one – What is Martin pretending and why? (She sets a purpose for reading.)

She listens to a student reading aloud. The girl is mostly fluent.

The other students are engaged in their reading. One follows along with the student who's reading aloud and others read at their own pace.

Students say they have connections and predictions.

Missy asks the reader a question. S- "I forgot why." Missy - "Then what can you do when you've forgotten?" S- "I can go back into the book and reread." He does this and is able to answer the question that Missy posed to him initially.

A student relays her connection about her friend who had many large stuffed animals in his bedroom.

A student brings up all the double negatives in an earlier book. Missy – why did the author do that? "Because that's how some people talk. It's real." They talk briefly about dialect adding realism to a story. It's more authentic when the language is real.

They share out about their initial question - What is Martin pretending?

S1 - He's pretending to be Kit Cane. S2 - He is pretending to be Kit Cane because it was a really interesting book. Missy - Okay, I like books but I don't pretend to be a character.

What's a character trait that we could use to describe him? S3 – He's an introvert.

S4- He loves to pretend, just like I do Missy – So you're making a personal connection to the character. You both like to pretend. S5 – Because it's his favorite book.

When each of the students shares his thoughts about why, Missy doesn't confirm or deny any of the answers. Then they discuss predictions for next time.

One child is so interested that he reads ahead. All are enjoying the book. Each is engaged in the reading and in the discussion.

Katie  
 March 15, 2011 - Wednesday  
 Observation 1

### **9:55 – Small Group Guided Lesson – 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Struggling Readers**

Katie brings the girls into the room and they sit down at the kidney-shaped table. There is a chart that says, “Good readers reread when it doesn’t make sense.”

She tells them what is going to be happening for the next three weeks. “We are going to meet this week, next week and the week after that. I know you do chapter books with Mrs. L. but we’re going to be looking at other types of text when we’re in here together,” she says.

The kind of reading you’ll do with me isn’t as complicated but we’ll talk more about our reading.

Katie introduces the chart and asks them to talk about it. “What do you do when you reread?” she asks. S1 replies hesitantly, “You track and you make it make sense.”

Katie repeats the chart sentence and asks S2 what that means. She says it means that you sound out the words.

She asks S3 what she thinks. She is silent for a period of time and then says, “If you don’t know what the word is ...” She doesn’t finish her sentence and Katie moves on. She tries a different tack asking, “What about this rereading part? How would you know if it doesn’t make any sense?” They are unable to answer and Katie moves on.

Katie passes out cards titled, Recipe for a Rainbow. She asks them to look at her saying, “Eyes on me. I’ll ask you to scan the card. I want you to scan the card. Watch me, watch my eyes, I’m scanning it. Am I reading everything from top to bottom and left to right. (They answer no). That’s right. Scanning means to look quickly at the different parts. Now you do that. Read the title, check out the pictures, and scan the headings.” She gives them some time to do this and then she asks them what they noticed.

S1 - It has lots of pictures S2 – It shows you how to make a rainbow.  
 S3 – I see that it’s a recipe for a rainbow and it has lots of different colors.

You’re right it has lots of pictures and colors. Hands down, we’re just talking.

Katie asks, “Have you ever followed a recipe?” S1 – a cake recipe. It had butter, water, chocolate chips. I helped my mommy with it.

Katie asks, “What do you know about recipes? Have you followed one or seen one.” S2 - I helped someone make a recipe. It was a pizza and it had some dough. We mixed it and then we spun it to get it like a pizza shape and then we put sauce on it.”

How do you think you might make a rainbow? S1 – we were outside, it was raining. Me and my brother saw one in water.

Katie says, “Since we’re talking and discussing we need to look at each other. S1 is going to speak so we need to look at her.”

Katie asks, “Anything else about rainbows?” S2 - I saw different colors outside and we thought we could touch it.

Katie asks S3, “Have you ever seen one S3?” S3 - I saw it in the car with my parents. I think in Alaska.

Then she says, “When you read, there may be things that don’t make sense to you? What can you do?”

S1 – If you don’t know a word you can sound it out.

Katie - What if that doesn’t work?

S2 – Ask your teacher or someone older than you for help.

We talked about rereading – S1 gave us an example of a sentence that doesn’t make sense - Cat in the door. If you don’t understand something, you can reread.

Katie - I want you to read the recipe for a rainbow. Stop once in a while and ask yourself if you knew how to do this.

Let’s read. One reads aloud to Katie. Others read aloud quietly.

Katie moves around while they read and takes anecdotal notes on the students as they read to her.

When you finish read it one more time. When we’re ready we’ll talk about it. We won’t read it again.

So, if I were going to do this what would I need: S2 – lists ingredients.

Can we do this?

S1 – water

S2 – clear glass

Paper

Table by sunlight (The girls are naming the ingredients together.)

Katie - What else did it tell you? S1 - Put paper on floor and you’ll see orange, blue, yellow, green (all participate)

Katie - How does it work?

S2 - When water shines on paper it makes a rainbow (eyes on S2)

Katie - What from the sun is making that rainbow? S1 tells a story about seeing a rainbow

What about the sun is making that rainbow? S3 - The little pointy things that stick out from the sun

S2 sunlight.

Makes colorful rainbows.

(The girls are beginning to build on each other's knowledge)

Katie - When you read this, were there any that were confusing and you had to reread. S1 #7. I didn't know the color. Indigo.

Anyone else (Katie models #3) Place the glass at the edge of the table. Hmmm, I had to reread because that was confusing to me. Who puts a glass at the edge of the table? If I do that it might fall. I had to read it again. Okay, I thought, I'm not sure about this. So those are different places to reread. Like there on #3, I went back to make sure I'd read it right.

Katie - Oh – Look at #4. Let a grownup help you. Why does it say that?

Put your hand down we're just talking.

S2 - To help because it's glass. S3 – Someone could get hurt.

Katie - Good readers reread when they don't know a word or if it doesn't make sense (Katie relates to the glass.) We reread to understand things better.

Katie - What did you learn from the article?

S1 - I learned that you get a cup and you pour water in it a table and paper with paper on the ground, and it makes a rainbow.

S2 - I learned how to make a rainbow and good readers reread

S3 - About how to make a rainbow and have your mother help you. When it doesn't make sense you go back and reread.

**These girls do not think about what they are reading. They are word calling.**

**When asked about substance from the reading, even literal questions, they were**

**unable to answer. It was only after rereading that they were able to answer basic**

questions about steps in making a rainbow. Katie brought in the metacognitive piece that good readers use to make meaning. She explained that reading is about questioning something that you don't understand. She asked the girls to share any confusions they had with the text and then modeled through think aloud how she worked through her initial confusion with a direction from the article that didn't make sense to her upon first reading. It was only after she reread that meaning was made.

When queried, the girls made no connection between rereading and meaning construction. When asked how you might understand when you reread, they responded with answers describing text decoding. At no time did they mention meaning formation as a consequence of rereading text. To these girls, reading is word calling, not understanding what is read.

Connie  
 Observation 1  
 Tuesday, March 22, 2011

**10:30 – 11:30 - 5<sup>th</sup> Graders – 20 Students**

Students enter the classroom and get out their work. They filter in slowly, and there is a lot of chatter among them. It takes a long time to get started because they arrive from different classrooms. They pick up their reading notebooks that are kept in baskets.

Reading is integrated with social studies. The novels read correspond to the social studies units. Today, they are reading *The Story of Harriet Tubman: Freedom Train*.

Connie begins. Let me have your attention. Today, we are working on novel study. As soon as we're finished with snack, we are going to be discussing some of part 2 and some of part 3. If you have finished, you may join the discussion group. If you are still working on part 3, you will finish that and not meet with the discussion of part 2. We will meet at the carpet to discuss.

Connie - Those who have completed part 2 bring your books and your sheets and move to the carpet.

Connie – In the very first part of the book you identified some character traits. This was the time when she was about 7 years old. Let's talk about that. Students raise their hands to participate.

S1 – Headstrong - She grabbed onto an idea and she sticks with it even if someone else suggests something else.

S2 – Brave - because she tried to steal sugar from the bowl

S3 - Brave - When she was getting whipped she accepted it.

S4 – Courageous – I agree with the two examples already given: whipped and sugar.

S5 – Wise – She listens to what her dad says and follows his good advice.

S6 – Smart – She was smart to run away because she was a slave who didn't want to be one.

Many students volunteer traits and their justifications for why they selected those traits. Connie tells them to write their traits on sentence strips and to place them on the chart titled character traits.

C - Now, I want us to think about part 2. Who can recall the overarching theme of part 2?

S1 – Struggles.

C – That was a part of it. Can you pick someone to add on to that thought? We're looking for the overarching theme

S2 – Adds.

C – So this is about her journey to PA. What character traits did she exhibit in that part of the book that we can add?

S1 – She was sad.



C – Okay, that's an emotion, but let's get a personality trait.

S2 – Tough. They were always saying that, I can't remember...

C – Check your book. If anyone can help her, that would be good.

S3 – Out going.

C – Outgoing usually means she is friendly and sociable. Is that what you mean?

S4 - No, not really.

A student hunts and finds the information to help S2.

S2 – She reads the portion of text to justify her TOUGH character trait.

The students agree and Connie tells her to include that on the chart.

S6 – Sneaky – She would pretend to fall asleep

S7 – Or maybe sly. Sly is a bit different.

C – You're right S7, there's a subtle difference.

They talk about the differences. Someone trying to get away with something is sneaky.

C - Is there another word we could use?

S9 – Crafty

C – It starts with a C a CL

S10 - Clever

C - Sly and clever imply an act without malicious intent.

C – Okay, a couple more comments on this.

S11 – Selfless - You care about others before yourself.

The students add other character traits and justify their answers: determined, confident, desirous

C – What is that word that means easily led?

Ss – Gullible

Students are given time to formulate their answers and justifications. There is no feeling of being rushed at all.

One student brings up strong as a character trait. Okay, that's a great point for us to transition from character traits to another kind of traits. She asks the others what strong might be a trait of. A student suggests it's a physical trait.

C – Let's all turn to page 39. What physical traits do you see?

S1 – large mouth

S2 – quick reactions

S3 – 5 feet tall

S4 – Graceful

C – We need to be listening so we know what's being said.

S5 – short, crinkly hair

S6 – hooded eyes

S7 – broad

All are talking at once as they are sharing their answers.

S8 - She's ugly. Then she reads the entire description from the book.

C- Maybe we could say "not beautiful" like the book description. That's a little kinder.

Okay, those who need to finish part 3 go ahead and go back to do that. Those of you who are finished with part 3, stay here so we can discuss it. 10 students remain.

We said that part 2 is about Harriet's freedom.

Connie - What's the gist of part 3? How can we sum it up?

S1 - Helping others get free

C - Okay, good. She got her own freedom, but she wasn't content. Let's find this. What did she need to do?

She takes multiple inputs for other students and they do a bit of light discussion. They go back into the text to find their justifications for their words. Students find out that there are several places where this is addressed.

C - She is not content to be free by herself. What term can we use to describe her?

Abolitionist.

They discuss what this is. They relate it to the Quakers.

S - Did abolitionists want freedom for everyone or just slaves? Because women aren't free.

This leads to Connie pointing out that women's rights came later with suffrage. All are interested and listen keenly to the discussion.

Connie is very precise about vocabulary. She models respectful interaction with students and they are pretty respectful of others.

Ashley  
Monday, 3/23/11  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Observation 2

This language arts period lasted for approximately an hour.

12:00-12:10

The lesson started with grammar – present, past, and future tense verbs. It lasted approximately 10 minutes with students do a workbook page. Adele circulated to work with students having difficulties.

12:10-12:34

I observed a whole group lesson by the classroom teacher. It was an introduction to functional language – direct instruction. She started by giving examples of functional text saying they might include steps or directions, but they are always nonfiction. Then she did a verbal brainstorm with the students asking them where they might find this and to identify types of functional text. Students mentioned textbooks, reading books, recipes, lists, calendars, and others. Then she showed a picture of a recipe for apple crisp. She said, “I want to serve this for dinner tonight. What do I need to do?” Students suggested buying materials and making a list, getting a recipe, asking a chef for idea, and looking in a cookbook.

Using a recipe as the example, the teacher identified parts of the recipe to include, headings, bulleted information, and quantities. Many of the children were not engaged in the lesson. Though the recipe was interesting, the lesson was too long and was not interactive at all.

12:40-12:55

The class broke up into reading groups. We left the classroom and went to another one that wasn't being used. The struggling readers consisted of six students: two girls and four boys. A piece of functional text was used for this guided reading group - a handout titled "President's Day All Day Skate."

In reviewing the flyer, students used a handout titled "Notice the Page" to ensure that they'd carefully noticed what was in the flyer. These questions included:

1. What kind of text am I reading?
2. What is the title of the text?
3. What do the pictures show?
4. Are there any headings? If so, what are they?
5. Are there any bullets? If so, what headings are they under?
6. Are there any numbers listed? If so, what headings are they under?
7. Are there any underlined words?

Each student read a question aloud and answered the question. There was confusion because when students were noticing the pages, the flyer was formatted differently than what they'd been taught. The title was on two lines so the girl assigned to that question only mentioned the top line as the title. There were no headings or bullets, but since the flyer had bolded information and some numbers, some students were confused. Adele retaught what headings and bulleted numbers were and this seemed to clear up the confusion. Adele asked students many questions as they were noticing the page and the students needed some help answering them. Particularly, there were many unconventional abbreviations in the flier that needed explanation. For instance, *adm.* was used as the abbreviation for admission and *reg.* was the abbreviation for regular. Those words were identified and discussed during this portion of the lesson.

After they finished this task, the students began to answer the SOL formatted questions about the flier. Students read question #1 to themselves, underlined the text to

justify their answers, and then the group discussed the questions. The other two questions were done in the group.

Three of the students were off-task and not engaged in the lesson. They were distracted and had to be redirected multiple times. At the end of the lesson, A. chastised them for their behavior and lack of concentration – kindly but firmly

## Appendix B

### Reading Comprehension Instruction Interview Guides 1 & 2

1. What is reading comprehension?
2. How would you define an effective teacher of reading comprehension?
3. Describe practices that students use to help them comprehend reading.
4. How would you describe a reader who is struggling to comprehend text?
5. How do teachers help struggling students to improve reading comprehension?
6. What are the effective practices that you use during instruction to help struggling readers to comprehend text?
7. Why have you chosen these particular practices for use during instruction?
8. How do you decide which practices to use while instructing struggling readers?
9. Do you use different practices at different times? Please explain.
10. Do you use different practices for different purposes? Please explain.
11. Do you use different practices with different students? Please explain.

## Reading Comprehension Instruction Interview Guide 2

1. How does formative assessment inform your reading comprehension teaching practices?
2. To what extent can teachers impact reading comprehension?
3. How does instructional reading level factor into your reading comprehension instruction?
4. To what extent does flexibility factor into your reading comprehension instruction?
5. Why did you choose to do literature circles with this group? How will this help with comprehension for your students?
6. How do you go about choosing books or reading materials for your group? Is it based on reading level, content, interest, or what exactly?
7. To what extent does discussion affect reading comprehension

## Appendix C

### Sample Interviews

#### **Ashley**

Setting – This interview took place in A's office.. It was a private area where both parties could speak freely. There were no distractions. We introduced ourselves to each other. I gave her a copy of the consent form. She read it, and I asked if she needed any clarifications. She didn't have any questions and signed it. I told her I would be asking her a series of questions regarding reading comprehension instruction and encouraged her to answer them as openly and honestly as possible. She didn't appear to be nervous at all.

Interviewer – L

Interviewee - A

**L: When I say reading comprehension to you what does that mean to you?**

A: To me reading comprehension is not just saying words but really being able to understand what you read to get something out of the reading to be able to apply it or at least to understand it. I mean there's a lot of children over the years who are very good at saying words they can read nicely and maybe read fluently they have no idea what they're reading. So reading comprehension is really being able to understand what you read is what I think.

**L: So what I'm hearing from you is that understanding and maybe then further on application?**

A: Yes, depending on the level of the children. The children that I work with if I could get them to really understand you know what they're reading and be able to discuss it but then the ones that are maybe higher thinking not only should they be able to understand it they should be able to apply it to something else or create something or to really have a deep discussion on it. But I don't really work with that many children like that.

**L: Who do you work with?**

A: I work with umm, it's totally, my role has changed over the years, whether it's good or bad, and I say it's bad we are very data driven. We are driven to get the third, fourth, and fifth graders to pass the SOL tests. I used to work with kindergarten, first, and second grade now I'm totally pulled for third, fourth, and fifth grade. Liz and I go into the third grade classes four days a week and then when we do guided reading. We take the medium well she told me she read this thing that it's no longer called the low group it's call the developing group, we take the developing group for one guided reading session and we take the middle group for the same thing. That's what I do for third grade. For fourth and fifth grade I do the same thing. I work...for language arts in third grade we're in there the whole time. But like for fourth grade we have an hour. So the first half an hour it might be whole group but I know which children need help staying on task or need help understanding. Then I pull a group out of there. So I still basically work with the children who have been designated as focus students because of past performance either on the benchmark tests or the SOL test or just normal tests, that they just need extra help. And basically I'm doing the same skill. We have pacing guides and they're certain skills they're supposed to do every



week. I do work with that skill but in the context of something not their book but in the context of something else. So basically I do work with the more struggling readers.

**L: Okay, so when you say that you follow the pacing guide with skills but you don't use the book, is your lesson a reinforcement of the skill?**

A: Yes, it's reinforcement of a skill it may be spiraling back on a skill that... We do now, we have something called professional learning communities. We meet as grade levels and we actually look at the data from the benchmark scores and we see what children have the most trouble with, the skill, so we create common lesson plans where everybody will do the same lesson plan and we create them, not saying we create them from scratch we get maybe the stories or passages from someplace and we create what we need to create for that skill and then we have a common assessment at the end of the week. What was your question, I forgot what we were talking about.

**L: I was asking about reinforcement.**

A: Yeah, but that's how we reinforce. We may be going back to a skill that they had trouble with before. But I'm basically reinforcing. I'm just giving them more practice in a smaller group at a slower pace sometimes at a level of passage that's a little bit lower than the grade level. I'm trying to get them to understand the comprehension part, just to see what that skill is about whether it's drawing conclusion or whatever. We also have Hampton City Schools has something called red packets.

**L: Red Packets?**

A: Well only because they ended up being in red folders. Now with Prometheum boards it is actually a lot more fun. It's actually, they tell you exactly, these have been around for a few years, how to start what the first lesson is like for drawing conclusions you get a funnel, trail mix marshmallows, pretzels and show how when you put all these things together and they come out just like your brain and reading. Sometimes I use that you know, I used to do, in years past, I didn't create these. I used to go into the classes in whole group and present them but now I really don't because I spend the majority of the time with the groups.

**L: Do you work with fifth graders also?**

A: I do. I do the same thing with fifth grade. Now fifth grades a little different. I work with third, fourth, and fifth. Fifth grade she was our first nationally board certified teacher from this school and she's an excellent teacher. She does not necessarily follow the pacing guide, we're getting better at following the pacing guides for the skills. She doesn't use Scott Foresman she uses literature circles. And they do a novel every, which I love working with novels, nine weeks and what I used to do is I had one the centers for that novel and I would create activities that went along with that novel that also went along with the comprehension skills. Then after these benchmark tests when we saw what the kids were really weak in, we decided that I would have my center would not really deal with the novel it would deal with the skill and the children would, actually we made interactive notebooks (I don't have one here) we'd get passages and stuff that they could read and then would go along with the skill that we were working on that week and they would keep on pasting it in their notebooks and they'd make a table of contents. But that just changed the last nine weeks. We were finding that even though everybody was coming through my center for that

comprehension skill, whatever it was for that week, even though it was in conjunction with the novel I would pull things from the novel to teach that skill that was not good for the kids who were the developing readers. They needed more reinforcement with... And once again it's still teaching them to read a passage, look at the question, annotate the question go back and find the answer. I don't say that I don't necessarily agree with all of that. But it's very data driven and that's exactly what they want us to do. They want us to teach these children to take apart a question, if it says paragraph two we teach them to go back to paragraph two and box it in and find the information, it's very... well we have this philosophy. We say it doesn't matter if the kids knows how to read or enjoys reading. That doesn't matter anymore as long as they can pass the test. And I feel bad telling you that. It's like we are bound to do certain things whether we agree with them or not.

**L: If you had the latitude to do what you thought needed to be done how would your instruction be different?**

A: It would be, I would do more reading. We went to this wonderful workshop. Do you know \_\_\_? We went to a full day workshop with this (shows folder to me) and the first part was word study but the last part was comprehension. She has a list of 78 pages of books, picture books, that you can teach all of these skills like ummm... let's see what was the summarizing. We took a book like *Cowboy Camp* and you cut these up and you stop it every so often and you ask the children, "Now which one of these would be the summary of that part and they paste those and two of these are details and they write. It's just a wonderful way. Now we are using that with our third grade and we explained it to some of the teachers. That's what I would do. I would do that all of the time. And I use the 78 pages of basically picture books and she has them classified as to what skill they can use with that: summarizing, inferring, fact and opinion. That's the way I would do it. I mean I think we used to be we had AR in this school which the kids loved. I had parents tell me that oh I'm so glad we have them because it's really turned my daughter on to reading. Now she can't stop reading but the powers to be didn't like it because the 10 questions, you'd read a story and then there'd be 10 questions, it was basically recall. They said the only way we could do AR from now on is if you let them have the book and go back and find the answer. Well then you have a lot of kids that are just doing it because we have little prizes that would just do it. They would never read the book. You want that to be a motivator to read. And now we don't do for all the years we had it in the school, for 6 years, we had a bulletin board with stars, the kids loved it we'd give them little prizes, we'd have signs outside the door, we're not having it any more. We're a Title 1 school this year and they don't believe in AR. Which it doesn't have to be AR, it could be Drop Everything and Read it can be something we don't really some people see the benefits of just reading that can especially getting the kids hooked on reading and then improve the reading with practice. There's a lot that I would do, that I have done in the past, but I've seen it change, I've seen the middle school change. We had, one year where every teacher, every language arts teacher and me in the grade level would do a novel every nine weeks. They would do it with their children and I would do it with mine because they're a little bit lower achieving. And then we at the end of the year the children would have read four novels. We didn't just read them, we worked with them, we created things, we wrote, but there were people in the school system that

just saw that as reading books, how could we possibly help them to pass these tests reading books so it was gone by the wayside. So I've seen reading, I get very disgruntled and disappointed but it's my job right now so you know it's not good. It's really not good.

**L: So how would you define an effective teacher of reading of reading comprehension?**

A: Well, I would do what I told you. I think it should be done in the context of reading, ummm, I like those graphic organizers and working with that. I really like the small guided reading groups. I think that really works. It's really not all children are at the same level. We love working with these two third grade teachers because they have one group of definitely high achieving and all the stuff, they have more time where they're in centers and will actually be done independently. What the two teachers have done is that they've gotten chapter books and the medium and high groups do the chapter books and they have things they have to create or fill in more things that are more enrichment activities. But the middle group goes to that and it comes to me and the lower group goes to the teacher and to me but we work more on easier stories and we try to get them... really if it's comprehension, we want them to understand what they're reading. So that's still where it is. But I like that we can you know not everybody's in the same mold. There's others that need more and there's others that need less. I mean direct instruction. But I still like it in the context, I love when we teach the novels, I love these ideas of picture books. I really think you can do so much of that stuff through actual literature.

**L: So an effective reading comprehension teacher would use practices in the context of reading?**

A: Yes

**L: You're a proponent of small group guided reading?**

A: I am. I am because you do... the way the Hampton City School's reading model is set up the first day is all whole group. You can introduce the spelling words, you can introduce the story, you can introduce the grammar we do so much now with the Prometheum Board where the kid can actually come up and drag in. They love that that's been a great thing. And then after, but you lose some kids in whole groups so you really want them to focus on whatever you're working on it really doesn't have to be done in smaller groups. We have some teachers that don't really like to do that. They feel more comfortable teaching a whole group but I know that you do lose a lot of kids in a whole group. You can just tell by looking at them that you've lost them.

**L: So the small group guided reading allows you to differentiate.**

A: Yes, to differentiate and to also make sure the children even the ones who can lose their focus easier, I've found over the years in the small group you can really get...they'll say this one doesn't do this in class, and I say, well now I don't notice any behavior problems and he's actually the highest one in my group. But I really think that child can get more in a small group. The ones that have the problem focusing, it really helps.

**L: And the guided reading that you do is done in the classroom?**

A: In the classroom. I used to have, there's so many people in this school we're stretched to the point of no return. I had my own classroom. This is the first year we've had two reading teachers, but that's because we're Title 1 now. I did go into

classrooms last year but I also had the opportunity to pull children out and I always pulled out the k and first. I always pulled them out and we would do the same thing. I would see what they were working on. It was more phonics. There were times I could pull out third, fourth and fifth graders. But my room was also used every morning. But now Title 1 insists that you go into the classroom - which it works. I do have a table in there, I brought my cart and file with my stuff so I have everything I would need. It works. People might think it's noisy, but it's really not. You have the one teacher back there with one group, I'm here with one group, and you have the independent group, they have one center where they work independently and they work in the center. But it's not loud loud, it's workable.

**L: This may seem a little bit redundant to you. Describe practices that students use to help them comprehend reading?**

A: Okay. Ummm...well the things that they like the best, are the things that they can still manipulate like they have something called the 10 most important sentences where they have to cut them up and put them in sequential order. I think anything that you can do like when you put things in the interactive notebook. They love to do that because they're cutting and pasting while they're doing that. Anything you can do they love games. They love all kinds of comprehension games. They actually do like, even though you're getting to go back into the passage and underline, they like using markers, they like anything that they can do that they do something, they manipulate. Anything like that that you can do, they love.

**L: And umm, when they're doing these things, is it your thought that this is helping them to comprehend?**

A: Yes, hopefully. Hopefully. I used to play a lot more board games when I had my own room and I had children five days a week, you know, that's what we would do. And I would always you know sometimes they had to read the cards out loud, sometimes they could read them silently if they missed it we would make sure they understood why they missed it. So hopefully yeah, it's still more practice.

**L: How would you describe a reader who is struggling to comprehend text?**

A: A reader who's struggling to comprehend text, they can read a passage and they might be able to read it well, most of the time if they're a struggling reader, not only do they not understand what they read, they also have a hard struggle decoding the words. But I believe they spend so much time decoding that they can't comprehend. But you could ask them a direct question of something that is right there, they've only read one little paragraph. Well what did June give to Jane, I said go back and look, I said you can look at the words to find June and Jane and they just can't do it. That would be the very low. There not all most of them are better than that. Most of them the more practice, they can... but and you'd say alright very short paragraph and you'd say, "Tell me what you just read." And they couldn't but a lot of that could be third grade and not focusing and just reading words and stuff like that. I think if you read something. If you read passages to them that you think are very interesting to them, especially maybe about people and things that they know, maybe just a fiction story, the more they're interested in the story the more they'll understand it. I mean you can ask some questions, say it's on dinosaurs or spiders or something like that, things that they're really interested in they can. So I think a lot of it has to do with motivation. Now a lot of times we give them things to read, not so much during class, but on this

benchmark test and SOL test and I wouldn't like to read. I would be bored with some of that and they're only in third grade and it's so wrong. I think if they're motivated by what they're reading, if it's something they're interested in, I think they can understand more than you think. The ones that can't at all are probably the ones that we put up for child study, they're just something a blank stare, but you don't get many children like that.

**L: So if you were to describe a struggling reader would you say that in addition to comprehension there's a decoding problem?**

A: Ummm... most of the time yes, although you'd be surprised sometimes there's a terrible decoding problem but if you read it to them their listening comprehension is really good which means they really do understand or sometimes if they do something on the computer and they read the words or it's read to them they would understand so a lot of times because they have such a hard time decoding the words they have to lose so much comprehension because of that. Not always, sometimes you can read something to a child and they still don't comprehend. But like I said sometimes you don't know at that age whether it's a comprehension or a focus problem.

**L: So sometimes it can be a focusing problem, a motivational problem, or they may not be particularly interested.**

A: Yes or even a decoding. If he just you know if he struggles so much through one sentence, if he reads a paragraph you're going to forget what the beginning of the paragraph was, so it all depends on the child. It isn't always all of them but it's usually several of those.

**L: How do teachers help struggling students to improve reading comprehension?**

A: Well, they come to the RS ummm we have tutoring during the day, we have, because we are a school that has not met AYP for two years we have tutoring companies that come to us. Parents can get tutoring for free, but they have to have free or reduced lunch. We take a group of third graders, we have a program called Unique Reader, it an online program called Let's Go Learn, and they take a test and they get the assessment and they can go on. It supposedly takes them to the areas including comprehension, but also phonics and stuff like that. If you miss the sight words. We have a group of third graders that go on it three times a week. The ones that we feel are really, really struggling we try to do. They definitely come to me. They might be qualified for that after school tutoring we have tutoring once a week during the day during their resource period. But the ones who come to this, basically if they haven't passed the benchmark test chances are they're not passing anything else. And most of it is reading problems.

**L: So when they come to you, what specifically do you do with them?**

A: I just do like I told you we work we have stories and questions that go with that story or activities. Like when we did sequencing they had to read the story, cut out these different boxes, and try to paste it in the order. But we go back to the story and underline what happened first, what happened second and they like that manipulative stuff. But I would basically work with the skills the other children are working with but just in shorter passages and try to do things that are more motivating and they do love putting it in that notebook because they can cut and paste. It's basically the same things, it's just different materials, you try to make them as motivating as possible.

We only have a 15 minute block. The way they've done in third grade, which everything is great the way they do it, but in order to get the groups in three days a week, because Monday is whole group and Friday is assessment we have 15 minute periods. You can't get much done so like one passage and the activities that go with it, pasting in the book I need two days to do that. I'm never going to get it done in one day so it's just not enough time. And I also with that group in third grade, besides doing those activities with the passages, when they do their seatwork they do it with me. So whatever the activity is sometimes we do it actually together, sometimes they do it by themselves but I'm there to see it. Sometimes that's a comprehension activity and sometimes it's a phonics activity. Like they were having trouble with functional text so the whole third grade made this common lesson plan. We actually took real text like grocery ads or Busch Gardens brochures and we make questions for them. The children did that in one of their centers independently. Well I did that with them with the lowest group so they do get me two times every day. Once as a regular guided group and once to work with them on their seatwork. Because we were finding if we gave them things they really had a hard time doing it or maybe weren't doing it right. So it's better if they do it with me.

**L: How many are in a group?**

A: No more than six. It can be from four to six. I've actually had as low as three. Because we've moved a few around. A couple of the ESL children that used to go out to the two ESL teachers they are functioning at a higher level and they're coming in with me to do those activities too.

**L: What do you see as the effective practices that you use during reading comprehension instruction to help struggling readers?**

A: Everything we do in the third grade. That's my favorite. Like I say coming to me, going to the teacher, coming to me when they do their seatwork, being in the room, I can sit next to them and make sure they're focused on the page. Really focusing even if it's a whole group activity, focusing on them to make sure they stay on task. Everything we do.

**L: So that small group setup?**

A: Yes. I think it's very important. And the fact that they come to me and their teacher. Every other group, no two of the groups come to me and the teacher - the middle and the low. And the higher group would actually have two activities that they do independently. So the fact that.

**L: So they actually get more reading time.**

A: Yes, they actually get the teacher, they get me, and that lowest group gets me again - where we still do a guided activity but it wouldn't always be reading, but sometimes it is. It's reading and questions. Now when they go to her, they get, they have leveled readers. So they do read the one day, they would read the leveled reader. They would read level a which is the lowest. They would do that and the next day they would do activities with it and with that leveled reader. I do not do the leveled reader she does it with them, but I do that interactive notebook which still always has some sort of short passage. And we were finding also that the children were having the most difficulty with nonfiction text so we're trying now that we've made these common lesson plans and common assessments trying to focus more on nonfiction. Because they really are, they're struggling with all comprehension of nonfiction. And

the functional text we've worked on twice because that's kicking their butts too because when it's a recipe or directions they do not see that as the same sort of text as paragraphs whether that be fiction or nonfiction, they're really struggling with that. And that's like a life skill, too. What they do in third grade with the Prometheus Board with the functional text, they work with it. They created recipes and made things with functional text. I can't say enough, if I could work with third grade all day long I would love it. I don't know what it is, they just, they're creative, they used to come from, one of them was k and 2 and one was first so maybe just coming from that lower to this it brings some of the same hands-on activities but at a higher level. Not so much, not workbooks, I think some of the teachers are still stuck with the workbooks and the workbook pages, which is still, I'm not saying they're not beneficial but they're not as motivating or as intriguing or actually as effective as some of the other things. So...

**L: So how do you decide which practices you're going to use when you're instructing?**

A: Probably by the group. I try to do things that are a little more interactive, even if it's cutting and pasting like I said just because I still think they're getting the comprehension out of the article or the passage but they're working with it, manipulating it. I try to do as much of that, I try not to do with the lower level readers just reading and answering questions or anything like that. I do still do that, we still go back, because if we don't practice going back into the passage, and underlining, and finding the information that led you to that answer, I really don't know how. Some of them are still not going to pass the benchmark and the SOL anyway, some of what we do has to be that. Because if they don't pass it, it's really a shame because when these teachers from the first grade came to the third grade the words strategies was thrown out to the kids the first day. I mean practically the first day of school. I'm not saying I agree with any of that but because everything is so data driven and focusing on passing the test, I don't know if it's that way in all school systems but it is certainly that way here. I would hope, you hear so much about Poquoson schools and they do so well and WJCC and they do so well, there's got to be better ways to do what can be done, but it's also you are bound by what people tell you you need to do.

**L: Do you use different practices at different times?**

A: Ummm...Yes. It's been a while since I've actually done my reading groups but I try to vary it. I try to, there are times that I have, they were actually ESL readers and I, there are times that we just read, and we do, we really do a guided reading with something but it's done orally because I might have to go back and find something. I have ESL take home readers that go along with, I use it a lot in 4th grade, that go along with the content of the story they're reading that week. So I feel like we're reinforcing a story but it's a little more motivating and it's small but it goes along with their story and I can still work with it like that. So I do that a lot in the fourth grade. In the third grade I do the interactive notebooks. In the fifth grade I kind of do what the teacher wants me to do. She's doing novels so there's that is my group right there is to work with the skill that they're working with, not with the novels so I do vary but a lot of times it's what the teacher would like me to do with that.

**L: So...you do try to vary it. Sometimes you read, sometimes you read orally, you want to make sure it's motivating the kids and depending on what the grade level feels that their particular needs are you try to honor those needs.**

A: Yes, I do, I do. The only thing I'm not doing this year that I have done in the past because the groups are well in third grade the time is only 15 minutes and the constraints on , I only in fourth grade I have groups 2 days a week, when I had my children every day, the only thing I'm not doing anymore is comprehension board games. I really do think they loved those, they really did. They like, I still try to do plays if I can find something that they can, even when I was in middle school and they were really struggling readers and they were really behind, but they did love to do plays.

**L: Do you use different practices for different purposes?**

A: Yeah, ummm, with sequencing there will be more moving around. Ummm....I'm trying to think...different practices for different purposes...when I was working with fifth grade in the novels, I definitely had different practices because we were actually working with a novel. I teach writing sometimes, you don't want that. Ummm....I basically have maybe per grade level what I've been doing. Like I told you the interactive notebook, the more guided reading or orally for fourth grade, and this new stuff. I think I had more before but I'm under more constraints time wise and space wise to be in rooms.

**L: Do you use different practices with different students?**

A: Probably not individual students. There might be students that I need to give a little more guidance to or reinforce more but because I work with groups, not one on one I'd say the practice is probably that same with the whole group, but I do know that students that might need, sometimes I don't have them do as many, maybe just a couple of questions with them, or some of them are more independent, I say you two can finish that and I'm going to work over here with Johnny to see if we can figure out this one here. So, kind of depends on the circumstance. I'm a lot with, when I do it, I'm there and I can tell if I need to, you know, if that particular activity we're doing somebody is lost so it kind of works with whatever is happening, if I see the need for it.

**L: Your practice is pretty much the same for the group, but then on a case by case basis if you see that a student is struggling then you would address that while two others who might be more able to work independently.**

A: Even though they're in, you find that you have a developing group, children in that group can have a leader and one you can go to that you know. But you have some that no matter what you do, they're struggling with that, so I'd say you finish these and I'm going to work with KiKi because she's having trouble. So even in the lower group you always have kids that are so different. Different levels.

**L: What kind of assessments do you use to assess the children's strengths and weaknesses?**

A: I don't give any grades for that. What we do is just guided reading. But we have that the children that we see as the struggling ones are the ones. all the ESL children take that Let's Go Learn assessment and we do it in the fall and the spring. And then they're on that Unique Reader although I'm not real fond of that assessment. We use it exclusively in the second grade for the children who didn't do well on the PALS and



at the end of the year I still don't see them improving that much on the PALs. But what they basically use are the benchmark tests. That's what they gauge as how they're doing and then the SOL tests and the tests that the teacher's have, like all the stuff that we worked on that we, that story the skills that will all be assessed as a whole group on Fridays. That's basically what we do. I don't do anything specifically except the Let's Go Learn.

**L: My question is more, I didn't work it correctly. At the beginning of the year, when the grade level is trying to make decisions about the groups, what kinds of assessments are used to group children.**

A: In the third grade we still use the PALS. They still are allowed to take the PALS in the third grade. And I don't, what I look at mostly is how they do on their instructional reading level. I look at that because some of the children might not do well on the phonics part but still can understand because they're reading it, they can still do well reading it. They also give a pre, they have it with their Scott-Forseman, the readers series that they have. The fourth, fifth and third all give a pretest of the skills they should be able to do in reading at the beginning of the year and that's how plus the PALs in third grade but the other grades don't have the PALs but that's how they do it. And the fourth and fifth also go by how the child did the year before on the SOLs. They wouldn't have that in third grade. So that's basically, and it's pretty much true to form.

**L: So fourth and fifth is based on the Scott-Forseman?**

A: Yeah the pretest. and the SOL test from the year before. And the third grade would be they still have their pretest or whatever they want to call it but they also go by the PALs test because they still take it. And then the third grade the only children that need to retake the PALs in the Spring are the ones that didn't make the benchmark in the Fall.

**L: So we've gone through everything that I had on my interview guide. What I'll do is I'll go home and over the next few days I'll transcribe this and then I'll consolidate it into a summary and I'll send the summary to you to make sure that it's an accurate reflection of what you thought and we'll go from there.**

### Connie

Setting – This interview took place in C's office which is located in a modular unit at the back of the school. We were completely alone during the interview and there were no distractions. We introduced ourselves to each other. I gave her a copy of the consent form. She read it, and I asked if she needed any clarifications. She didn't have any questions and signed it. I told her I would be asking her a series of questions regarding reading comprehension instruction and encouraged her to answer them as openly and honestly as possible. She didn't appear to be nervous at all.

Interviewer – L

Interviewee - C

Background - Reading Specialist - 11 years bachelors early childhood education, K - 1 year, stayed home. private preschool and K - 4 years. 1st grade - 12 years loved it enjoyed teaching reading and the different levels. loves the light bulb moments.

2nd grade - 2 years

Reading's change a lot in that time. first - immersed into whole language then a shift to phonics - decoding skills are essential whether through formal lessons or word study. *Words Their Way*. Doing that for 10 years. We got on at the beginning. Big shift to strategy instruction has come about in the last 10 years and the data and DRAs on everybody. Better evaluation instruments.

NBCT - I was at one of those points. I needed a change. I looked at the literacy PhD from ODU and then thought about national boards. Ten years to retirement so national board was better way to go. It was a challenge - only 1 in the beach at that time. Can you do it. I like the idea at the reflective look at my teaching. It was truly reflective. It was quite an experience to get it done. I thought it was very worthwhile. Yes, it was. I did really help me go to another level of being student-centered even though I already was. It was an excellent professional development activity. It reemphasized the differences between students, we have to figure out what works for the child. How can I figure out what he needs and to be successful?

**L: What does reading comprehension mean to you?**

C: Basically that the child gains knowledge, information, pleasure, amusement, anything from written text. That they're able to not only decode the words, but also understand the subtlety of the language: the puns, the sarcasm. Any of that. I think it also means the child, the reader doesn't have to be a child, is interacting with the text in the sense that they feel, they question, they wonder about things that are happening in the text. Ummm, I think it's like a total absorption of the child with what's going on in the book.

**L: So it's an interaction between the child and the book. And that interaction has to go much deeper than just decoding text?**

C: Yes, I think they can read words and maybe not get, they may understand the words themselves but might not really get what the author meant by using those words. They don't necessarily put it together. And they may not, I think they have to learn to question text or question things happening in the text and bring in things like why did the author use those words or say that or say it that way. Instead of another way. And I think it's important that they not only comprehend the text but begin to really look at the writer's craft and when there are particularly descriptive passages or rich language, I think the teacher often needs to point that out until they get to the

point where they see it themselves which I think they do readily when they have a teacher who can point it out to them. And help them to see the beauty of it. The beauty, the language, the power of the words, especially when they're using more specific terms: nouns, verbs, adjective and adverbs that really explain. And I think what's missing in our schools and I think it has to do with the emphasis on the guided reading is a real development of a love for literacy itself. The texts that are used often for those guided reading lessons to me are very low, many of them are very very short little books that are probably written specifically for that purpose. But I think if we don't let our children get into lengthier text and quality literature at an early age, say at least by third grade or third grade level, once they can decode, once they can do the reading itself, I think we have to move them into the good pieces of literature, the chapter books, the classics. And help them develop a love for reading itself. You know, a lot of people are not pleasure readers anymore. I think we're killing that when we don't let them go that way. And I certainly think that worksheets and skill and drill things, that's just totally out there. I mean just totally just kills the kid. I think you can teach or strategy instruction has been overdone too. If you think about it, up until 10-12 years ago, we didn't really talk about strategy instruction or reading comprehension strategies. Now, did good readers not use strategies? Of course, they did. They just didn't have a name for them. They hadn't specifically been taught - oh, you're inferring there because you took what's in the book and what you already knew and you put it together and came up with that. Or when your questioning and you're wondering what's happening next, I don't think it was as out there as it got to be and I think it's necessary to identify strategies and help children know when they're using them but I don't think that's the be all and end all for reading because our good readers are doing it anyway, whether we told them what it's called or not. They're doing it, they wouldn't be reading and comprehending and keeping on going with reading and loving reading if they weren't doing those strategies, if they weren't able to apply them. So I think we have to be careful that we just don't teach strategies and teach when the kids get it. I think we have to move on and so I think that's probably...I probably sound really cynical but I think we've we can kill the joy of reading by doing so much of what we think we have to do in schools. I think there are better ways to do it.

**L: You said that good readers have those strategies already internally so we don't need to overkill. What about struggling readers?**

C: I think they have to be helped with those. Yes, they need help. I think they have to know that you can take what you already know about this and look at what's here in the text and even with the younger one's I'll say, "If I have an umbrella with me, what would you assume?" And they'll say, "Well it's raining, or it's going to rain and you want to be prepared." How do you know that? Well, you know that an umbrella means rain so in a book if the character's got an umbrella you're going to make the assumption, "Oh it might be raining or it's going to rain. And we call that inferring. You're using what you know with what's in the text and you're bringing it together to make an assumption." So I think we have to point those out to them. We have to talk to them and ask them, "Well what do you think will happen next?" What could happen next based on what you already know. We help them predict because readers, good readers, do that too automatically as they finish reading a part they think about

what's going to come next. I wonder what's going to happen? I wonder if she's going to do what I think she's going to do. so I think we have to identify those strategies for them and help them learn which ones they seem to use readily. A lot of children are visual. They say it's just like a TV show playing in my mind or a movie. I feel like I'm there. I can see it. So you're a strong visualizer; that's a good trait to have. So I think we have to teach it but I think we can do it in a pleasurable way and maybe not even as directed as what we typically think we have to do. Ummm, I think teacher read alouds should be done through elementary school and I think they offer great opportunities for sort of even spur of the moment conversations about something with the students. And discussions, I think you need discussions. We use the Junior Great Books. We've been using that here for 10 years. It's not intended for gifted children but it works very well for them because it does involve higher level thinking where most of these children want to go anyway. But I have a friend whose a reading specialist at a Title 1 school and started using the JGB last year with some fifth graders who had failed the SOLs for two years in reading. And she just felt like she had to do something different. So she just took the JGBs and started using it with them. All of them passed the SOLs and not only that they loved the great books and they loved the whole discussion format. And of course the GB are read aloud anyway so they are good for a struggling reader because they don't have to access the text on their own. And yet the content, the material, and the thinking and the ideas involved are at a higher level and many of these children who aren't great readers can still think and discuss so it really opened the door for them. They got so interested in literature that their reading improved. And their whole attitude improved which is probably the biggest thing right there. They no longer dreaded coming to school and hated reading. Now they were enthused. And, of course, the teacher was very positive and motivating and encouraging which helped, but now that building is doing it in third, fourth, and fifth grades. And they are hoping that their data supports what they've done. But their loving it, the teacher's are loving it, the principal's on board, buying new books and material. They feel like it's and it's definitely 21st Century skills involved. They've got effective communicators and collaborators and you've got to have people who can talk about things. I always tell my children we need to discuss it before you write anything because when you write what are you doing? You're putting down your ideas. They'll say that they're putting down what I think and I say well what happens if we discuss first? And then they'll say well I hear everybody else's ideas too and sometimes I've never thought of it that way. So I say, "Well we'll discuss first and then when you write you can have the benefit of not only of what you've reading and think but what you've heard others say as well. You get much richer writing if it follows discussion.

**L: So it sounds to me like you're saying comprehension is more than just what takes place between the child and the text, it's also what takes place between the teacher and the child and the other students.**

C: Yes, you get. If you can do it in a group setting, even if you're only round robin reading, but I mean you're all in the same text and then you come together to discuss it, ummm, in the fourth and fifth grade novel study groups they mark their text with sticky notes. I wish they could have a book that they could just underline like I do with my book. They mark, I tell them anything that strikes you. If it's a question you

have if it's a word you either don't know or think sounds neat or you're curious about, whatever, if it's a character's actions or motive or whatever, just figurative language beautiful language. Put a sticky there right on the spot and when we discuss we can look at those things. I have found that the children many of them, can come up with excellent discussion questions for the group that are higher level, that are interpretive so that there's not a right or wrong answer. That's primarily the type of questions we use for any graded work, written graded work. As long as it fits within the context of the story anything goes basically. There's no right or wrong. It's just, I want to see your thoughts and what you're thinking or what the book made you think. And in fact some of it gets very profound. So, ummm, yes it can be more than the interaction between the reader and the text, I can become a wider circle. And even pulling in other texts with similar themes or issues also really can be interesting.

**L: An extension of the comprehension?**

C: Yea.

**L: So how would you define an effective teacher of reading comprehension?**

C: Ummm, I think an effective teacher of reading comprehension is one whose an effective teacher of reading in a sense that not the formal up in front of the class teaching, but the facilitating of reading, the guiding of reading in the sense that the children become excited and engaged, truly engaged in the text. I think if they enjoy reading and if they want to read then the comprehension follows. As long as they master basic reading, basic decoding, the comprehension will come with that guidance. But I think it's key that they enjoy the process and if they don't enjoy reading you can talk about comprehension strategies but, and they may be able to recite them back to you but it doesn't mean that they're using them because if they don't enjoy reading and they're not reading they're not comprehending anything.

**L: So the teacher acts as the facilitator and the guide and helps them to enjoy reading, how?**

C: Ummm, I think the teacher's enthusiasm, interest in the text or the material or the content of it. I think all of that is critical and I think the teacher does that in the way that questions are structured and the discussion is held. A lot of children think they won't like historical fiction. In the age of fantasy that's what they're all interested in or time warp things you know the science fiction. But we begin with historical fiction in fourth grade with Jamestown novels. I think if you help them relate it to their own life, you need to have text the involves young protagonists that they can at least identify with. And help them relate it to their own experiences, I think the crossover between well look what this child is facing in this book and there just a year or two older than you are. Think about what you have to face in life. Your daily routine. Think about the differences. Think about how they're alike. But I think it's important to give them time for reading in school, in class because I think there's so many demands on their time outside of the school day. So many activities they can be involved in and then they have so many distracters like TV, computers, and video games. They're taken from reading. They have so many different kinds of things that can occupy their time other than reading whereas I think when I grew up we couldn't go outside, we were reading. Maybe playing games with your siblings, TV was limited severely, we didn't have the choices, you know TVs with a hundred and some channels, we had three. So I do think they have a lot of things pulling at their time

and I try to give my students plenty of time in class to read so that they can get it done and it's not hovering over their head and then it becomes nerve-wracking and then they don't want to do it. It's a stressor. So if we can do our reading in class or most of it, then that's what we need to do. It's just not going to happen otherwise. And, of course, I think an environment that conducive to reading with carpet pillows, couches, whatever where they can get comfortable and I always like having the music on, classical music that is just soothing and calming. And they, you could hear a pin drop because they're all engaged.

**L: How would you describe a reader who's struggling to comprehend?**

C: I think when you discover someone who's obviously through questioning or if they have any kind of organizing problems or they're not getting. For example, if you're asking them to do a quick summary of the chapter, or part, and you see that what they've put down may have occurred but it's not really the main point you can tell right away there's a problem here if that's truly what they think the chapter was about and it's just one detail from the chapter then you know they're not getting main idea. We need to work on that. I think talking with them, of course, is another way. If you've finished reading or you in a group and you say, "So what happened to him?" And they can't respond with what did occur than you know they might have read it but they didn't take it in. I think that's how you can tell that they're struggling. Obviously, if you listen in on a child and they're struggling to decode that you can find that that's a problem. And you might have to do some remediation. Also, if they're reading and come to a word maybe they don't know and they ask what it means and you say, "Well how is it, what do you think about it in context of what you've just read? What could it mean based on what you know?" And sometimes, of course, if they can make a pretty good guess, a reasonable guess based on the context then you certainly know they're comprehending, they just don't know this word, but if they made a guess that's approximate to it either in terms of the way it looks or because of the context then I think that shows whether they're getting it or not.

**L: Okay. So how do teachers help struggling readers?**

C: I think that it's important to keep a very positive and enthusiastic demeanor. I think if you are working with them and you find...First of all you need to know the student in terms of their interest because if you can tap into their areas of interest with their text it will be more engaging immediately for the child. And I think you help them see what they're doing well, you point that out as you're going along when they do make an attempt at something or stop to decode a word and sound it out, and get it, you point out that readers do that. Or when they go back and reread a few words or the sentence or whatever they need to do, you point out the strategies that they employ as they're doing them. And I haven't gotten too big into the whole fluency thing as far as practicing and practicing and rereading and rereading the same materials to develop the fluency. Probably because I don't work with really young children. That's more of an issue. But I just think if you help them enjoy the process of reading and laugh about what's going on, with younger ones, using the Amber Brown series, I'm trying to think of some of the chapter books they love, those who are about late 2nd grade or 3rd grade reader can read, then get them engaged where they have problems and incidents that the kids can understand and help them laugh about it and connect it to their own life. I had a sleepover and we made pancakes for

breakfast too. And help them realize that books are like real life. They're experiences that happen to people, real people, even if they're fiction, it could be true it could happen. And I think that if most children have that kind of support that they'll develop that love for reading and it will help them overcome the problems and issues they have with it as a reader. And I think they have to know and understand reading is like many other things. You get better at it by practice and practice is reading. So, you have to encourage that independent tie as well and I think it's important that they read at a level that they can competently read. I don't believe we tell little children they can't go beyond a certain level because first graders have to stay here. I think if they see a book that they're really interested in and you think it's too hard and difficult for them I think you let them try. Because often if they really want to read it, they're going to do what they need to understand it. So, if you can see they're frustrated I think you need to take them back and help them pick something that's not as hard, but if they are if they want a big chapter book because everyone else has one and they find one in a topic that they like then I then we have to let them try at least to read it or read it with them and help them with it.

**L: So knowing the student, maintaining a positive enthusiastic demeanor pointing out what they're doing well, the strategies they're using as they're using them, maybe they're not even aware that they're using them so that you reinforce the strengths that they have, help them to enjoy the process of reading, choose books that help them to connect to their personal lives, and just act as their support so that they can develop that love for reading. That's how you can help struggling readers.**

C: And I think if you have a group of them, if you're working with a small group as you're pointing out strengths you're also showing the others what they could be doing. You don't have to say, you're not doing this very well, but by saying, "Well you reread that so you could make sure you understood it or to get that word at the end that you didn't know, then I think it helps the others see. Oh, that's what I should be doing even if they aren't. But you're not telling them that they have to do it, it's subtle. Of course, you're going to have children with different strengths you can manage to praise just about all of the different strategies and everything else by just doing that and help them all see that. And even pointing out to them, "Well you know I can remember when reading a word like that would have been really difficult for you and now look at you. I can tell you're chunking those parts looking at each letter and that's what readers do you look at the chunk you know, and use the context, you're looking at the picture, or whatever. I think that to me is just that gentle guidance, not the direct teaching so much, as just that guidance as they go.

**L: What are the effective practices used to help struggling readers?**

C: I think that's probably in there. I think probably the biggest thing is the climate for reading and the attitude of the teacher. And, ummm,

**L: Can you talk a little bit more about the climate for reading?**

C: Well, I think it's important to let them do their reading in class in a group setting at school, to have a place where they can just get physically comfortable for one thing, but then it's the mental comfort too that if they have a question they feel they can ask it. And it's not going to be ridiculed, whether it's from another student or the teacher. And I think that the teacher can set the tone for the students so that they can be

supportive with each other without being demeaning. Oh you don't know that word, what's wrong with you. That's an easy word, you should know that. I think you just have to establish that we're all learning, we're all progressing and we all learn things at different rates. And we have the conversation that we all have things that we're better at than other things too. And we just keep moving from where we are, keep going up, even adults can improve in reading or in writing, There's always more we can do, so the important thing is to go from where we are and move forward not stagnate or regress. So...

**L: How do you decide what practices to use during reading comprehension instruction?**

C: I usually let the text guide what I want to include. We have the SOLs and we have our city objectives but I've found and it probably comes with age, that you can pretty well cover everything rather than trying to deliberately take one objective at a time and cover it with something. If you take your material, your reading material, you can find where all those objectives are going to come in. And with writing it's basically the same thing. You can incorporate persuasive writing if that's one of your grade level skills that listed, you can do that with your novels with a novel response a reading response. You can get them all worked in. So I look at the part of the text that we're reading and what is there that can be used so if it's similes and metaphors they've got some of that, we can talk about it at that point when we get to it. If it lends itself to predictions, which most novels, chapter books would because at the end of the chapter is always what happens next or questioning, why did he do that, would you have made that same choice, why or why not, I think you can do all of that readily with the text. So then you can just start, you need to keep track of the objectives just check them off as you address them. And you can always do quick rechecks with the kids, and do a treasure hunt with them and say okay today I want you to find an example of a simile in the chapter on this page or in this chapter. Do you see any sensory imagery there, where, what is it? You can constantly check back on those things just to make sure they're still in the forefront. The grammar - if there's dialect in there then you can talk about why it's written that way and why it isn't right in terms of proper grammar, but that it's effective for the time. So I think we can do a lot through the novels, the chapter books themselves. I think that's the guide; the text is the guide. Of course if there's an area that's total missing than you get it in the next piece of text. You make sure you get it. We might, I use a lot of picture books with 5th graders. And at first they're like, "What are you doing with a picture book?" And I say that a lot of picture books we think they're for little kids but when you look at this text no little child is going to be able to read that much text or that much on a page. And then I'll say, "And I think you'll find that the issues in some of these texts are much more mature and complex than a little child can handle. So let's just see what you think. I'll read the book and then I'll say that a little kid would never understand that it's about such and such. But those are excellent for bringing in little short min-lessons on something as well because it's quick, it's to the point, and it's usually a very vivid description of it because it's not a lengthy text. It's shorter.

**L: Do you use different practices at different times?**

C: Practices, meaning? What do you mean?

**L: You're defining your practices that you use in your classroom.**



C: Yes. I guess I use different practices at different times.

**L: So, give me some examples.**

C: You mean like the formats?

**L: You can start with that.**

C: We use independent reading, partner reading if you wish to read with a partner, group reading meaning a small group if you like to read aloud. Some children are very auditory. They like to hear themselves or they need to hear themselves in order to get it. Ummm, read aloud. I usually introduce a novel with a reading of the first chapter aloud. But they have the text and they can follow along if they wish, or they can choose to just listen. We have discussions, small groups and whole group. Mini-lessons if I notice that several people didn't get something perhaps in response to a question then I'll meet with them and talk about it. But it doesn't have to be the whole group. Sometimes in our text getting them to understand what someone else meant that's written there, they don't understand the analogy relationship that the author's using. So they're very literal I guess. So they see it, they take it at face value. So then I'll help them understand what if I "see the light" the author means become educated. Get some schooling. How would that effect what is written. Oh I get it - and then they can go on. But I think we have to help them see that sometimes writers write in that way. And I do think that's a higher level skill of course. Response choices are varied. I like for them to have choice in how they respond and what they're responding to. So they may have 3 options for a part of the book, a section of the book, and they choose which one they wish to do. And I also like them to have the choice in whether they like to do adjust the gist which is a one sentence summary of a chapter. But I'll let them choose whether they do that or write a personal response, a personal reflection. And I find that those are very concrete are going to do the summary, whereas those who can think on a higher level will take a personal reflection and write what they were thinking or they'll do an evaluative piece about something that occurred. So they take it to a little bit further level. I really think that even asking them to write a title for the chapter helps you see that, see whether they get the main idea and I had one student last year who used very few words. He cut right to the chase and I would tease him and say, "Boy, man of few words. I bet you could probably get to the point where you're writing one word to sum up this chapter." So he took that as a challenge and of course he did. Well that's sort of the ultimate synthesis if you can get it and it fits. It doesn't have to be the same thing I'm thinking, but it has to fit. It takes a lot of thought or even to a few words. Some of them have difficulty and I'll say, "What's the most important thing? What's the biggest idea?" And we'll post those sometimes I have them write them down and we'll put them on a chart once they've written it in their organizer so I know they've got their own idea. Then they can put it on a chart for the class and it's amazing how similar they are and yet there are some that are a little bit out, but not far off. They're all legit.

**L: Do you use different practices for different purposes?**

C: Certainly the responses could also be different.

**L: When you said you give them three options in their response choices what might those options be?**

C: I try to go with higher level things, but I don't want to totally ignore the more concrete learner. There's short answer questions - they are basically factual. But the

reason I pick the ones I do is that they're either important in terms of the content since it does support social studies, the novels, terms they need to know. So I pick them for that reason or because they have a key thing to do with the character. But then the back the first option is more concrete in terms of listing the jobs that she was doing at that time. But then to bring it to the child: if you could choose to do one with her, which one would it be and why? The next one is more interpretive because they haven't learned much yet about the Quakers and the abolitionists. Why would they do this. And the last one is more creative in the sense that they're writing a song or a poem. It gives them a different venue, and it varies from year to year what kinds of things they gravitate towards. One year they were writing spirituals and they were pretty good. They got it. I put page numbers because if I want them to know this, why wouldn't I tell them where it is, why make it a big hunt? They feel more secure when they can check it with a page and then they know it. So I think I'm all about enabling learning, not trying to put an impediment, I don't want assessments of any sort to impede progress. I use RAFTS a lot. I do it where it goes straight across. They don't pick and choose from different plots. It needs to be something that could be authentic with historical fiction.

**L: Do you use different practices for different students?**

C: Well I think you have to figure out what each child needs, wherever the struggle is. We accentuate the strengths but from the strengths you can tell where they need to go or if they got these it means they might not be getting these. So then we've got to work on those some.

**L: How do you do that?**

C: I think it's guidance, as you're reading you help them with those specific areas whether it's,

**L: How do you identify their areas?**

C: Informally, pretty much. I mean we have DRAs so I use those and the information that gives. You can see when they reach a work they don't know, what are they doing. Are they rereading to get the context, do they look at chunks. I use the information for that but I think a lot of it is just from sitting down and saying where are you right now in your book, would you read that aloud to me. And from what they turn in too from reading responses or written assignments. You can see what's lacking and go from there. I think it's pretty individualized. You can call groups together, small groups, but a lot of it is just helping the individual where they are.

**L: Can you describe some of the practices that students use to help them comprehend their reading?**

C: Reread either a segment or. I went back and reread that. Was it better the next time? Yes. Do you have any questions you need help with. I think they definitely reread. They ask questions or ask of each other. They'll ask me but they also ask each other. Ummm, if it's, if there are pictures in the text, I know they use those but not all of the texts have pictures. I think pretty much I see them doing all of the strategies. They'll even come and say, "Oh, I really want to go on to the next part. I want to find out what happens." You know that they're predicting or they're asking questions, they're engaged in that and

**L: What do you mean when you say strategies?**

C: Making connections, asking questions, predicting, wondering from the book, *Mosaic of Thought*. All were labeled, visualizing and clarifying a word or a paragraph or the text. But I think they're pretty well doing all of those things or doing the ones that work for them. I don't think, well we all probably do all of them at some point, but I don't think we always use all the strategies in any given text or at any given time. We do the ones we need at the time. We visualize where we can. If it's nonfiction and it's a text book we may not be or if it's math or physical science, we may not visualize. I think you can see it, you see it in your discussions too. And misunderstandings come out then too.

**Katie**

3/9/11

Setting: I met K. in her modular trailer at the back of the school. Several teachers use this as a classroom. It is chock full of children's books though neatly organized and divided for more privacy. It is a happy place. While I was interviewing K. another teacher was in the room. K. was forthcoming but brief in her explanations of thoughts about reading comprehension. She had difficulty with some of the questions.

L: Interviewer

K: Interviewee

**L: Start with just a little bit of background information. How long have you been teaching? When did you get nationally board certified?**

K: Oh, wow. I started teaching, I graduated college in 1978, ummm, I taught for several years in the early 80s and I was, I've always really been connected with struggling readers, like my whole career, except for the classroom experience. I was Title 1 I did math and reading and it was two years simply because, we were military, my husband moved and I stayed home with my kids. So I had kind of a long hiatus there. Then I came back in 1995. I taught, I was in kindergarten several years and then I went into Reading Recovery and taught Reading Recovery for a long time. When I finished my master's at W&M in reading, then I branched out to become a reading specialist. I've been a reading specialist since 2000. And I've just always worked with struggling readers. What got me interested in reading was actually my first teaching assignment and I actually had a case load of like 60 kids, it was in NJ, I went from junior high to elementary. A lot of the kids were military and I had a little girl Lisa Miles. Out of all those kids Lisa Miles came back the following year and she told me, "Mrs. B., I want you to know I can read. I'm in a regular reading group and I don't need any help." That is like life changing. So I've just always kind of worked with struggling readers. I've been a reading specialist, I was at a K-2 school for a year, my principal moved to a K-5 school and I was there for 9 years. When she retired it was time for a change so I came to this school.

**L. So what made you go for the national board certification?**

K: Oh, national board. I'm a person that to me I'm a life-long learner. I don't want to stagnate and I feel after a number of years, I could never be the person who stays in one place. I started to feel like I'm stagnant. After four years at the last school I started to feel that way. I wanted to stay with my principal so I thought what challenge can I, what's out there for me? A friend of mine had mentioned national board and it was a huge challenge but very rewarding. It changed the way I teach.

**L: How so?**

K: It changed my perception of teaching. National board changes your life because it's what, so what, now what. So what you're doing, what about it, and what are you going to do with it. It's all based on you really looking at the child, you gather the data, and you have a goal in mind and you can move them forward. And it changed, it really changes, and the other thing that is changed is the videotaping process is very intimidating. I mean Reading Recovery behind the glass people watching. That's different from watching yourself on tv. And it's very, the first time you do that type of thing, it's intimidating but my goodness, it makes you such a better teacher. Because

you critique yourself and you can see where that was good or oh I need to change that. But 2004 is when I went to national board.

**L: What is reading comprehension?**

K: Reading comprehension is making meaning of text. It is huge, you don't just comprehend text, there's so many nuances to it. Ummm, it's whether or not you can make connections to it, it's whether or not you can go on inference, whether or not you can come up with conclusion. Reading comprehension is huge and we all come to it in different ways. And that's that trick to teaching children. That's why you have to be flexible. That's why you constantly develop your craft because you, every child is different in how they come to that making meaning. It's different, maybe a different path or a different process to go through, but it's huge.

**L: So, it requires flexibility on the part of teachers?**

K: Oh, my yes. Oh my, yes. And it requires you have to know the children. You have to really know the children. You have to know their strengths and weaknesses to be able to build from the strengths. You not just to focus on weaknesses. That gets you nowhere. What you have to do is build off of what they know.

**L: How would you define an effective teacher of reading comprehension?**

K: Ummm. An effective teacher, you have to know your students, you have to know your content, your strategies, all of those things. And, ummm, you have to be effective teachers, you have to be willing to think outside the box. In other words, you bring all everything you know you bring to bear on that student and especially struggling readers because they have so many gaps, different gaps and it might be something small and you have to figure out what's blocking the comprehension. Is it sight words, is it they can't break words down. Is it the fact that I really don't think when I'm reading, I just call words. It's like that's, the effective teacher is someone that can problem solve and figure that out.

**L: So how do you do that?**

K: Like I said, you have to. I'm getting ready right now for lessons that you're going to see. I'm getting ready to teach a group of students. And it's gathering, you start off by gathering data. I watched them with another teacher, I'll watch them with their interventionist. I'm going to do some assessments myself and it's like you get a starting point,. And then when you start teaching, you have to respond, you have the end in sight. You want them to make meaning and then you have to, you work, you're not quite sure. You know where you want to go, but you're not quite sure how you're going to get there. And that's a lot of it, a lot of it's data, and a lot of it's you really have to know kids. And you really have to know your area. You have to be willing to ummm learn. It's like reading is huge. How can I say this? Ummm, there's so many different viewpoints, there's so many things out there, it's kind of like the internet, you have to be able to sift through it. And...you have to be willing to try and fail. It's like when you have a child and you try something with them and it doesn't work, you don't keep on doing it. You say this isn't working what do I try next.

**L: So, you have to know the student, you have to know the content, you have to know the strategies. Tell me more about strategies.**

K: Ummm, strategies. One of the interesting things about strategies is we test a lot of times we test strategies but we don't explicitly teach them. So, in other words, I might test you about drawing an inference and I want to know if you can do it, but I never

really take you step by step through the process. So when I talk about strategic thinking I'm talking about making your thought process explicit to the children so they understand how you did that. It's not magic. I'm going to show you how to draw an inference. this is what I think, this is what I do. Now you do it. That's what I mean by strategic or strategies. It's like how do you make those strategies real for the students. And some children respond to however you do it, and then if that child still doesn't get it, then okay, what other way, how else can I make it clear for him, what I'm doing, and why I'm doing this strategy. That's what I mean.

**L: So an effective teacher of struggling readers would use explicit instruction?**

K: Yes. Yes. Not everybody needs it. Duffy is wonderful with explicit thinking and he says, and he's right, not everybody needs that. And we don't want to give children what they don't need. But struggling readers often times do need explicitly instruction. And they compartmentalize. It's like what they, in reading they may not know in writing. RR used to talk about digging ditches. You have to connect it all. I was talking to a teacher today and the student understands the word on sight cards, but when she sees it in text, she's very slow. What we were talking about and I've done it in RR, don't know if it will work, but it's like, okay, I just held up this card and you said always but you got to it in the book and you stopped cold. If you lay that right beside her and say "You know that, what is it?" I've seen kids do that with writing too. They'll be able to write a word but they'll see it in a book, can't read it, and you'll say write that word for me and they do and they recognize it. Very interesting. Yea. Very interesting.

**L: Describe the practices that students use to help them comprehend reading.**

K: Ummm, That varies depending on the student. It does, as far as practices, a lot of it, ummm, what comes to mind is metacognition. Whether or not they know how to think about their thinking. Some students come to the naturally and some do not. And for those who do not, that's the job of the teacher. You need to know who they are, you need to talk, you need to do a lot of think aloud type things in the classroom. And I think you need to know when to do that to make it effective. If that answers the question.

**L: So give me an example of when it might be effective to use think aloud.**

K: When you're introducing, I would think, a strategy, or even if your reinforcing a strategy. You may talk about making connections and you may model for students how you make a connection. You know you mark in the book, and you stop and you say, what I'm thinking about right now as I'm reading this, I'm thinking about, I'm connecting this by whatever it is. I'm connecting to *When the Relatives Came* and I'm connecting to when my relatives came to visit. I'm thinking about what the text says and I would model that aloud. You would do the think aloud part of it with the idea in mind that eventually you're not going to keep doing that. Kids are going to take that on. As far as, this is how you really think about text, if that makes sense.

**L: How would you describe a reader who's struggling to comprehend?**

K: How would I describe them? As far as, do you mean, like frustrated.

**L: No. I mean more of what do you see, when you're assessing them what are some of the areas that you would focus on with the struggling readers.**

K: It could be fluency. That might be something as far as, you would notice it in fluency, you would notice it in taking words apart, word attack - what do they do

when they come to a word. What do they do when they don't know a word. Do I sit and wait for the teacher to tell me? Do I use that first letter, make a guess? Those types of things as far as struggling. That would be the decoding part of it. As far as the comprehension part of it, you do have students who can read beautifully but they get to the end of it and they really don't know what they've read. You may have the children that - like with their retell, they may tell about the sequence, but if you question them their understanding is there, they just truly don't know how to retell a story in sequence. So it's any, I guess it's any number of things. It could be a student that can retell beautifully, use detail, and you come back and you ask them to reflect on what they've read like what's the author trying to tell us, what's the main message, and they don't have a clue. So that's an area of comprehension that's something to work on. So it's a multitude of things. All of those things depending on what assessments you use, those are all the things you'd look for.

**L: What kinds of assessments do you use?**

K: Oftentimes, as far as a screening, what I do is a word sort. I used to do Schloss in the past but that's very tedious and time consuming. The San Diego is much quicker and it gives me a good starting point. So I give them like word sort and then that gives me an idea of where to get started with developmental reading assessment. As far as the screening, I really like using the observation survey. Lots of good information there. In the upper grades, the DRA is good because it gives you the retelling, it gives you a reflection, interpretation, it gives you a lot of things to build on.

**L: How do teachers help struggling readers to improve reading comprehension?**

K: First you have to know what strengths to build on. You have to know them. You have to have a relationship with them. They have to know that you are working with them. The relationship piece is big because they've had experience with failure. So the relationship piece is big. Also, how you help them is you know their strengths and weaknesses based on assessment. You look at where they are and what information maybe the teacher has, what's come in the portfolio, and then you go from there. That's where you pull out whatever assessments. From that, it depends on the child, it really does. You try this and that. There's really no cut and dried - I always do. The key is flexibility and a wealth of knowledge. You have to keep adding to your as they always say, your tool belt. You have to keep adding information so that ummm you have something to draw from.

**L: So you build on strengths, you have to have a relationships with the students, they believe in what you're trying to do , you're a team working together. And you find out about their strengths and weaknesses based on assessment and it needs to be ongoing.**

K: Yes to all. Assessment has to be ongoing. Flexible because every child is different with different needs. That's where the strategies come in as far as techniques and strategies. Different from inferencing and all those types of strategies. Strategies that you use to work with them and that comes from knowing what works with that child. Simple thing. You talk to them about what they like to read. Do you like nonfiction, the real thing where you learn stuff or do you like stories? Now if that child tells me stories, I'm not going to work a lot with nonfiction. Not that I'll never do it, but I'm going to really, with my instruction, I'm going to start off with stories because it's

something they're going to be engaged with. Engagement is huge. Engagement is huge because you can't motivate people, they motivate themselves. You have to find what triggers that so I think with struggling readers, I think that because they have, these kids have dealt with failure.

**L: What are the effective practices that you use during instruction to help struggling readers to comprehend?**

K: To me, effective practices.

**L: If you want to use an example of a child do that. That may make it easier for you.**

K: Effective practices. How do I want to word this? This one sounds so cliché but it's making it concrete for them. Ummm, for example, I have a little boy that I work with and it's like even something as simple as magnetic letters, he couldn't, the word could was very difficult for him and it was like explain it him why that word is difficult because you eyes don't see what you think you should see. There's letter in the middle that don't make sense. You know it's not like cat you see the c and the t. And it was like having the magnetic letters. It's realizing first of all, realizing and explaining to him, this is what's giving you trouble. Close your eyes and see the word in your head. Spell it, what doesn't it look like in your head, Now open your eyes. What I think effective practice is. Making it real for that student. Giving them hooks to hang it on in their head. Something abstract like that. The word could, the word was. With inferencing, to go to comprehension. With inferencing - to take them from a picture where it's easy to draw the inference and talk them through and move them from the picture into the text. I think of effective practices, I think of things that build those bridges for students. It gives them success. But it's not get on the computer and do this program. It's like you figure out like with inferencing, you figure out where they need to go. You know where they need to be at the end. They need to be in a book, but you're going to start them back at the picture because it's easier and it's concrete.

**L: Build the foundation and grow from it.**

K: Yes, you build from it and that's one thing I really learned from RR you build off of what they know. You build off of what they know. Or else you're spinning your wheels. So you take something they have control of and you show them how to expand it.

**L: Sounds like you're talking about scaffolding.**

K: It is. Yes.

**L: So, why would you choose to instruct in that way?**

K: To scaffold the learning? Ummmm. Because it's effective. Because Vygotsky talks about that zone of development - where you are and where you think they need to go. There are things you can do independently and things you can do with a little bit of help. And that's where you want a kid to be most of the time- instructional. It's not too easy, it's not too hard, it's just right. Yea.

**L: How do you decide which practices to use?**

K: It depends on where I see the need. For example, with these girls that I'm getting ready - the ones you'll see me with. And there again, it's thinking out of the box. We've done a lot with the oral language recently. What we're starting on is the oral language and how it affects reading. It's very interesting these three girls are grade level readers. You know level 34, 99%, whatever, and the comprehension is very



difficult. They don't do well on quarterlies. they are working with an interventionist to work on summarizing. I just saw them today with their classroom teacher. They were working on question answer relationship type things. But what's interesting, what we'll be working on, watching the dynamics of these girls in this group what I want to explore is the oral language aspect of it. I'll assess them on Monday afternoon in oral language and see if, according to what we've been told, if they need an adjusted DRA to level 2 to discuss. Depending on how that turns out, then from that is when I'll pull all that information together and start writing lesson plans so I'll know where we're going to go.

**L: So how does discussion play into your instruction?**

K: Discussion - kind of like they say if you can't define, if you can't really, let me see, how do I want to say this? You don't want kids that can just answer multiple choice questions. You know I can show my understanding of something by picking a,b,or c. But the deeper understanding of something is what the goal is. And from them to be able to communicate. To be honest, I don't think we do enough of that - we don't have time to do it. And I want to see what the affect of group discussion will have on everything else. Their scores. If you look at their DRA everything looks good. Quarterlies are terrible and from what I saw today, they couldn't really discuss that book. They could answer questions. And the other thing I noticed is when the teacher started with what can you infer from this title, it was very surface, very literal. If was called *Snow Babies* and it was like it was snowing and they have a baby. As I'm watching them answer questions, all the questions that she asked, there was no deep thinking. That's why I'm wondering if we tap into that and we expand that scaffold. I'm wondering if it might not solve some of the other issues for these girls.

**L: So you're hoping that discussion will be a way to build deeper understanding?**

K: Yes. Discussion at a lower level. It'll be interesting to see what their scores turn out like. Whether it supports what I think or not. I have a feeling that a discussion with less complicated text than grade level text, with something that's easy for them is going to really improve their ability to tackle a more complex piece of text.

**L: So they're reading on grade level. They're reading, but you're going to use an instructional level that's below grade level.**

K: Probably. But it will go back to the data. It will depend on what I find when I do that oral assessment. If the assessment looks fine then I need to regroup. I may still do it, but I'll have to think about it.

**L: Do you use different practices at different times?**

K: Yes. Yes.

**L: Can you explain about that?**

K: Ummmm. That kind of sounds redundant too but it gets back to knowing your students. The practices come out of what you find out about the student. What kinds of things can I use to move him forward to where I want him to go. What does he need to learn. So, yes. There's no laminated list of do this, do this, and then do this.

**L: So you're not bound by the pacing guide.**

K: No. That doesn't mean I completely ignore it. I think you need to be aware of all of those things. What are the expectations. But I'm not bound by them. Because the goal is making meaning. The goal is comprehension.

**L: Tell me a little more about engagement. What are some techniques that you might use to try to get a child to engage during reading?**

K: First of all, it's just personal. First of all, it's like being interested and having a true interest in the student. And they see that. If you're fake they know it. Having a true interest in them, finding out about them, and if you say to them, "Do you like to read?" and they say no. Ask them what they like to do. Find out what they like to do or read. Whatever they like, my goal is when I meet them is first to develop that relationship by finding out who they are so they know I care. And then it's finding what they like and finding reading material about that. Like NASCAR. Then it becomes, let's read it, let's do it together. Engagement is key. If you don't have that, it's just presenting lots of lessons. Some kids will be alright with that, but the struggling readers, no. They won't get it.

**L: Do you use different practices for different purposes?**

K: What do you mean by that?

**L: Let's say that you were having a discussion. Would there be a different way that you would discuss when you were trying to cull out different conclusions?**

K: Okay. Differentiation? What I would expect? Is that what you're talking about?

**L: Not what you expect, what you do with children. Do you use different techniques, different instructional strategies for different purposes?**

**L: Do you use different practices with different students?**

K: Oh, yes. Differentiation. That goes back to what do you decide or how do you decide practices to use when instructing struggling students. It goes back to knowing your kids. You have to have a broad range of things because one size doesn't fit all. You look at what you want the outcome to be and then you, it like that whole backwards planning, I want them here, now let me back up and see what I have. What do I know about this student? What do I know about what he controls? Where do I want him to be? Let's try this. That is kind of the way.

**L: What do you mean by control?**

K: When I talk about controls it's like, What are my independent capabilities? What do we need to do to get him from here to there. I won't focus on what he can do. You're going to focus on comprehension if that's the need. And that to me is why lesson plans, you can't have a format because what may work for Kevin won't work for Kathy. You know I may need decoding, word sorting but Kevin doesn't. Kevin's got all that. So why am I going to waste his time going through when his lesson plan needs to be all about comprehension. Kathy might need to spend part of her time with the word study aspect and then do the reading and the comprehension.

**L: How would you do this with a group of six or seven students?**

K: I would think you'd try to keep it to four and with struggling readers, no way will you have six or seven.

**L: Well the reality is that many time you do have six or seven in a classroom group.**

K: That's the classroom, but that's why you have interventionists and tutors and PALs assistants. Because really you may have a group of that many but if you have that many in a group, I would argue that you're not effective because they all are so different. Well I wouldn't say you're not completely effective but you're not as effective as you could be. If you narrowed it down and differentiated accordingly,

you could change that. If you have a group of six or seven kids, you're presenting a lesson. You may be fortunate enough to reach this one but you're not going to reach them all.

**L: So what do you tell a classroom teacher who's required to do three guided reading groups a day in LA? They have six or seven in a group.**

K: My opinion I think what you do is you differentiate. You put some in a discussion literature circle group. They don't need to touch you every day. They're more independent so you're working on higher level things and they don't need to sit at a table with you every day and work. Those are the type of things, alternate your groups, see them every other day. But you're going to see those struggling kids, break them up and see them every day. That's my recommendation and we have all kinds of literature circles, discussion background groups, all kinds of groups. They can be right by you while you're working with the struggling kids so you can get those groups in every day. That's what I would recommend.

## Missy

Interview 1 - March 14, 2011

Setting - I met Missy in a classroom at the school. She was very enthusiastic and accommodating. She told me that she has wanted to be a teacher since high school and loves teaching reading to struggling readers. She was a special ed teacher for 10 years. Most of it was self-contained students with autism. Then she did an eds position for two years. She didn't like that and started teaching first grade. She loved it and was excited about literacy. She transferred with her principal to the current school and has been teaching 5th grade for the last four years. She likes this position and has found it to be the most rewarding. She works at an all Title 1 school of just fourth and fifth graders - the first of its kind in the area. The NBCT was a new challenge. Missy likes new challenges and thought it was important to do. It was the next step professionally. But it's made her analyze everything she does and she's a better teacher because of it. The reflective piece was very important. Watching the video was enlightening. It impacted how she teaches literacy and what she teaches. Every activity had to be evaluated in terms of why and how it impacted learning.

**L: What is reading comprehension?**

M: Reading comprehension is not the actual reading of words it's being able to take what you've read, summarize it into your own words, and to have a nice understanding of what you just read.

**L: So reading comprehension is not the actual reading or decoding of words, what it is is you read, you summarize that reading and form a basis for understanding that reading.**

M: Right.

**L: How do you do that?**

M: How do I teach that or how...

**L: How do you think that happens?**

M: Well, first of all you have to do it on their level, you have to start where they're at. And you have to ask questions and not just general recall questions, but you have to ask questions that would give them, you know, thought provoking questions like, when they've finished reading, we do a lot of, some of my groups, we do literature circles where they're focusing on a specific skill or topic and so they have to take what they have read and apply it. Ummm, sometimes it's just a question and response, sometimes it's an inference, but there's no way they could answer or apply it without understanding what they've read.

**L: So you start by making sure that whatever it is they're reading, the text is on their level. It includes asking questions, higher level questions, and being able to apply their understanding in some way, and that can take the form of a question response or whatever the different skill is that you're looking for and you tend to do that in literature circle groups.**

M: Well that is one group where I definitely look at a specific skill because a literature circle group, are you familiar, takes from week to week instead of day to day. So those groups are definitely focusing on you know, give me a cause and effect that occurred or looking at some of the unknown words. Yes, they're probably a good enough reader where they can use context clues and understand it, but I want them to

think more critically about what they're reading and understanding those words, and you know, being able to relate it to their own lives, or to the world, or to those kinds of things that are getting them richer instruction, getting them deeper into the literature.

**L: Okay deeper into the literature.**

**L: How would you define an effective teacher of reading comprehension?**

M: Well, at our level, at a 5th grade level and you have to have some type of assessment to give you baseline data about where they are.

**L: Is that where you begin?**

M: Yes. Once I have the baseline data, then I know how to formulate their groups. I group the students, I take interest inventories to see the types of text that they might be interested in. I think that good teachers should give them a variety of genres so that they're not just focusing on one specific thing. They need to have students read and respond critically to what they're reading. Get in verbal discussions about what they're reading so that, because everyone's not going to read something the exact same way. You can have you know discussions about what's being read and the broader understanding about how someone interpreted what was read.

**L: So, when you say you want them to have verbal discussions, what does that look like.**

M: In small groups based upon what their reading level is. I group them into smaller groups and then every, most of the groups except for the high-highest group will work in the literature circles but even still we all have discussions at the table where we're reading and we're responding to the text and we're discussing it and we're talking about it what we've read and our understanding of it. That happens in a group of roughly five kids to the teacher. And the literature circle groups we definitely are doing that same thing but we have a leader every week - called the discussion director and they kind of lead our discussion and then we again we talk about the roles and how we understood that text and just like that. It's just a deeper conversation.

**L: Describe practices that students use to help them comprehend reading.**

M: Yes. Ummm, well are you talking about just in general what they would do?

**L: Yes.**

M: Students I think from their early grades, if there are pictures, they'll look at them. Typically, at our level there aren't. They'll start making predictions about what they're going to read, especially if you've read a chapter the day before you say, "I think that this is going to happen or what have you. They'll make inferences based on what they've read. Students will take what they know to make inferences. They'll ask themselves questions while they're reading like, "Why does the author say this or do this?" They're going to summarize obviously, whether it be a small group discussion summary or response to questions, or what have you, they're still going to summarize what they've read. And then again evaluate what you're doing. You're going to have that thought-provoking conversation with one another and evaluate what the author has done, what you have done and talk about the text critically.

**L: So, some of the practices that students use to comprehend reading, when they're younger they use the pictures in the picture books. They make predictions, inferences, ask questions, summarize as they're reading.**

**L: How would you describe a reader who is struggling to comprehend text?**

M: Ummm, well on a 5th grade level, what I typically will see are students who ummm, will make up words if they come to unknown words, they'll make them up. They will, if they're reading aloud to me at that particular time which we do , with the strugglers, if they're reading aloud to me they will mumble over the word, they will look at me and ask if prompted they will decode those words to try to understand. Ummm, you know I see struggling readers oftentimes will try to look like they're typical peers. For example, when they go to the library they often will not select text that is appropriate for them. They will try to select a book that their friends can read and ummm, they don't read it because they can't. They are frustrated about responding to text if they're asked questions about the text they can feel frustrated about it if they didn't understand what they've read and they're having comprehension issues with whatever.

**L: So if they didn't understand something that they had read, and they're having comprehension issues, what would be your plan of attack for that student.**

M: Typically I'll say, "Let's go back and look at it together." So the student and I will read it together and talk about it together and discuss it together. For example, I had a whole group with the book *Sounder*. It was on the level of one of my fairly high groups, but the verbiage that's used isn't exactly easy and I found that the group was struggling to get through it and it's such a great book. I didn't want to lose that opportunity and so we read it together. I would read to them and they would follow along. We would talk about it and we would still have that rich discussion. We didn't quit the text. And so it was to me just as powerful for them to have appreciated that text then for them to have to just push it away and move on. Now, it would have been senseless for me to have expected them to read the book by themselves and respond and have this discussion about a book that they really weren't getting. Because it wouldn't have come out with the same level of meaning for them. So that kind of shows you on a level that I thought they would have done fine, but they just struggled. And I say they, it was the majority, like four out of five. For a lower level kid, again, I would just have them read with me and we'll work through it together and just meet their challenges individually.

**L: So when they finished *Sounder*, what did they think of it?**

M: They loved it. It was interesting because then they would go to the library, public or even the school library and they would still check the book out because they realized that the book had multiple covers and so they were like look here it is again. And I found that they were rereading it on their own because they did appreciate the book but they couldn't have appreciated it again at the same level had we not worked through it together. But then after it was all over they really enjoyed the book and they saw that it was a good book, but that first time we just kind of struggled through it together.

**L: Do you think their vocabulary grew based on the book?**

M: I do because we had dictionaries at our groups and they would look up certain words that they didn't know. They'd talk about the vernacular that was used because it was old African American English and so and then we'd talk about how one of the kids said, "You know my grandma says that word." And we would just talk about how our grammar has improved over time because we've had the opportunity to go to schools and everything.

**L: How do teachers help struggling students to improve reading comprehension?**

M: Well, I think what I was saying, you again, you make sure you're choosing the right text for students and when you see that students are struggling, you can make a decision at that point, do you say to the kid, "This is a text that 's too hard and let's try something different or do you help them work through it. I think definitely talking to the kids about these kinds of things that they use and they don't realize that they use, going back to those and helping them make predictions using what they already know, helping them make an inference, let's go back into the text, everybody turn to this page and find that information. And the more that you model it and assist them and guide them through it, the more that they can kind of do that on their own and they become more successful.

**L: Can you expand on that, the idea of modeling?**

M: So if I have generated a thought-provoking question in a guided reading group about what they're getting ready to read and I find that they're not able to tell me because they didn't understand for some reason, they didn't comprehend what they read then I would say, "Okay, I know that I just read this information, I'm going to turn to page whatever, so everybody let's turn to that page. I know that I found it somewhere on this page, I'm going to start here and then I'd go back through it and just verbally model my thoughts to them and demonstrate what I would be saying in my head to myself. And then that would allow for them to like I said, I would be able to release that and love for them to do the same thing as they have practiced it with me.

**L: So you use think aloud for strategy instruction?**

M: Absolutely.

**L: But first you choose the right book, like you said Sounder. If you find it wasn't right for a number of reasons and you decided that you were going to read it aloud with them and work together on it. Are there other things you might do or is this a practice that you use regularly?**

M: If for some reason it's not working, there are times if I see that they're just struggling to get through, they're comprehension is drastically decreased because they're missing every other word then I'll say, "You know what guys lets scrap that book and try something different. Yes, there are times I'll completely scrap a book and move on to the next thing.

**L: What are the effective practices that you use during instruction to help struggling readers to comprehend text?**

M: Again, I always look at data. I always take data from observations, just anecdotal notes that I might take, assessments that they do, I disaggregate them into the types of questions that they were and I might pull out a small group of students while the others are working on something our reading specialist comes in and I share that data with her and she will do pull out for small groups to target some of that. We have read aloud, students that have accommodations on their IEPs and that obviously very helpful. Sometimes you can't pick the text that is on a lower level. For example, I try to infuse a lot of my instruction with some of the social studies or science - content areas and I would buddy them up with someone who is a little stronger reader to help facilitate their reading. I give students tools that would help them. Some students read

when you give them some kind of ruler or something to help keep their place while they're reading.

**L: What kinds of assessments do you use?**

M: I use a variety of assessments. But right now we are focusing a lot on open response assessments so we want to see what the student is able to tell us and not just be able to mark a multiple choice so with that I can kind of gather a student's understanding or a general understanding or completely off-base.

**L: What assessments do you use at the beginning of the year to form groups?**

M: For the small pull out reading groups we use the DRA. I think it's very appropriate. Recently, within the last few years they added the timed component. I think fluency is crucial but it sets some of the kids back because they meet all of the other benchmarks except that, but that's the only part that's sometimes a little unfair.

**L: Do you think it gives you a good idea of where they are and what you need to be focusing on?**

M: I do.

**L: Why have you chosen these particular practices for use during instruction?**

M: I try to focus on research based practices that are proven to be successful for students and that I have had success with in the past.

**L: So what might those be?**

M: Well, making sure the students are reading on their level is a huge piece. When students buddy read they have opportunities to be exposed to text that they might struggle with a little with. I don't know.

**L: How do you decide which practices to use while instructing struggling readers?**

M: Well I think you have to look at the kid first. You know, you have to see, when you're looking at the practices you have to say, "Is this a kid that works well with a partner?" Whether it be can't get along with anybody or he doesn't do his work, he clowns than that might not be the best option so you have to look at the child first. And then you also have to see what aspect are they struggling in? Sometimes if they're you know we have kids that are on levels of their DRA in their 20s, the curriculum has to be so modified that you just try to do the practices that you see them being successful with. If you try something and it doesn't work out, you try the next thing. You just try to tweak it to see how was that student learning best, what structurally have you seen the best outcome with and then you kind of build on it from there.

**L: Do you use different practices at different times? Please explain.**

M: Yes. It depends on the students, and the class. For example, last year, I had more students with IEPs than I had gen ed students so I had a lot of struggling learners in one classroom. It really wasn't effective to buddy them up because there wasn't a buddy at the higher level. It just didn't work. I also had more boys, I had 4 girls and the rest were boys so. I found infusing technology as much as I could was what seemed to keep them engaged and learning and wanting to do more. So, again, it depends on the dynamics of the group and the individual kid as a learner.

**L: Do you use different practices for different purposes? Please explain.**

M: Yes. Yes. Laughs. Well for reading specifically. See reading and writing it all goes kind of hand in hand. So the things I would use for some kids in a small group



reading, that might not work in a word study group for example, because some of them might be a better speller than they are a reader but I know them as a reader when we look at features within text that they still have to be able to decode even though they're on a higher level. Different practices for different purposes would be more determined upon the kind of group that I'm doing the kind of instruction I'm doing and again the kind of learner that the particular children in that group are.

**L: Do you use different practices with different students? Please explain.**

M: Yes. Because every child learns differently so I have to make sure that I've reached each kid and each kid, you know, if they're a kinesthetic learner or it just depends, absolutely. Some kids learn differently and learn better in different ways so I'll do come on let's go to the back table and work on this a different way that's the only way I'm going to reach them

## Appendix D

### Research Participation Consent Form

#### Effective Reading Comprehension Teaching and Research: How Do They Relate?

#### **WHAT DO I HOPE TO LEARN FROM YOU?**

This investigation, entitled “**Effective Reading Comprehension Teaching and Research: How Do They Relate?**” is will study the practices of effective reading teachers during reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers. It will serve to inform the field about what is happening in those reading classrooms in which nationally board certified teachers of literacy are helping struggling readers to gain proficiency in reading comprehension.

#### **WHY IS YOUR PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT TO ME?**

Analyzing your practices and beliefs regarding reading comprehension instruction will help me to discover what is occurring in your effective classrooms with struggling readers. This, in turn, may provide the reading field with effective practices not yet identified for use with struggling readers to improve their reading comprehension.

#### **WHAT WILL I REQUEST FROM YOU?**

- As one of four to seven nationally board certified educators participating in this study, I request that you participate in a maximum of three one-on-one interview sessions. Each will focus on your reading comprehension teaching practices and experiences/beliefs regarding reading comprehension instruction. One interview will occur at the beginning of the study, prior to an observation period, and one will occur following the observation period. A third interview may be scheduled if additional information is needed. Each will take approximately one hour. Following each interview, I will send you a summary of the interview and ask you to read the summary for accuracy and to correct any perceived misinterpretations.
- After completing the initial interview, I will ask to come into your classroom to observe your reading lessons over the course of several weeks. I will also request to see lesson plans, student work, and handouts pertaining to each instructional lesson observed. All identifying information that pertains to you or your students will be removed.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Please know that:

- The confidentiality of your personally identifying information will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

- Your name and other identifying information will be known only to the researcher through the information that you provide.
- You may refuse to answer any questions in the interviews if you so choose. You may also terminate your participation in the study at any time. (To do so, simply inform the researcher of your intention.) Neither of these actions will incur a penalty of any type.
- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decline to participate, this decision will not endanger your current or future relationship with the College of William & Mary or with your school or district.
- A summary of the results of the study will be sent to you electronically once they are complete, using an email address that you provide.
- A stipend in the amount of \$75.00 will be provided to each participant at the conclusion of the study.

#### **HOW CAN YOU CONTACT ME?**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Lauri Leeper (lmleeper@email.wm.edu) at 757-250-3259. If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact my dissertation chairperson, anonymously if you wish, Dr. Judi Harris at 757-221-2334 ([judi.harris@wm.edu](mailto:judi.harris@wm.edu)). Alternatively, or in addition, you may contact Dr. Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 ([EDIRC-L@wm.edu](mailto:EDIRC-L@wm.edu)) or Dr. Michael Deschenes at 757-221-2778 ([PHSC-L@wm.edu](mailto:PHSC-L@wm.edu)), chairs of the two William & Mary committees that supervise the treatment of study participants.

By checking the “I agree to participate” response below, then signing and dating this form, you will indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this research, and confirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

- I agree to participate.
- I don't agree to participate.

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

#### **SIGNATURES:**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Sample Interview Summaries

#### **Summary of Interview 1 with Ashley**

Reading comprehension is more than word calling; it is being able to understand what is read, to get something out of the reading. Those children who are higher thinking should be able to not only understand the reading but should also be able to apply it to something else, to create something with it, or to have a deep discussion about it. I don't really work with many children like that.

Struggling readers can usually read a passage, and sometimes they read it well but most of the time they also have decoding problems. With this problem, children miss so much comprehension because they're trying so hard to decode the text. But if you read aloud to them and ask questions, many of them can answer correctly. Their listening comprehension is higher because they're not focusing on decoding text. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes you can read something to a child and he/she still doesn't comprehend. But it's hard to know whether it's a focusing problem, a motivational problem, or a problem with not being interested in the reading itself.

The struggling readers that I work with have been identified as such because they have not met the benchmark test requirements, have not passed the SOL test, or if they are third graders, they have not passed the Spring PALs test from the previous year. They need extra help. Basically, I help them by reinforcing the weekly skills that are designated in the pacing guide. As grade levels, we meet in Professional Learning Communities. We look at the benchmark tests to see what skills the children need help mastering. Then we develop lessons to address the skill deficits. That may mean spiraling

back to a skill or reinforcing the current week's skill. I give them more practice in a smaller group, at a slower pace. Sometimes the reading passage we use for these skills is also at a lower level than the grade level reading passages.

Children like to do activities in reading where they can manipulate something. Sometimes it's cutting and pasting, sometimes it's ordering items, or putting things in their interactive notebooks. They also love all kinds of comprehension games and working with highlighters to underline words or phrases in passages that they read.

I work to reinforce skills with third grade struggling readers in guided reading groups. But I only have 15 minutes for these groups and we meet three times a week. There are usually 4-6 children in these groups. I also work with third grade struggling readers when they are doing their seatwork. Sometimes we do the activity together and sometimes they do it by themselves with me monitoring their performance. Sometimes we work on a comprehension activity and sometimes it's a phonics activity. They need help with their seatwork. We were finding they had a hard time doing these activities correctly by themselves. So it's better if they do them with me. I can sit next to them and make sure they're focused on the page.

We noticed that our students were having trouble with functional text so the whole third grade made this common lesson plan. We actually took real text like grocery ads or Busch Gardens brochures and we made questions for them. But I try not to just have my struggling readers read and answer questions. We have to do some of that because our school system is so data driven and focused on passing the SOL test. But I do try to vary it and keep it interesting.

In fourth grade, I have an hour to work with students. The first half an hour is usually a whole group lesson. I help the struggling readers during this time and then I pull the struggling readers after the whole group lesson. We are in guided reading groups and use readers that complement the content of the story that they're reading for that week. We're reinforcing a story but it's a bit more motivating.

In fifth grade, the students read novels and do literature circles. They read a novel each nine weeks marking period rather than using the basal reader which is Scott-Forseman. I work in a small group with the struggling readers and we use interactive notebooks that focus on the skills they need to master for that week. They read passages, complete the skill, and paste it in their notebooks. The passage is no longer related to the novel. We changed it this nine weeks. But the process is still the same. They still read a passage, look at the question, annotate the question, and then go back and find the answer. I don't necessarily agree with all of that, but we are bound to do certain things whether we agree with them or not. It's very data driven and that's exactly what they want us to do. They want us to teach these children to take apart a question, to teach them to go back to the paragraph, box it in, and find the information.

If I had the latitude to do what I thought needed to be done, I would do more reading. I went to a wonderful full day workshop. The first part of it was word study but the last part was comprehension. The workshop leader gave us a list of 78 picture books that can be used to teach all the skills such as summarizing, inferring, and fact and opinion. We used to have Accelerated Reader in the school and the children loved it. But we can't use it anymore because the powers that be said the only way we could use the program was by allowing students to look up answers to the questions with the book in

hand as they took the quizzes. Well then you have a lot of kids that are just doing it because we have little prizes. They would never read the book. You want that to be a motivator to read. We're a Title 1 school this year, and they don't believe in AR. It doesn't have to be AR, it could be Drop Everything and Read or anything that gives children the opportunity to read books. First we need to get kids hooked on reading and then they improve their reading with practice. But the decision-makers in the school system don't see the benefit of reading books. They question how students can pass the SOL test if they're just reading books. So, books have gone by the wayside. I get very disgruntled and disappointed but it's my job right now. It's really not good.

I think an effective reading teacher is one who teaches in the context of reading. Using actual literature, either novels or picture books is the way to go. I like using graphic organizers. I like the small guided reading groups. Those really work. You lose some kids in whole group lessons. When you work with smaller groups, you can help them to maintain focus. I work with both the medium and struggling readers in guided reading groups. They also work with their teacher. So they get reinforcement of reading from both the teacher and me. I also think a lot of it has to do with motivation. If you pick readings that are interesting to the children and that they have some background knowledge about, they'll understand it better because they will focus on it.

**Summary of Interview 1 with Connie** I believe that reading comprehension is when that the child gains knowledge, information, pleasure, amusement, anything from written text. In addition to word decoding, comprehension involves understanding the subtlety of the language: the puns, the sarcasm. When a reader is comprehending text, he is totally absorbed and interacting with the text, wondering and questioning what is read. It also includes thinking about the author's purpose, appreciating descriptive, rich language, and just the beauty and power of the words. Oftentimes, with struggling readers, the teacher need to point these things out until the reader internalizes these things for himself and does it unconsciously.

In schools today, I believe that this love of reading is what's missing. The emphasis on guided reading, with necessarily short text, makes deeper reading impossible. By the time children are in third grade they need to get into lengthier text and quality literature. That way they can develop a love for story. We're spending too much time on drill and kill types of activities and worksheets that bore students. I also think strategy instruction has been overdone as well. I think it's necessary to identify strategies and help children know when they're using them, but I don't think that's the be all and end all for reading because our good readers are doing it anyway, whether we tell them what they're called or not. If children are using the strategies, we don't need to be teaching them. I think we can kill the joy of reading by doing so much of what we think we have to do in schools.

I do think that with struggling readers, strategy instruction is necessary. We have to help them to predict and to infer about their reading. We help them predict because readers, good readers, do that automatically as they finish reading a portion of text. They



think about what's going to come next. In their minds they might say, "I wonder what's going to happen? I wonder if she's going to do what I think she's going to do?" So, I think we have to identify those strategies for them and help them learn which ones they seem to use readily.

Many children are visual. We can point that out to them and help them to become conscious of what they're visualizing as they read. But this can be done in ways that are pleasurable, through read alouds and discussions. Both of those are very important. We use Junior Great Books and have been successful with these because of the discussion and the higher level thinking that occurs in conjunction with reading. It also involves 21st Century Skills, creating effective communicators and collaborators, and you've got to have people who can talk about things. Discussion helps to build knowledge because you're hearing ideas you might never have considered before. My students discuss before they write and it results in richer writing.

In fourth and fifth grade, students use sticky notes in their texts to highlight anything that strikes them. It might be figurative language, a character's actions, something they're curious about, or even a word they don't know. They do this so that we can discuss it after reading. I want to see their thoughts and what is occurring to them as they are reading. So, it's more than what happening between the reader and the text, it's also about creating understanding across a wider circle, with other students and the teacher as well. They can even pull from other texts with similar themes or issues.

I think an effective teacher of reading comprehension is one who's an effective teacher of reading. I don't mean the formal directed teaching of reading in front of the class when I say this. I mean a teacher who's facilitating reading, guiding the reading in

the sense that the children become excited and engaged, truly engaged in the text. I think if they enjoy reading and if they want to read, then the comprehension follows. As long as they master basic reading, basic decoding, the comprehension will come with that guidance. But I think it's key that they enjoy the process. If they don't enjoy reading you can talk about comprehension strategies and they may be able to recite them back to you, but it doesn't mean that they're using them. If they don't enjoy reading, and they're not reading, they're not comprehending anything.

The teacher's enthusiasm, and interest in the text or the content is critical. I think the teacher shows enthusiasm in the way that questions are structured and the way the discussion is held. It's important to be able to relate the reading to their lives, so the protagonist should be someone who is close to their own age. We've found that children love the historical fiction that we use in our program. The students can either compare their lives to the lives of the characters in the books or they can see just how different their lives are. Even the reluctant readers enjoy these books.

I think it's important to give students time for reading in school because there are so many demands on their time outside of the school day. I try to give my students plenty of time in class to read so that they can get it done, and it's not hovering over their head. When that happens, it becomes nerve-wracking and then they don't want to do it. It's a stressor. We don't want reading to be a stressor. We want them to want to read that book, and to enjoy it. Of course, I think an environment that's conducive to reading with carpet pillows, couches, or whatever they need to get comfortable is important. I always like having the music on, classical music that is just soothing and calming. You could hear a pin drop because they're all engaged.

Struggling readers sometimes have difficulty pointing out the main idea or summarizing what they've read. They may have some decoding difficulties as well. Maybe they can't use context to understand words. When a teacher is helping, it's important to keep a very positive and enthusiastic demeanor. You have to know the child and what interests him. That way you can tap into their areas of interest with their text and it will be more engaging immediately for the child. I also think you help them see what they're doing well, you point that out as you're going along. When they make an attempt at something or stop to decode a word and sound it out, and get it, you point out that readers do that so that they make the connection. Pointing out the strategies they are using is important in helping them to develop those competencies. If they reread an area, you can notice that and comment on it.

It's also important to help them enjoy the process of reading and laugh about what's going on. With younger ones, using the Amber Brown series is good because she finds herself in predicaments that they can relate to so that they make those connections to their lives and they engage in the reading. If you give that kind of support they'll develop that love for reading, and it will help them overcome the problems and issues they have as a reader. I think they have to know and understand that reading is like many other things. You get better at it by practice, and practice is reading. So, you have to encourage that independent tie as well, and I think it's important that they read at a level that they can competently read.

I don't believe we tell little children they can't go beyond a certain level because first graders have to stay here. I think if they see a book that they're really interested in and you think it's too hard and difficult for them, I think you let them try. Because often

if they really want to read it, they're going to do what they need to understand it. So, if you can see they're frustrated I think you need to take them back and help them pick something that's not as hard. But if they want a big chapter book because everyone else has one and they find one on a topic that they like, then we have to let them try at least to read it or read it with them and help them with it.

Strategy instruction can be accomplished subtly. If you're working with a small group and one of the children uses a strategy, you can just point that out to others without making it a big deal. In a group, each of the children will probably use a strategy or two and you can just notice those rather than teacher them in isolation. I think that is more effective. I think most of us using the strategies that work for us with particular texts.

Teachers set the tone for the climate in their classrooms. They need to ensure that the classroom is one where students feel mentally comfortable. There is no tolerance for belittling or demeaning behavior. The classroom needs to be an area where kids support one another. That means that the teacher emphasizes students' strengths and establishes the notion that all are learning, all are progressing, and we all do this at different rates. We just keep moving from where we are. I point out that even adults can improve in reading or in writing. There's always more we can do, so the important thing is to go from where we are and move forward. We don't want to stagnate or regress.

Usually, the text will guide what instructional practices I emphasize at any given time. Rather than trying to deliberately take one objective at a time, following the pacing guide and the SOLs, I think it's better to infuse those competencies naturally as they present themselves in the text. I look at what we're reading and what it reveals and build my lessons from that. Perhaps, similes and metaphors are in the reading so we'll deal with

those. Predictions are part of fiction so we do that often as we read. You can just keep track of these skills and strategies in a checklist and check them off as you come to them. You can constantly check back on those things with your students just to make sure they're still in the forefront.

I use a lot of picture books with 5th graders. They are the perfect vehicle for bringing in short mini-lessons on something you want to teach. You can do this quickly because of the length of the text. And because the text is shorter, the imagery is usually very vivid and descriptive. I find picture books to be very appropriate for 5th grade use.

I usually introduce a novel by reading the first chapter aloud in class. They have the text, and they can follow along if they wish, or they can choose to just listen. We have discussions, both small groups and whole group. If I notice that several people didn't understand something, perhaps in response to a question, then I'll meet with them and we'll talk about it. I'll do a min-lesson. It doesn't have to be the whole group because not all in the class are having difficulties.

I think you have to figure out what each child needs, wherever the struggle is. We accentuate the strengths but from the strengths you can tell where they need to go. When you've identified those needs you've got to work on them. I use the DRA information for some needs assessment, but I think a lot of it is just from sitting down and saying where are you right now in your book, would you read that aloud to me. And I also see need from what they turn in, from their reading responses or written assignments. You can see what's lacking and go from there. I think it's pretty individualized. You can call groups together, small groups, but a lot of it is just helping the individual where they are.

### **Summary of Interview 1 with Katie**

Reading comprehension is making meaning of text. There are many nuances involved, and that's what makes it so complicated. Comprehension requires making connections to text, inferencing, and drawing conclusions. All of us comprehend text in our own way. Because of this, when working with struggling readers who are having difficulty with reading comprehension, teachers must be flexible. They must be willing to try different approaches which means that teachers need to constantly develop their craft in order to meet the needs of all children.

In addition to flexibility in teaching struggling readers, it's critical to know the children. You have to know their strengths and weaknesses and be able to build from their strengths. Focusing on a child's weaknesses gets you nowhere. What you have to do is build from their knowledge base. Effective teachers do this. They realize that struggling readers have gaps in their knowledge. They must identify these gaps and then devise a plan to fill them.

To do this, teachers begin by gathering data. After they've analyzed the data, they come up with a plan that they think might work. You must be willing to try and fail. Reading comprehension is huge and there are a multitude of varying points of view. If something you try doesn't work, stop doing it and try something else. Effective teachers know their children, they know their content area, and they know how to employ strategies to help children comprehend.

It's important to explicitly teach specific strategies to children who are struggling. If a child is having difficulty inferencing, I'm going to take that child step-by-step through the thought process of inferring. I'll model my thinking through think aloud, and

I'll start from the concrete and build to the abstract. For instance, I might start with a picture and then move to the text. The picture is easy but the text is more difficult. After I model, I'll have the child try it. Since my goal is for the child to be able to infer from the words, I'll move in that direction. I'm trying to get that child to a point where he is no longer thinking about the strategy; he's just using it automatically.

Not everybody needs explicit teaching, but for many struggling readers, it is beneficial. I'll talk about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it so the child fully understands the purpose of the explicit instruction. I'll build that metacognitive piece into the instruction. For example, if a child is not connecting to the text, I'll model how to make a connection with a think aloud. I'll mark my place in the book, and stop say, "Right now, I'm connecting what's happening in *When the Relatives Came* to when my relatives came to visit." I'll talk about how this connection helps me to remember the reading and to relate to it. This kind of instruction needs to be strategic; it's based on analyzed needs of the child. If a child understands something, don't bore him with that lesson; target his areas of need and focus the explicit instruction on those areas. Think of strategies to use to strengthen weaker areas and then implement them. In other words, scaffolded instruction is key. Target instruction in their zone of development, like Vygotsky told us, so that it's not too easy and it's not too hard; it's just right.

Struggling readers can struggle for a variety of reasons: lack of fluency, word attack skills, all those basic decoding problems. But there are others who read fluently, have an extensive sight word vocabulary, and then can't remember a thing they've read. They may even be able to retell the story but when you ask them deeper questions, they

have no response. To help struggling readers you first have to ascertain why they might be struggling. Again, that gets back to assessing strengths and weaknesses.

One area I think is critical in helping struggling readers is to build relationships with them. You have to know the children if you're going to help them. They have to know that you are working with them. The relationship piece is big because they've had experiences with failure. You have to build a feeling of being a team so that they are onboard and motivated to learn. Talk to them about what they like to do. Ask them if they like to read. Find books that will interest them. If they like fiction more than nonfiction the focus should be on fiction initially. Engagement is huge. You must engage the student so that he is motivated. Find triggers that will help him want to participate. If a child loves NASCAR, find a book about NASCAR, and read it together.

Discussion can be an important part of meaning making. We don't want our children to just be able to correctly identify letter A, B, or C on a multiple choice test. We want them to have a deeper understanding of a subject. That's what the goal is. Discussion is a way to build that deeper understanding. The group that you will be observing has difficulty with deep understanding. They have a literal understanding, and we need to get to a deeper level. I have a feeling that a discussion with less complicated text than grade level text, with something that's easy for them, is going to really improve their ability to tackle a more complex piece of text. I won't really know this until I do their assessments on Monday afternoon. I've already begun gathering information, but I need this piece to make a decision about how to begin.

In order to help struggling readers, I can't work with a group of six or seven. I would say that keeping it to four at the most is necessary. More than that and you're just



presenting a lesson but not really helping struggling readers. You may be fortunate enough to reach one, but you're not going to reach them all. Differentiating to meet individual student needs is how to help struggling readers become competent.

### **Summary of Interview 1 with Missy**

Reading comprehension is not the actual reading of words, it's being able to take what you've read, summarize it into your own words, and to have a nice understanding of what you've just read. If children are going to comprehend reading, it's important that students read text on their instructional level. They need to understand on more than just a literal level.

To build comprehension in students, I ask questions that make them think critically about what they are reading. These questions are thought provoking and require deeper thought. I want them to be able to apply their understanding in some way. That can take the form of literature response or response to a particular skill that is the focus of the lesson; this usually occurs in literature circle groups which takes place week to week rather than day to day.

An effective teacher of reading comprehension begins with assessment to get baseline data about students. I use this data to formulate groups. I take interest inventories to see the types of text that my students might be interested in. I think that good teachers should use a variety of genres with students so that they're not just focusing on one specific thing. Effective teachers also need to have students read and respond critically to what they're reading. It's important to have verbal discussions. Students interpret reading differently and sharing helps to broaden understanding of reading. My guided reading groups usually have about five students on the same instructional reading level. We discuss our reading and our responses to the text.

Students use various practices to help them understand text. In the early grades, pictures help them to build meaning. This isn't usually the case with text used in fifth

grade. Students make predictions about what they're going to read. They'll make inferences based on what they've read. Students will take what they know to make inferences. They'll ask themselves questions while they're reading like, "Why does the author say this or do this?" They also summarize what they've read, evaluate what the author has done during discussion, and talk about the text critically.

Students who are struggling to comprehend in the fifth grade make up words if they come to words they don't know. If they're reading aloud to me, they will mumble over the word or look at me for help to decode the word. If prompted they'll decode those words to try to understand. Oftentimes, struggling readers will try to look like they're typical peers. For example, when they go to the library, they often will not select text that is appropriate for them. They will try to select a book that their friends can read. Then, they don't read it because they can't. They sometimes get frustrated about responding to text if they're asked questions, and they don't understand what they've read. When this happens, I'll read the text with the student, and we'll talk about. One of my groups was reading a great book, *Sunder*. It's a classic, and I wanted to share it with them. But the verbiage was too difficult, and the kids were frustrated. I decided to read it aloud to them. We would talk about it, and we would still have that rich discussion. We didn't quit the text. To me, it was just as powerful for them when I read it aloud, and they weren't frustrated. They learned a lot of great vocabulary words as well. We talked about the old African American English, and one student connected it to the way her grandmother talked. I found that after we'd finished the book, they were rereading it on their own because they appreciate the book. But they couldn't have appreciated it at the same level had we not worked through it together.

It's important to go back into the text when students are struggling to gain meaning. I also think it's important to talk to the kids about strategies that they use and don't realize they're using. Going back to those and helping them make predictions using what they already know, and helping them make an inference increases understanding.

The more you model it and assist them and guide them through it, the more that they can kind of do that on their own, and they become more successful. For example, when modeling I might say, "Okay, I know that I just read this information, and I'm going to turn to page whatever. So everybody let's turn to that page. I know that I found it somewhere on this page. I'm going to start here." Then I'd go back through it and just verbally model my thoughts to them, and demonstrate what I would be saying in my head to myself. Hopefully, seeing me do this will eventually result in them doing this themselves.

I always take data from observations, just anecdotal notes that I might take, and assessments that they do. I disaggregate it into the types of questions that they were, and I might pull out a small group of students while the others are working on something. Our reading specialist comes in, and I share that data with her. She will do pull out for small groups to target some of that as well.

I use a variety of assessments. Right now we are focusing a lot on open response assessments. We want to see what the student is able to tell us and not just be able to mark a multiple choice response. For the small pull out reading groups we use the DRA to assess. I think it's very appropriate. Recently, within the last few years, they've added the timed component. I think fluency is crucial but it sets some of the kids back because

they meet all of the other benchmarks except that. That's the only part that's sometimes a little unfair.

To decide which practices to use with struggling readers, you have to look at the kid first. For instance, you have to ask, "Is this a kid that works well with a partner?" If not, then buddy reading is not a good option. And then you also have to see what aspect they're struggling in. Sometimes if they're at a very low level, the curriculum has to be so modified. You just try to do the practices that you see them being successful with. If you try something and it doesn't work out, you try the next thing. You just try to tweak it to see how it benefits the student, and you go from there.

I use different practices with different students because every child learns differently. I have to make sure that I've reached each kid. Some kids learn differently or learn better in different ways. I try to recognize these differences because it's the only way I'm going to reach them.

## Appendix F

### Member Checking Sample Responses

#### **Ashley's Summary Check**

On Sun, Feb 27, 2011 at 4:05 PM, Lauri Leeper <lmleeper@email.wm.edu> wrote:

Hi Ashley,

I have completed my summary of your interview comments. Please read it and let me know if there's anything else you want to include or anything you want me to reword.

I'll see you tomorrow morning at 7:30.

Thanks,

Lauri

to Lauri Leeper <lmleeper@email.wm.edu>

date Sun, Feb 27, 2011 at 8:24 PM

subject Re: Summary of Interview

Here is the document with the few changes that I made in red.

#### **Connie's Summary Check**

Lauri Leeper to Connie  
show details Apr 23

Hi Connie,

I hope your travels were great fun!

I have attached my summary of interview 2. When you get a chance, please read it and make any changes/corrections in red font. Thanks so much!

Lauri

Connie to me  
show details Apr 25

I caught just a couple of omissions, I think, more than anything! Otherwise, it looks fine. Best wishes as you compile all of this! Take care, Connie

### **Katie's Summary Check**

From: Lauri Leeper [lmleeper@email.wm.edu]  
Sent: Saturday, March 12, 2011 2:50 PM  
To: Katie  
Subject: Summary of Interview

Hi Katie,

I have transcribed the interview and summarized the transcription. I am attaching the summary for your review. Please make any changes in red color.

Thanks!

Lauri Leeper

Katie to me

Hi Lauri,

I finally added a few comments to your summary of our discussion (sorry for the delay!) and just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you. Helping you meet your doctoral requirements is helping me to grow professionally AND helping xxx, xxx, and xxx to think while they are reading rather than just "get the words right." In addition, my video tapes will make excellent discussion material for our reading team meetings. I would call it a WIN-WIN-WIN situation!

Katie  
Reading Specialist  
XXXXXX Elementary

Observation 1-1

TIME/GRADE TEACHER	PACING GUIDE (PG)/ COMPREHENSION SKILL (CS)/SOL #	ESSENTIAL SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE
7:40 - 10:30 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ██████ M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Visualizing SOL 3.5b(B)	M - Whole group activities using the book, "The Babe and I," for visualizing and summarizing T-TSW read "Michael Jordan" and complete a graphic organizer to discuss summarizing. TSW answer practice SOL questions. W-TSW read "Clara Barton," and complete Links activity to practice visualizing/summarizing TSW answer practice SOL questions. Th - TSW read "Crayon Story" and complete the "Really Reading" activity to summarize story. TSW answer practice SOL questions F - Common assessment on summarizing non-fiction using "Pocahontas" and "Gold Fever" stories.
10:30 - 11:45		Planning/Lunch
11:45 - 12:55 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████ M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Functional Text SOL3.4a (A2-5), 3.4b (B1-3), 4 5a(D)	M - Whole group activity on PB with a recipe where TSW notice the page and interact with the text. TSW complete the functional text, "President's Day All Day Skate"/some whole group and some in a guided group setting. T-TSW work with the packet, "The Path to SOL success" as a whole group. TSW work in a guided group setting with the calendar activity. W - TSW work with the functional text, "Go Carts Plus" in a whole group setting. TSW work in a small guided group completing the "Lumberjacks" functional text Th - Common assessment of functional text, using the passage, "Mammal Model."
1:00 - 2:00 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████ M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Personal Narrative SOL 3.10a,b; 5.8b,d, e, f; 5.9a-h	M-Th - work with students in writing activities in preparation for the writing SOL in March.

Anything Special: Ms. Leeper will be here M-Th





TIME/GRADE TEACHER	PACING GUIDE (PG)/ COMPREHENSION SKILL (CS)/SOL #	ESSENTIAL SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE
7:40 - 10:30 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ██████ M-Th	PG: Week 6 CS: Summarizing SOL 3.4c(D1) Sequencing, 3.5h (N) Generalizing, 3.5c(C1-3)	M - Whole group activities introducing week's story, spelling words, and skill of generalizing T/Th-not in class; giving SOL writing to grade 5 W - catch-up day/ TSW work with main idea and details and place activities in interactive notebooks. If time, sequencing activity still needs to go into notebook.
10:30 - 11:45		Planning/Lunch
11:45 - 12:55 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████-M-Th	PG: Week 6 CS: Drawing Conclusions SOL 3.5g(L)	M - Whole group introducing skill of Drawing Conclusions, spelling words, and story M - TSW read "Tiger in the Moonlight" and use graphic organizer activity to work on story elements T- TSW complete a graphic organizer for drawing conclusions as to why James thought so much about the tiger in "Tiger in the Moonlight." TSW do a picture walk of the Nellie Cashman story and also go over vocabulary words so we are ready to read on Wed If extra time, continue with drawing conclusions activity using other scenarios. W- TTW lead a guided reading of "Nellie Cashman, Frontier Angel," using LRR6, pp 66-67. TSW use a graphic organizer to draw conclusions as to why Nellie was so courageous, using details from the story Th - TSW wrap up this week's stories by completing p. 182 for "Nellie Cashman." If extra time, TSW continue to work on the drawing conclusions activity using various scenarios
1.00 - 2:00 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████-M-Th	PG: Week 6 CS: Personal Narrative SOL 3 10a,b; 5.8b,d, e, f; 5 9a-h	M-W-Final preparations for writing SOL test T- Multiple Choice writing SOL Th - Direct writing SOL

Anything Special: Ms Leeper will be here M and W; SOL Writing on T and Th mornings

Katte

Small Group Weekly Lesson Plan		Teacher: _____	Group: _____	Dates: March 16-18, 2011	
Component	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Discussion materials	Out of building	Out of building	Info-Pairs 5A <b>Recipe for a Rainbow</b> Focus: Good readers reread when it doesn't make sense.	Info-Pairs 5B <b>An Icy Summer Storm</b> Focus: Good readers are aware of the author's message and purpose—it helps them understand the text and form their own opinions	Info-Pairs 5A&B <b>Reflection</b> Focus: Good readers compare and contrast information in nonfiction - synthesizing
Introduction Reflecting on the about Text	<i>weather / water</i> <i>Same - How things are made - one is a recipe</i> <i>one tells how hail is made</i>		Let's read the title and scan the card (model scanning for students) to see what it's about ... What do you notice about this card? Yes, it's a recipe for making a rainbow. Have you ever followed a recipe? Who can tell me how? How do you think you might make a rainbow? Let's read to find out ...	Before we read, let's look at the card and figure out what it is about. Any thoughts? Who would like to share what they already know about ice storms? As we read, let's try to figure out the author's message (point of view) and what you think about it ...	Let's think about what we've learned. Who would like to share about the first card? About ... How did you learn to be your understanding? Who will share some ideas from the second card? <i>How did being warned at the weather ...</i> <i>&amp; prepare</i> <i>Vanna Bergman</i>
Reading the Text Cross-Text Analysis	<i>Disjointed</i> <i>How is it hard to see with water</i>	<i>can read in rain</i>	When you read, there may be some things that don't make sense to you. What are things you can do when something is difficult to read? How do you think rereading might help? When you read this article, stop once in awhile and ask yourself if you understand. If you don't, read that part again ...	Students read with the lesson focus in mind. Listen as students read and provide support as needed. Note strategies students use to problem-solve challenging words (note cards) Would anyone like to share how they figured out a word while they were reading?	Who can share ... Two cards are the same? How are they different? When I compare information from two articles, I try to use what I already know to help me. What did you already know that helped you compare these two cards? Can you think of any other ways these cards are ... or different? Any other ... Why do you think it's helpful to compare texts we read?
Discussing the Text Reflecting on the Learning			Who will share instructions that might have been confusing? Let's talk about how rereading might help? <b>By rereading the words or ideas we have trouble with, we can get a better understanding of the text.</b> What did you learn from reading this article?	What do you think is the author's purpose? What else is part of the author's message? Now that you've read the article, what is your opinion? Who can share experiences they've had with ice storms? How did your past experience help you better understand this information?	Let's talk about what ... Who has a ... What strategies did you ... understand the text better? Remember to ... <b>Let's Synthesize!</b>

Connie

<i>Learning Plan</i>	
 	
<b>Grade:</b> 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Novel Study - <i>Freedom Train</i>	<b>Unit:</b> 3 - Opposing Forces
<b>Lesson Overview</b>	
<b>Enduring Understandings:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values and beliefs change over time.</li> <li>- Individuals create change when they stand in opposition to the beliefs and values of a society.</li> <li>- <i>Freedom is never free; it is achieved through struggle and carries responsibilities.</i></li> <li>- Conflict brings about change.</li> </ul>	
<b>Essential Questions:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do individuals create change when they stand in opposition to the beliefs and values of a society?</li> <li>- Is freedom ever free?</li> <li>- What are the responsibilities of freedom?</li> <li>- How does conflict bring about change?</li> </ul>	
<b>Language Arts Objectives:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. 5.1.9 - Ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>B. 5.3.3 - Compare the feelings, traits, and motives of the characters and support with text references (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>C. 5.3.4 - Describe the relationship between characters (SOL 5.5)</li> <li>D. 5.3.7 - Summarize a reading selection (SOL 5.7)</li> <li>E. 5.3.8 - Skim text to locate information to justify opinions, predictions, &amp; conclusions</li> <li>F. 5.3.11 - Support conclusions and inferences with information from text (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>G. 5.6.2 - Write daily using a variety of tools and formats (SOL 5.7, 5.8)</li> <li>H. 5.7.1 - Use complete and varied sentences, avoiding run-ons and fragments (SOL 5.9)</li> <li>I. 5.7.5 - Use appropriate punctuation (SOL 5.9)</li> <li>J. 5.7.6 - Indent the beginning of a paragraph</li> <li>K. 5.7.7 - Write legibly and neatly</li> <li>L. 5.8.1 - Participate in class lessons and class discussions (SOL 5.1)</li> </ul>	

Cannie

<p><b>Instructional Activities.</b></p> <p><b>Pre-Reading - "Book Bits"</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Students read selected short passages from beginning, middle and end of the text. They write their thoughts and ideas about each passage then share their ideas with another. Individually, they consider the book as a whole and write what they think it will be about predictions, etc. Share whole group</li> </ol> <p><b>During Reading</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Organizer for factual information, vocabulary, brief summary of each chapter and personal reflection</li> <li>2 Group discussions following each part of text</li> <li>3 Self-selected research on topics introduced in text</li> <li>4 Character Analysis (Harriet Tubman)</li> </ol> <p><b>Post- Reading - Socratic Seminar</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Following the reading of the novel, <i>Freedom Train, the Story of Harriet Tubman</i> the students will engage in a Socratic seminar</li> <li>2 Students will bring their texts and seminar questions (4) with them to class</li> <li>3 The rules for discussion will be reviewed from the poster. Student recorders will volunteer to be watching the discussion and taking notes. Inside and outside circles will be formed depending on who answered which question.</li> <li>4 The teacher will ask a child to share one question and begin the discussion. Students will continue the discussion on their own. Outside circle people will observe the discussion</li> <li>5 Questions to be used for discussion (given to students ahead of time so that they can prepare notes for responding to two of them) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- David Walker, in his "Appeal," wrote. "Are we men? I ask you Are we MEN? America is more our country than it is the whites'—we have enriched it with our blood and tears. The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears." Do you agree or disagree with his thoughts? Why?</li> <li>- What is the significance of the words on the Liberty Bell "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof?" Is it happening in America at this time? Why, or why not?</li> <li>- How did Harriet's actions differ from those of Nat Turner and John Brown? (p 33-35, p 141-147)</li> <li>- How do the ethical issues of slavery influence the perspectives of the different groups of people at this time?</li> </ul> </li> <li>6 (15 min. before the conclusion of class) The student recorders will share what they noticed about the discussion. Were there "hogs" and "logs?" Was body language of everyone appropriate? Were students on task and listening/speaking in a civil manner? Did everyone participate who wanted to? Were quieter people "invited in" to the discussion? Were people well-prepared to speak on the questions? What can we do to make our next Socratic more effective?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Differentiation Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students grouped by reading levels</li> <li>- Pacing, opportunity to read alone or with partner</li> <li>- (Socratic) Student choice of the questions for which to prepare (given 4, prepare for 2)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizer scored for each part (4)</li> <li>- Rubric scoring of the question notes for Socratic Seminar</li> <li>- Quizzes (open-book) on each part (4 total)</li> <li>- Teacher observation of the discussion (sometimes recorded or video-taped)</li> </ul>



~~Missy~~ Missy

Daily Learning Plans		Week of: <u>March 14-18, 2011</u>		
	Notes	Reading & Writing	Word Study	Stations
Monday	PE 8 30-9 15 Kirsten 9 15-10 00 12 15-1 00	I VBO LA.5 R 5 1.2 II Review Nonfiction Text Features and complete Nonfiction Text Feature Scavenger Hunt (Wilkerson) III Ask ?s/Observe	I VBO 5 5 1, 5 5 2 II introduce spelling words in small groups Model and sort and have students record III Observe	1 Guided Reading 2 Read About 3 Reading – North V South 4 Writing – Finding Info in a Newspaper 5 Language Arts – Main Idea
Tuesday	PE 8 30-9 15 No Kirsten Today	I LA.5 R 5.1 II Reading comprehension pre assessment "Tower to the Moon" (open response) and Reading SOL (multiple choice) Then, students will complete the flipchart by distinguishing the main idea of Nonfiction and Fiction texts III Collect and check (diagnostic & formative)/Ask ?s	I VBO 5 5 1, 5 5 2 II Students will work with a partner to complete sort and check each other's work III Observe	1 Guided Reading 2 Read About 3 Reading – North V South 4 Writing – Finding Info in a Newspaper 5 Language Arts – Main Idea
Wednesday	Kirsten	I LA.5 R 5 3.8, LA.5 R.5 1.2 II Finish pre-assessments from yesterday Then use Nonfiction Text (Field Trip Info ) to Insert Text Features (Roth) III Ask ?s/ Observe	I VBO 5 5 1, 5 5 2 II Students will speed sort their words with a partner and record sort in notebook III Observe	1 Guided Reading 2 Read About 3 Reading – North V South 4 Writing – Finding Info in a Newspaper 5 Language Arts – Main Idea
Thursday	PE/PLC Meeting 8 30 9 15  Library 9 20-10 50 (AM) 12 45-1 15 (PM)  Kirsten 9 15-10 00 12 15-1 00	Library Language Arts Lesson  I LA 5 R 5 3.8, LA 5 R.5 3.9 II Complete shared reading of various simple passages about whales to determine the important information within the text and overall main idea Also, complete extended activity in creating a book about whales from their work. III Ask ?s/Observe	I VBO 5 5 1, 5 5 2 II. Using this week's words, students will complete word study game with their partner III Observe	1 Guided Reading 2 Read About 3 Reading – North V South 4 Writing – Finding Info in a Newspaper 5 Language Arts – Main Idea
Friday	PE 8 30-9 15  Art 1 1 45	Reading Test (Sorting Main Idea)	Spelling Test	1 Guided Reading 2 Read About 3 Reading – North V South 4 Writing – Finding Info in a Newspaper 5 Language Arts – Main Idea

Kathie

Component	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	<p>Info-Pairs 7B Playground Polygons</p> <p>Good readers often change their minds and make new predictions as they read.</p>	<p>Info-Pairs 7A&amp;B Reflection</p> <p>Good readers compare and contrast information to gain a better understanding of what they read.</p>	<p>Info-Pairs 8A Horses on Patrol!</p> <p>Good readers think about what they already know about a topic before reading to help them form questions that will help them better understand what they read.</p>	<p>Info-Pairs 8B The Royal Canadian Mounted Police</p> <p>Good readers pay attention to what they already know about a topic before reading to help them form questions that will help them better understand what they read.</p>	<p>Info-Pairs 8A&amp;B Reflection</p> <p>Good readers link information (compare and contrast) to gain a better understanding of what they read.</p>
	<p>Before we read, let's scan the card to find the topic and the features.</p> <p>Let's read the title together</p> <p><b>Predict</b> Let's read to find out</p>	<p>(distribute cards) Think about the text features</p> <p><b>HLT</b> rdy Now let's compare &amp; contrast</p>	<p>(distribute cards) Read the title. Let's scan the card and look at the photo</p> <p>Good!</p> <p><b>*Write questions on sticky notes to talk about later*</b></p>	<p>(distribute cards) Read the title. Let's scan the card</p> <p>(Police officers in Canada, called Mounties)</p>	<p>Let's think about what we've learned (distribute cards)</p> <p>(say what is most important in one sentence)</p> <p><b>Synthesizing organizer</b></p>
	<p>As you read stop once in awhile and ask yourself if your prediction is correct</p> <p>(encourage students to adjust predictions)</p>	<p>Praise specifics</p>	<p>Now let's read to find answer to some of our questions</p>	<p>Often information in articles is given in a certain sequence</p> <p>As you read pay attention to the sequence</p>	<p>Praise specifics When you read articles on the same topic - linking information is important</p>
	<p><b>HLT DISCUSS</b> Restate focus encourage students to apply it to future readings.</p>	<p>Let's talk about what we learned</p> <p><b>Making Text-to-Text Connections</b></p>	<p>Thinking about what you already know about a topic allows you come up with questions that help you better understand what you read.</p>	<p>Let's talk about the sequence of events in this article</p> <p>Restate focus Good readers pay attention to sequence to better understand how and when things happen</p>	<p>Let's talk about what we learned</p> <p><b>DISCUSS</b></p>

\* THILL \*

Sample Lesson Plan Coding

Appendix H

Observation 1-1

TIME/GRADE TEACHER	PACING GUIDE (PG)/ COMPREHENSION SKILL (CS)/SOL #	ESSENTIAL SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE
7:40 - 10:30 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ██████-M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Visualizing SOL 3.5b(B)	M - Whole group activities using the book, "The Babe and I," for visualizing and summarizing. T-TSW read "Michael Jordan" and complete graphic organizer to discuss summarizing. TSW answer practice SOL questions. <i>video</i> W-TSW read "Clara Barton," and complete Links activity to practice visualizing/summarizing. TSW answer practice SOL questions. <i>link</i> Th - TSW read "Crayon Story" and complete the "Really Reading" activity to summarize story. TSW answer practice SOL questions. F - Common assessment on summarizing non-fiction using "Pocahontas" and "Gold Fever" stories.
10:30 - 11:45		Planning/Lunch
11:45 - 12:55 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████-M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Functional Text SOL 3.4a (A2-5), 3.4b (B1-3), 4.5a(D)	M - Whole group activity on PB with a recipe where TSW notice the page and interact with the text. TSW complete the functional text, "President's Day All Day Skate"/some whole group and some in a guided group setting. <i>SOL</i> T-TSW work with the packet, "The Path to SOL success" as a whole group. TSW work in a guided group setting with the calendar activity. W - TSW work with the functional text, "Go Carts Plus" in a whole group setting. TSW work in a small guided group completing the "Lumberjacks" functional text Th - Common assessment of functional text, using the passage, "Mammal Model."
1:00 - 2:00 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade ██████-M-Th	PG: Week 5 CS: Personal Narrative SOL 3.10a,b; 5.8b,d, e, f; 5.9a-h	M-Th - work with students in writing activities in preparation for the writing SOL in March.


Anything Special: Ms. Leeper will be here M-Th



Connie

<p><b>Instructional Activities:</b></p> <p><b>Pre-Reading - "Book Bits"</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students read selected short passages from beginning middle and end of the text. They write their thoughts and ideas about each passage, then share their ideas with another. Individually, they consider the book as a whole and write what they think it will be about, predictions, etc. Share whole group.</li> </ol> <p><b>During Reading</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizer for factual information, vocabulary, brief summary of each chapter, and personal reflection.</li> <li>Group discussions following each part of text.</li> <li>Self-selected research on topics introduced in text.</li> <li>Character Analysis (Harriet Tubman).</li> </ol> <p><b>Post-Reading - Socratic Seminar</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the reading of the novel, <i>Freedom Train, the Story of Harriet Tubman</i> the students will engage in a Socratic seminar.</li> <li>Students will bring their texts and seminar questions (4) with them to class.</li> <li>The rules for discussion will be reviewed from the poster. Student recorders will volunteer to be watching the discussion and taking notes. Inside and outside circles will be formed depending on who answered which question.</li> <li>The teacher will ask a child to share one question and begin the discussion. Students will continue the discussion on their own. Outside circle people will observe the discussion.</li> <li>Questions to be used for discussion (given to students ahead of time so that they can prepare notes for responding to two of them): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>David Walker, in his "Appeal," wrote, "Are we men? I ask you. Are we MEN? America is more our country than it is the whites—we have enriched it with our blood and tears. The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears." Do you agree or disagree with his thoughts? Why?</li> <li>What is the significance of the words on the Liberty Bell "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof?" Is it happening in America at this time? Why, or why not?</li> <li>How did Harriet's actions differ from those of Nat Turner and John Brown? (p 33-35 p 141-147)</li> <li>How do the ethical issues of slavery influence the perspectives of the different groups of people at this time?</li> </ul> </li> <li>(15 min. before the conclusion of class) The student recorders will share what they noticed about the discussion. Were there "hogs" and "logs"? Was body language of everyone appropriate? Were students on task and listening/speaking in a civil manner? Did everyone participate who wanted to? Were quieter people "invited in" to the discussion? Were people well-prepared to speak on the questions? What can we do to make our next Socratic more effective?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Differentiation Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students grouped by reading levels</li> <li>Pacing, opportunity to read alone or with partner</li> <li>(Socratic) Student choice of the questions for which to prepare (given 4, prepare for 2)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizer scored for each part (4)</li> <li>Rubric scoring of the question notes for Socratic Seminar</li> <li>Quizzes (open-book) on each part (4 total)</li> <li>Teacher observation of the discussion (sometimes recorded or video-taped)</li> </ul>

Connie

<i>Learning Plan</i>	
	
Grade: 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Novel Study - <i>Freedom Train</i>	Unit: 3 - Opposing Forces
<b>Lesson Overview</b>	
<p><b>Enduring Understandings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values and beliefs change over time.</li> <li>- Individuals create change when they stand in opposition to the beliefs and values of a society.</li> <li>- Freedom is never free; it is achieved through struggle and carries responsibilities.</li> <li>- Conflict brings about change.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Essential Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do individuals create change when they stand in opposition to the beliefs and values of a society?</li> <li>- Is freedom ever free?</li> <li>- What are the responsibilities of freedom?</li> <li>- How does conflict bring about change?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Language Arts Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. 5.1.9 - Ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>B. 5.3.3 - Compare the feelings, traits, and motives of the characters and support with text references (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>C. 5.3.4 - Describe the relationship between characters (SOL 5.5)</li> <li>D. 5.3.7 - Summarize a reading selection (SOL 5.7)</li> <li>E. 5.3.8 - Skim text to locate information to justify opinions, predictions, &amp; conclusions</li> <li>F. 5.3.11 - Support conclusions and inferences with information from text (SOL 5.5, 5.6)</li> <li>G. 5.6.2 - Write daily using a variety of tools and formats (SOL 5.7, 5.8)</li> <li>H. 5.7.1 - Use complete and varied sentences, avoiding run-ons and fragments (SOL 5.9)</li> <li>I. 5.7.5 - Use appropriate punctuation (SOL 5.9)</li> <li>J. 5.7.6 - Indent the beginning of a paragraph</li> <li>K. 5.7.7 - Write legibly and neatly</li> <li>L. 5.8.1 - Participate in class lessons and class discussions (SOL 5.1)</li> </ul>	

~~Missy~~ Missy

March 17

Objective: Students will use a variety of reading comprehension strategies to gain meaning from print. (Nonfiction text)

- Identify main idea and supporting details
1. Students write a category for a group of related items/objects.  
Discuss.
  2. Review main idea (big idea).
  3. Circle key words within small passages and write them in the "words connected to the topic" section on the flipchart.
  4. Discuss responses as the lesson progresses.
  5. Students work independently reading passages about whales. They circle the key words in each small passage, and create their own main idea for each.
  6. When students finish, they will create a flipbook about whales, with pages that they have entitled, adding whale illustrations.

explicit  
instruction

Discussion  
HL

Missy

Group 2

Week of: 3/14 - 3/18

- INTRODUCE**  
Strategies:
- Relate previous experiences to the topic (5.6.1)
  - Infer the meaning of a word by using context clues (5.5.9)
  - Make, confirm, and revise predictions while previewing and reading a text (5.6.7)
  - Ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading (5.6.8)
  - Support conclusions and inferences with information from text (5.6.20)

- Skills:**
- Compare the plots of stories (5.6.12)
  - Identify the conflict of a story and explain how it is resolved (5.6.22)
  - Identify and justify the theme of a selection (5.6.21)
  - Compare settings and the ways authors inform the reader about the setting (5.6.10)
  - Describe the relationships between characters (5.6.11)
  - Explain ways in which the author informs the reader about the characters (5.6.13)
  - Differentiate between selections written in the first and third person (5.6.26)
  - Compare the feelings, traits, and motives of characters (5.6.14)
  - Explain the author's purpose and support with text references (5.6.24)
  - Differentiate among narrative, descriptive, explanatory, and persuasive selections (5.6.24)
  - Describe how the author's style and choice of vocabulary contribute to the selection (5.6.27)
  - Recognize a variety of genre (5.7)
  - Recognize the characteristics of historical fiction and identify what is fact and what is fiction (5.7.1)
  - Summarize a reading selection (5.6.28)
  - Retell a story orally and in writing focusing on story elements (5.6.28)
  - Recall using visual words: the occurrence of these or words in a selection (5.6.34)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Title	The Personality Potion				
Chapters/Pages		Intro text and discuss plot	Ch. 1 4-8	Ch.2 9-18	Ch. 3 19-28
Focus of instruction (reading strategies/skill)	HCT	Plot	Predictions	Character Feeling	Making an inference
Text Introduction: Main Idea Statement/Guiding Question(s)	Introduce Word Study Words in Small Groups	Discuss the various parts of plot: Rising action Climax Falling action Problem Solution	Q: What is Martin pretending? Why?  A: He is pretending to be the famous Kit Kane because he is a nerd and wants to be him.	Q: How is Martin feeling about the part? Why?  A: He is feeling deserving, but lacks the self confidence.	Q: What is the purpose of the potion from Uncle Hal?  A: To help him get self confidence for the part
Observations			<i>Mia... good... (handwritten notes)</i>	<i>Pa... (handwritten notes)</i>	<i>Mia... (handwritten notes)</i>

*A*  
*diff*

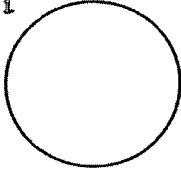
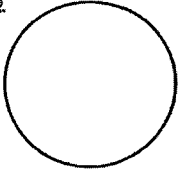
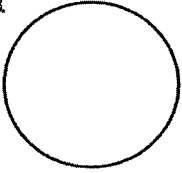
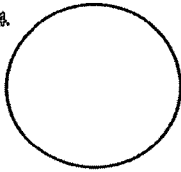
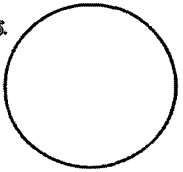
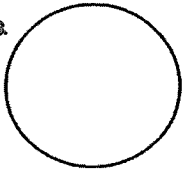
Appendix I

Sample Instructional Handouts

Ashley - Handout 1  
Observation 1

2/28  
Monday  
Activity 2  
whole class

Ashley

Visualizing and Summarizing		
Book Title: <u>Peter I</u>		
1.	2.	3.
		
<hr/>		
4.	5.	6.
		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		

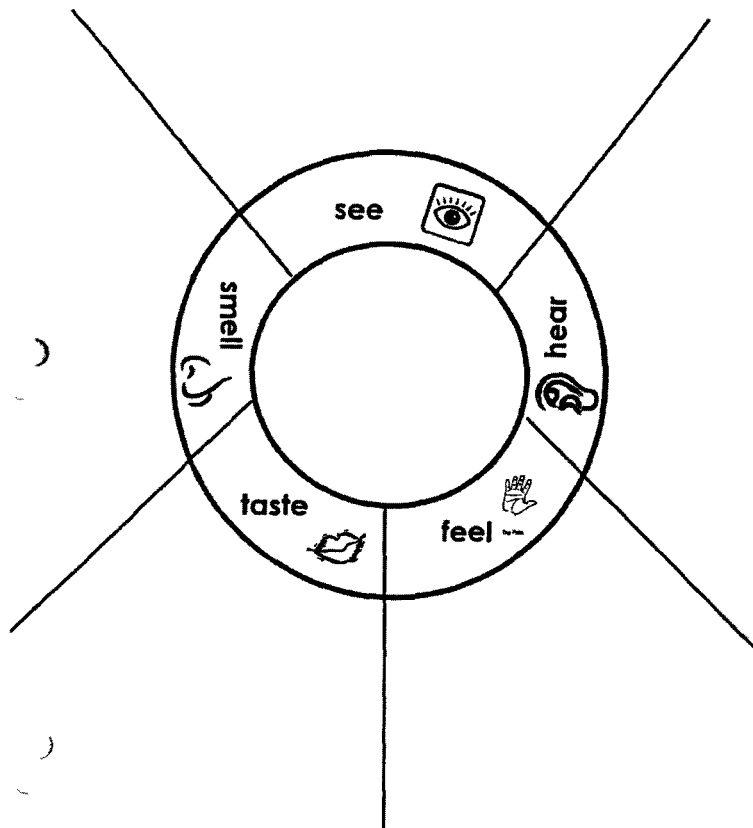
Ashley - Handout 2  
Observation 1

Monday  
2/28  
whole class  
Activity 1

A Ride to the Stars

Ashley

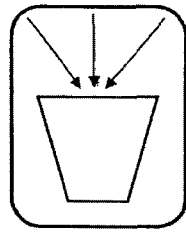
### Visualizing With the Senses



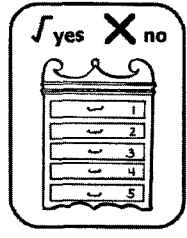
Ashley - Handout 3  
Observation 1

Ashley GRADE 3  
**SOL Secret Strategy Codes**

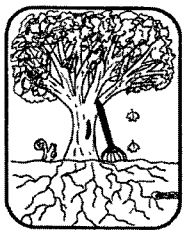
Drawing Conclusions  
DC



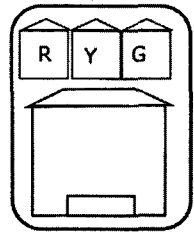
Ask and Answer Questions  
A/A



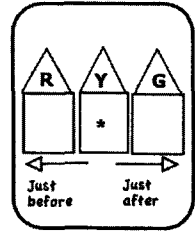
Root Words, Prefixes, Suffixes  
RW



Context Clues  
CC



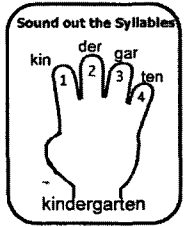
Sequencing  
SEQ



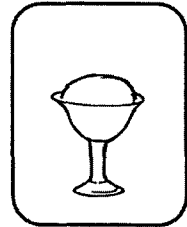
Main Idea/Summarizing  
SUM



Phonics  
PH



Reference Sources  
RS



**My name is**



Connie Handout  
Book Notes

Connie

Name \_\_\_\_\_ P \_\_\_\_\_

**Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman**  
By Dorothy Sterling

**Chapter Notes**  
Part One

Chapter	Characters Introduced and Role	Vocabulary – New, Interesting, Unusual Page Word
1 – Little Girl, Little Girl		
Setting (Time & Place)	Just the Gist	Personal Reflection or Wondering
	Summary Main Idea	

Chapter	Characters Introduced and Role	Vocabulary – New, Interesting, Unusual Page Word
2 – Peck of Trouble		
Setting (Time & Place)	Just the Gist	Personal Reflection or Wondering

Chapter	Characters Introduced and Role	Vocabulary – New, Interesting, Unusual Page Word
3 – School Days		
Setting (Time & Place)	Just the Gist	Personal Reflection or Wondering



Connie 3/30  
 Class 5 4th

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

"Book Bits"

Text	Feelings, Thoughts, Reactions
<p>Smith frowned "After our meeting, the captain agreed to keep Reverend Hunt on board. The captain's mood is of no importance to me. Furthermore," Smith added stiffly, "I don't care what he thinks of my social status or my manners."</p> <p>Calthrop raised his eyebrows "Be careful, John. There are powerful men on these ships. Men who believe their opinions are law." Calthrop paused, his brow wrinkled "If Reverend Hunt were to die during the crossing, it would cast a shadow across the Virginia Company's first venture. Some of the gentle men might blame you for insisting that we keep such a sick man aboard ship."</p> <p>"That's absurd, Stephen!" Smith sputtered "I'm an explorer, not a doctor. And I'm not a fortuneteller, either. I sincerely hope Reverend Hunt recovers his health. But ailing or healthy, the man believes it's his duty to look after the spiritual needs of our colony. I respect Hunt, so I stood up for him. I won't beg forgiveness when I stand up for my friends."</p> <p>Calthrop smiled "Hold your temper, man. I'm just telling you what's afoot. I'm not agreeing with your critics." Calthrop put an arm on Smith's shoulder, and the two men stared out over the waves. "You know my thoughts, John. We have a new world to conquer. We need men like you—men with skill and daring. I just don't want you to anger the captain or the gentlemen."</p>	
<p>Death was never far from Sam's thoughts. Hardly a day passed without another man dying in the fort. Scores of colonists were ill, groaning on filthy blankets inside the tents. Gentlemen died—a lifetime of comfort and plenty in England did not protect them against Virginia's sickness. Common workers also died—a lifetime of hard work in England, building strong muscles and calloused hands, did not protect them against these fevers.</p> <p>John Smith told Sam "This is an ordeal that we must survive to plant a new colony, Sam. Some of us will be strong enough to live through it. Think of it as our seasoning period."</p> <p>Sam nodded, but he didn't really understand what Smith meant. <i>What does it matter?</i> he thought. <i>I'll probably die here in Virginia.</i></p> <p>Nate moved into the tent with Sam and Smith. Whenever Sam looked at his friend's sad, bony face, it reminded Sam of how hopeless their situation was. <i>It will be a miracle if anybody lives through our seasoning to greet the supply ship from England.</i></p>	
<p>"Before we came, did you realize that so many would die?"</p> <p>Smith paused "I suspected as much. Virginia is a test for us, Sam. It tests our courage, our cunning, our determination. Only the strongest and smartest will survive. Before we started this adventure, I realized there were risks. Grave risks. But I was confident that I'd withstand the test. And I chose you as my servant boy because you have what it takes to survive."</p> <p>Sam thought over his master's words. <i>James Brumfield wasn't strong, he thought, or brave. Although he was a clever boy, he had no desire to explore a new world. But others who died weren't timid and sickly like James. Some of them were brave and determined, too. Like Master Calthrop. Sam wondered whether a man's survival really had more to do with luck than skill or strength.</i></p>	

Connie - Book Bits

Name \_\_\_\_\_ HR - P \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions. Read each passage carefully. Then consider it. What does it make you think of? What are your reactions to it? After you've read all three and written your responses, what patterns or themes seem to emerge from the passages? What predictions would you make about the novel based on these passages? Write a brief summary to include the patterns you notice and the predictions that you would make.

HLC  
RCP

<p>She was everlastingly hungry, everlastingly sick of the corn meal and pork, corn meal and pork, which was her daily ration. There were nights when she dreamed of good things to eat, of platters of chicken and brown gravy, of frosted cakes and mounds of candy.</p> <p>Her eyes fastened on the silver sugar bowl at Mistress' elbow. She stared at the bowl, fascinated, while Master and Mistress engaged in angry argument. Slowly she moved toward it, scarcely hearing their shouted words. Now her fingers were only a few inches from a precious lump. Now they were dipping into the bowl. But before they could pick up the sugar, Miss Sarah turned "Harriett!" she screamed. This time she would not be satisfied with a careless cuff. "Make the little slaves mind you or flog them," she always said. Pushing back her chair, she strode to the fireplace, where a rawhide whip hung next to the mantelpiece.</p>	
<p>Harriet's feet flew over the narrow path. In less than an hour she had followed its twists and turns until she could see the highway ahead. After peering out cautiously to make sure that she was alone, she stepped to the signpost at the crossing. With her head held high, she walked into the free state of Pennsylvania. She stood there, wanting to sing, wanting to shout, but no sounds came. A tear glistened on her cheek, and she wiped it away. "I looked at my hands," she later told a friend, "to see if I was the same person now I was free. There was such a glory over everything. The sun came like gold through the trees and over the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven."</p>	
<p>Harriet was everywhere, that first winter, swinging an ax in the frozen woods, swinging a hammer on the cleared land. She cooked for her charges on a crude outdoor stove and washed their clothing in water melted down from blocks of snow. She nursed them, begged for them, prayed for them, fighting to keep them from despair by coaxing and pleading, by scolding and scorn.</p> <p>"You say blacks can't stand this weather? When you were little, who wore the thinnest clothes, you or the white children? Who sat around the schoolhouse stove, and who worked outdoors in the rain and the snow? They had the cold in their hearts. In you, it's not more than skin-deep."</p>	
<p>Summary and Predictions for the book.</p>	

Kate



# Construct Meaning Using Text-to-Text Connections

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Write ideas from Text Card A in the first column. Write ideas from Text Card B in the third column. In the middle, between the ideas, write how they are connected.

Text Card A →	Connection	← Text Card B

Copyright ©2007 Mondo Publishing

In 1732 a person was born named George Washington. He grew up in this country before it was a free country. He played in the wilderness as a boy, and when he grew up he was a leader in the Army that made America free. People thought he was brave, honest, and smart. They asked him to be the first President of the United States. Washington was not sure if he should take the job of president at first. He knew it was a hard job. However, Washington loved the new United States of America, and so he did become the first President of the United States on April 30, 1789. He was president for eight years, from 1789 until 1797. He served our country well.

3/17 whole class instruction  
 Missy Main Idea

**Directions:** Write the category for each of the groups of words below.

_____ basketball hockey tennis football	_____ soccer ball tennis racket bat glove	_____ rose daisy buttercup carnation	_____ French Spanish English Swahili
_____ hot dog hamburger steak	_____ Ford GMC Chevy Lexus	_____ nails saw hammer ruler	_____ house hospital school church
_____ Richmond New York City Dallas Los Angeles	_____ Maine Florida Oregon Utah	_____ oak maple cherry pine	_____ dog cat parakeet hamster

3/24 Thu  
Obs 5  
Miss 1  
The Blue Whale Pg 4

Blue whales are the largest animals on the planet. An average blue whale grows to a length of 100 feet and can weigh up to 260,000 pounds. That's about the weight of 10 school buses! (A blue whale's heart alone can weigh about 2,000 pounds, that's the weight of a small car.)

The world's largest animals eat some of the world's smallest animals, called krill (tiny shrimp-like crustaceans). A blue whale can eat up to 8,000 pounds of krill in one day! Blue whales also have the world's largest babies. Newborns can weigh 16,000 pounds and be 23 feet long. They can drink up to 160 gallons of milk per day. Blue whales are endangered. There are only an estimated 350 alive today!

#### The Kittiw's Hog-Nosed Bat Pg 6

This teeny tiny mammal averages only about 1 inch in length and weighs only about as much as a dime. Full-grown, its body is no bigger than a bumblebee!

Kittiw's hog-nosed bats are called microbats. Most microbats have small eyes and very large ears. Like all bats, they use a special sense called echolocation to find food and navigate as they fly. When bats echolocate, they bounce sound waves off objects and listen to the returning sound waves.

#### The Cheetah Pg 8

The fastest cheetahs have been clocked running more than 70 miles per hour. What's more, they can maintain their high speed for about 500 yards at a time. Like a fine sports car, a cheetah can go from 0 to 60 mph in about 3 seconds.

Cheetahs are excellent hunters. Unlike other cats, they chase down prey instead of ambushing and pouncing. Their sharp claws do not retract (move in and out) the way other cats' claws do. Sadly, cheetahs have been hunted to near extinction by humans. Today, they are found only in parts of Southern Africa.

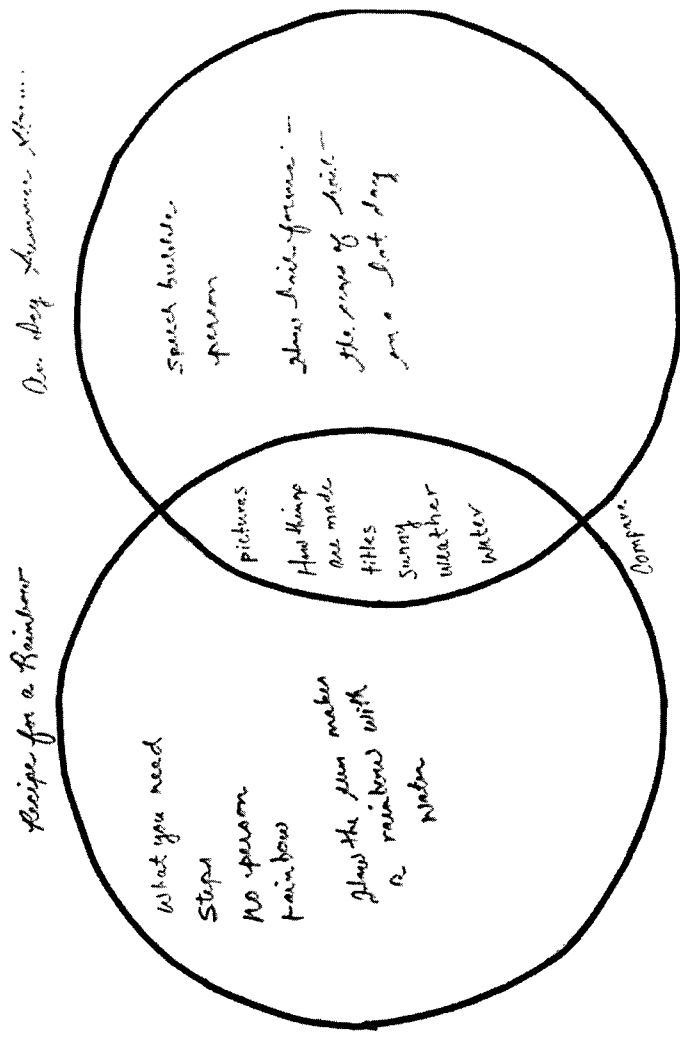
#### The Three-Toed Sloth Pg 10

On land, the average sloth will crawl along at about 0.7 miles per hour. At that rate, it would take nearly 15 hours to travel 1 mile.

Three-toed sloths are found mostly in the rain forests of South America. High up in trees, they spend their lives hanging upside down. They eat, sleep, and even give birth upside down! They move so little, and so slowly, that algae actually grows on their fur! In a green rain forest, this camouflages them well.

Appendix J

Student Work Samples



Katie



## Construct Meaning Using Text-to-Text Connections

Name: Arianna Date: 3/30/11

Write ideas from Text Card A in the first column. Write ideas from Text Card B in the third column. In the middle, between the ideas, write how they are connected.

Text Card A →	Connection	← Text Card B
Tipis are not by "s.	diff erent	Sox is used are not easy to move.
Tipis are not out of animal skins.	diff eren	Sox is used are made of animal skins.
Tipis are not out of animal skins.	both	Sox is used are made of animal skins.
Tipis are not out of animal skins.	both	Sox is used are made of animal skins.

Copyright ©2007 Mondo Publishing



Appendix K

Sample Teacher Notes

Main Idea Statement/Guiding Question(s)	Introduce Word Study Words in Small Groups	think Catherine's nervous to talk to Jason? A: She's not sure exactly how to interact with him since he's not verbal.	thinks things are looking up... A: Answers vary. <i>Silene + Delphona were asked to leave the group</i>	feels about David? Why? A: She feels like he's always causing trouble in her life making her resentful.	about speech? Why or why not? A: No, he really just wants to see Catherine.
Observations		<i>Jaylen - excellent reading. Jason - nice expression</i>	<i>Silene was confused by writing in parenthesis. Said it didn't make sense. Nigam and expression a. diddy</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>

Observations	<i>discuss</i>	<i>Jaylen no expression Dya - nice reading</i>	<i>Jason - reading quickly. He's a simple. Cite words</i>	<i>Jaylen didn't seem to be reading but Absatzes Respond Appro. keep up this</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>
--------------	----------------	--	---	--	---

Observations	<i>orchard discussed this word fluency chance &amp; Negway needs confidence in word attack</i>	<i>soldier. DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>	<i>DK says Dya needs to add expression. Jaylen able to read nicely text</i>
--------------	--	--	---	---	---



he

Winnings

Andrew's  $\frac{1}{2}$  of  $w$   
Boris  $\frac{1}{2}k$   
 $\frac{1}{2}w >$

7000

1000 1000

1000 1000

1000 1000

1000 - 1000 =

update

1000 1000  
1000 =

Sum  
talk about variance  
+ dense  
1000 1000  
1000 1000  
1000 1000  
1000 1000  
1000 1000

2)  
1000 1000  
1000 1000  
1000 1000  
1000 1000

## Appendix L

## Interview Open Coding Samples

Connie  
Interview 2  
4/14/11

**How does formative assessment inform your reading comprehension teaching practices?**

Well I think a lot of informal assessing can be done. Even having assessing	informal
children read those small passages, where did you see that in the text and what are you talking about and reread that word for me gives you a quick look at how they're reading and what they might be doing incorrectly or the miscues they're making telling you what you need to do to help them be more successful. So I think help	small passages reread quick look miscues assessing to
the informal is every bit as valuable and possibly more valuable then formal assessments. And I think a lot of what should be assessment	more valuable formal
formative assessment should be informal because it should inform the teacher's instruction and not be so much about the instruct	need more inform tchr
child and their progress or grading them or something.	not grading

It's more about the teaching and what needs to be done. inform tchr  
instruct

**Can you think of an example in any of the observations that I participated in where you were teaching and in the course of the teaching you assessed a student and you decided that you needed to do something about something that you noticed?**

The 5th graders when some of them read like just doing vocabulary assessing  
vocabulary

in a sentence. There were words that were mispronounced or mis-said. assessing  
vocabulary

And that let me know that they need more help with decoding, decoding  
instruction

specifically maybe with chunking larger words and possibly using chunking  
instruction

context clues that might depend on the word. Sometimes a context clues  
context might, if they had been doing that better, they might have assessing  
context

figured out the word before they misspoke it. That's mainly, I think, assessing  
context

what I might have noticed when you were here. assessing  
context

**To what extent can teachers impact reading comprehension?**

Well I certainly hope that we can help them a great deal. I teacher impact  
large

think it's more than teaching strategies. I think it involves trying	more than strat
to get across the pleasure of reading, the joy of reading. And I	reading
pleasure	
think helping them focus on writer's craft, figurative language	writer's craft
and descriptive language and seeing how the sensory imagery	fig lang/desc
lang	
seeing how all of that really brings the story to life for them ummm	all bring life to
story	
can help them comprehend the text better. They can focus,	helps w compr
they can think about what senses are being involved here and why.	sensory
imagery	
Why would it be important that smell, what they're describing?	helps w compr
I think that helps them with the comprehension.	helps w compr
<b>So you think that teachers have a big impact on</b>	
I would say yes. And I think once the child is reading well,	tchr impact
large	
they're using strategies, but when you call their attention to it,	metacognition
it reinforces it and it also helps if maybe they're hearing it.	metacognition
Maybe it's not a strategy they use a lot but they hear a strategy	metacognition
that so and so used it, or see how that was used. It might become	metacognition
something that they can also put in their toolbox for a future time.	metacognition

**So you might point out to them when you see a strategy used if you see a student is having difficulty you might point out okay let's go back and reread and see if we can figure this out?**

Yes. Or even ummm when they do something well or they do strengths	focus on
if they've made an inference especially, because they don't always understand that. Then I always, I like to celebrate that because I think students	inferencing celebrate
it is sort of a higher level thing and you have to help them see well you thinking	higher level
took what you know and what was in the text and you put them together to come to that conclusion. Ummm you could call it drawing conclusions kind of or making an inference. So I think as you do that and help them see that they think they're reading, you know I'm reading, but when you start showing this to them, when you make that inference or ummm you were wondering what was happening next. So you're predicting or anticipating and good readers do that. That means they're engaged and they're actively involved in the text.	think aloud think aloud metacognition metacognition metacognition metacognition metacognition engagement engagement

**So you try to bring that metacognitive piece in to them? And make them more aware of their thinking?**

Very definitely. Yeah. I think that's critical.

**How does instructional reading level factor into your reading comprehension instruction?**

In terms of. Well most of children I see are at about the same level. IRL

Their instructional reading level is pretty much the same. And I work IRL

with what I consider readers, in that they're not still at the decoding level IRL

they're not really at decoding. It's only the new words that cause vocabulary

them difficulty. I'm trying to think about my third graders. Those are vocabulary

the ones making that jump from learning to read to reading to learn. IRL

**I'm thinking about ummm is the whole grade level that's reading the initial Jamestown book.**

No, the whole class is.

**Okay. And is the whole class at the same instructional reading level?**

No.

**So what was the decision in deciding that everybody would read that book?**

The value of the text. choosing texts

**So the content?**

Yes, it so strongly supports the 4th grade Va history objectives. content

And we're doing it with help. I have the 9 children who are reading scaffolding

at a slightly lower level. But, as you probably saw, some of them scaffolding

choose to read together or with a partner or I'll read with them if partner

reading

they want. And we go over a lot of the vocabulary. And of course vocabulary

work



we talk about the main ideas of the chapters so that we're making sure they're getting the meaning from it. So they're working more, they're working at more of an instructional level than maybe the level

main ideas  
 assessing  
 instructional

others are. They may be more independently working in their classroom while we're doing it in a more teacher help.

small group  
 scaffolding

**So you're providing more support?**

Yes. Definitely. With the vocabulary and with the understanding of what's going on. Especially ummm some of the events that might, that they might not understand at first. That they might not have any prior knowledge of. Somebody today asked about gallows.

scaffolding  
 scaffolding  
 scaffolding  
 vocabulary

What is that? What does that mean? So just ummm just available availability

teacher

to give them whatever it is that they need so that they can get availability

teacher

through the text. They seem to be doing pretty well, even the ones that really that I feel struggle. They're doing pretty well with the reading.

positive  
 positive

**To me in my observations, they seem to have been engaged with the reading. They found it interesting.**

Yes. And they still enjoy it. They're very interested. And I think it is a very captivating text. It's a young boy, the protagonist. He's 13. He's a few years older than they are. They can relate to that. They've been to Jamestown. They know how close it is. They know they first

engaged  
 connections  
 connections  
 connections

landed at Cape Henry, just a few miles down the road. So they are connections  
 very interested and of course the whole element of adventure and engaged  
 encountering the "savage" Indians just fascinates. engaged  
 They're pretty much into it. engaged

**That's half the battle isn't it? Making sure that you pick a text that you think will somehow enthrall them, that they'll be interested and want to keep reading from chapter to chapter.**

And I think with the literature circle roles adds to that. I'm hoping, literature  
 circle roles  
 because I don't believe that if there are 9 roles by the 9th week they've student choice  
 done them all. I still think there should be an element there that you're student choice  
 choosing the ones you really want to do. And it doesn't mean you're student choice  
 going to eventually do all of them. So I'm hoping that after we've student choice  
 done about four that we can switch to something else. I'd like to limit LC  
 develop kind of a different format for what they do with the rest new format  
 of the text. new format

**So not do the roles of the literature circle but do something else? Have you thought about what that might be?**

Kind of like what we do with 5th grade. They have the organizer organizer  
 for the vocabulary, and the gist, any characters that text had many vocabulary,  
 gist, char  
 characters. Most of them were historic figures or important for them characters  
 to at least recognize the names. But I think that, and having them characters

sticky note things in the text, and then when you're just going	sticky notes
through a chapter asking them what they noticed, what did you think,	discussion
what did you mark? What are your thoughts about the chapter? Kind	discussion
of like. I think we have to be careful using the literature circle role sheets.	limit LC
It doesn't become more about the writing and for many of these	not too much
writing	
children that is not a strength anyway. And I just think in every	not too much
writing	
chapter of a book I'm reading if I had to write something about it,	not too much
writing	
it would kill the whole joy of reading. And I don't want that to happen.	kill reading
pleasure	
So I think if they do a few roles and they felt good about it,	limit LC
they got to choose the top four roles, you know, that they wanted	limit LC
then it's time to take it in a different direction before it gets to be	limit LC
drudgery. I think too we have to be careful about having too many	limit LC
responses that are written or written to an essay type degree. Jot notes.	not too much
writing	
I think sometimes it works well, but then I think others are you	not too much
writing	
know just really it becomes more about the writing. So...	not too much
writing	

**So you're always thinking and assessing not just the kids but also what's going on in the classroom, what you're doing and you can change it up? If you think that there's a potential for it to become boring or mundane how can you spice it up?**

Yes. Exactly. I think that our goal as teachers is that every child student success

meets with success. And to do that you've got to find the ways to student success

each child or to bring the material to them in a way that they can differentiation

enjoy. So I do think variety is good. And I think choice as many student choice

ways as possible for the child because they certainly take a lot more student choice

ownership if they have choice than if you just say do this. So I think student choice

that's important. student choice

**To what extent does flexibility factor into your reading comprehension instruction?**

Ummm a great deal. It depends on the children, it depends on the group. flexibility

And ummm I think you totally have to keep thinking about how can it assessing yourself

be better and how can it be done differently that might make it. Or if assessing yourself

this child's not engaging, like the one you saw in fifth grade, what assessing yourself

can be done to help him? Or what's going on that he isn't engaging? assessing students

What's causing the behavior? What's causing the disinterest or students assessing

whatever it is. So I think it's... students assessing

**So being willing to try new things when something isn't working?**

Absolutely. Yeah, I think teaching is a continual refinement or refinement continual

attempt to refine. The problem is different groups of kids need refinement continual

different things so when you think you've hit on something, continual refinement

it may not work with that next group or some of that group or continual refinement

whatever. So it's always, it's just ongoing. A willingness to say continual refinement

okay what do we do for that child. What can I do to help him? assessing

And sometimes even talking with the child about it is helpful. talking with student

You know just you don't seem very interested in this. Can you tell talking with student

me a little bit about why? Or what's going on? You're not getting talking with student

much done here. What 's the problem? How can I help you? talking with student

Sometimes I think when the teacher says how can I help you talking with student

that in itself helps the child. And then it does put the burden on sharing insights

the child too, to come up with a solution. Finally, they might say, sharing insights

I don't have time to read at night. I'm too busy or it's too noisy sharing insights

or I just don't seem to be able to work it in. So then you can find sharing insights

out that you need to be doing other things or planning time during co-solutions

the day when they can get more time to read. I think it's just that co-solutions  
 constant ongoing what can be done to make it better. And you can't assessing  
 instruction  
 be afraid when you have a horrible day. One day we had a catastrophic assessing  
 instruction  
 day, but you just have to stop and say okay, why was it that way and assessing  
 instruction

how can we change it. And I think the next day went a lot better continual refinement  
 just by regrouping kids and restructuring a little bit. They get a continual refinement  
 little too comfortable with certain people and they get a little off continual refinement  
 task. You just kind of rein them back in, put them with different kids, continual  
 refinement  
 and then they realize okay we were off task and we need to do something else. continual  
 refinement

**Once again, the assessment comes into play?**

Yes, yes.

**Why did you choose to do literature circles with this group? How will this help with comprehension for your students?**

I really didn't. That's what the teacher was doing so... literature  
 circles

I really didn't have the say. She just said that's what she teacher  
 directed

wanted to do this time. And that's what the 4th grade teachers	teacher
directed	
were going to be doing. But like I said, that was the one today that	teacher
directed	
I was talking to, she's not thrilled about it. She's thinking about	continual
refinement	
other way. And so we had talked earlier about either doing something	continual
refinement	
maybe with questions that are more broad and relate more to the	continual
refinement	
content that are like the enduring understandings or the essential	continual
refinement	
questions really for that for the content piece. And using them in	questioning
small groups and letting maybe each child in the group choose one	discussion
to focus on and take notes on for that part of the reading. Maybe	discussion
doing something with reading logs with responses. Just put	jotting notes
again more jotting than a formal paragraph because I find they	jotting notes
do their best writing after they've discussed not when they're	transacting stu
to stu	
just writing what they think, but what they've heard from the	transacting stu
to stu	
group or a small group. It doesn't have to be the whole class.	transacting stu
to stu	

But that's when you have the dialogue of ideas. That's when	transacting stu
to stu	
you can see or hear other points of view and it happens	transacting stu
to stu	
that you say, "Oh, I didn't think of it that way." I mean we do	transacting stu
to stu	
that all the time as adults and I think the kids need to have that	transacting stu
to stu	
opportunity too. And ummm you know sometimes before	transacting stu
to stu	
discussion I'll have them write what they think - jot notes.	jot notes
And then after discussion they'll be a question: Did you change	higher level
question	
your mind? Did you change your opinion? Was anything said	higher level
question	
that caused you to feel differently? Or did you hear an idea that	higher level
question	
you hadn't considered before? And I think it's good for them to	higher level
question	
see that they can hear from others or rethink things from	transacting stu
to stu	
when someone else says. So...	transacting stu
to stu	



**How do you go about choosing books or reading materials for your group? Is it based on reading level, content, interest, or what exactly?**

Most of what I do is by reading level. But then it ties to content	IRL
since we do a lot with historical fiction. And ummm most of the	historical
fiction	
children read pretty well independently in terms of pleasure	IRL
reading so we haven't felt as much push to do. In the lower grades	IRL
they do more with fiction. They have little book clubs to talk	lower grades
about books. Small groups - read a book and they have	lower grades
discussions. But with the upper grade kids we do more of the	historical
fiction	
historical fiction because it turns out to be a genre they like	historical
fiction	
and they haven't have much of up until 4th grade. And for	historical
fiction	
another it just works in well with the content. There are so many	content related
good books related to colonial times and umm certainly with	content related
Jamestown too. And the difficulties of that period so	content related

**And you think that they do enough independent reading so they're being exposed to other genres as well?**

Most of them. There are a few that don't read a whole lot at home.	independent
reading	

We see a number of gifted children who still want to read nonfiction preference nonfiction

only because they like reading for information. And I know it's preference nonfiction

not unusual. I've seen 2nd and 3rd graders who are just on preference nonfiction

nonfiction only other than what they get in school. Usually by preference nonfiction

4th grade they're coming around. They hear the other children fiction 4th grade

talk about Harry Potter and they decide they want to read it too. peer influence

They're finally willing to give up just reading for information. peer influence

But up til 3rd grade it can be really strong in some children. nonfiction

preference

I think mostly by 4th and 5th they are reading fiction pieces independent

reading

on their own. Like I say historical fiction isn't a genre that they've independent

reading

usually delved into. Most of them really love it. engaging

**To what extent does discussion affect reading comprehension?**

Well, kind of like I said, I think it gives them a lot of other ideas. transaction

And I think sometimes that have that moment when they say, transaction

"Oh, is that what it meant?" clarifying

### A clarifying moment?

Yes. Oh, I didn't realize that. And they hadn't stopped to ask about it.	clarifying
They just went on. I think discussion is very beneficial. I think	discussion
adults who do book clubs find that often happens with them.	clarifying
Some discussion clarifies. Sometimes they've glossed over it	clarifying
very quickly when they've read it the first time and they've missed	clarifying
that point. Sometimes those moments when you get to the end of	distraction
the page and you think what did I just read? We may go back	distraction
and reread but there are moments when you don't notice it. Then	rereading
when it comes up in the discussion it's Oh, I've never seen that	discussion
part but now it makes sense. So I do think that that's important	transacting
and it's another way we engage with text. It not only thinking	transacting
about it ourselves, it's hearing other people's ideas as well. And	transacting stu
to stu	
everyone's background and perspective bring a different	transacting stu
to stu	
dimension to a text so depending on your experiences of what	transacting stu
to stu	
the author's written it can almost mean totally different things	transacting stu
to stu	
to different people. So I think discussion is a very valuable part	transacting stu
to stu	

of the reading experience.

transacting stu

to stu

## Appendix M

## Interview and Observation Axial Coding Samples

Missy

Interview 1 - Axial Coded Chart

<b>1. What is reading comprehension?</b>	
Reading comprehension is not the actual reading of words it's being able to take what you've read, <b>summarize</b> it into your own words, and to have a nice <b>understanding</b> of what you just read.	RC - summarizing and understanding reading
<b>So reading comprehension is not the actual reading or decoding of words, what it is is you read, you summarize that reading and form a basis for understanding that reading.</b>	<b>Follow-up Summary</b>
Right.	
<b>How do you think that happens?</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
Well, first of all you have to do it <b>on their level</b> , you have to start where they're at. And you have to <b>ask questions</b> and not just general recall questions, but you have to ask questions that would give them, you know, <b>thought provoking questions</b> like, when they've finished reading, we do a lot of, some of my groups, we do literature circles where they're focusing on a specific skill or topic and so they have to take what they have read and apply it. Ummm, sometimes it's just a question and response, sometimes it's an inference, but there's no way they could answer or apply it without <b>understanding</b> what they've read.	I - IRL I - questioning I - higher level questioning TG - understanding
<b>So you start by making sure that whatever it is they're reading, the text is on their level. It includes asking questions, higher level questions, and being able to apply their understanding in some way, and that can take the form of a question response or whatever the different skill is that you're looking for and you tend to do that in literature circle groups.</b>	<b>Follow-up Summary</b>
Well that is one group where I definitely look at a <b>specific skill</b> because a <b>literature circle group</b> , are you familiar, takes from week to week instead of day to day. So those groups are definitely focusing on you know, give me a cause and effect that occurred or looking at some of the unknown words. Yes, they're probably a good enough reader where they can use context clues and understand it, but I want them to <b>think more critically</b> about what they're reading and understanding those words, and you know, being able to <b>relate it to their own</b>	RCP - literature circles RCP - critical thinking RCP - connecting to their lives and the world RCP - deeper into the literature

<p><b>lives, or to the world</b>, or to those kinds of things that are getting them richer instruction, getting them <b>deeper into the literature</b>.</p>	
<p><b>2. How would you define an effective teacher of reading comprehension?</b></p>	
<p>Well, at our level, at a 5th grade level and you have to have some type of assessment to give you baseline data about where they are.</p>	
<p><b>Is that where you begin?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>Yes. Once I have the <b>baseline data</b>, they I know how to <b>formulate their groups</b>. I group the students, I take <b>interest inventories</b> to see the types of text that they might be interested in. I think that good teacher should give them a <b>variety of genres</b> so that they're not just focusing on one specific thing. They need to have <b>students read and respond critically</b> to what they're reading. Get in <b>verbal discussions</b> about what they're reading so that, because everyone's not going to read something the exact same way. You can have you know discussions about what's being read and the <b>broader understanding</b> about how someone interpreted what was read.</p>	<p>A - baseline data A - group formation A - interest inventories I - variety of genres I - read, respond critically D - varying ideas D - broader understanding</p>
<p><b>So, when you say you want them to have verbal discussions, what does that look like?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>In <b>small groups</b> based upon what their <b>reading level</b> is. I group them into smaller groups and then every, most of the groups except for the high-highest group will work in the literature circles but even still we all have <b>discussions</b> at the table where we're reading and we're responding to the text and we're discussing it and we're talking about it what we've read and our <b>understanding of it</b>. That happens in a group of roughly five kids to the teacher. And the literature circle groups we definitely are doing that same thing but we have a leader every week - called the discussion director and they kind of lead our discussion and then we again we talk about the roles and how we understood that text and just like that. It's just a <b>deeper conversation</b>.</p>	<p>SG - IRL D - all of our understandings LC - deeper conversation LC - student led</p>
<p><b>3. Describe practices that students use to help them comprehend reading.</b></p>	
<p>Students I think from their early grades, if there <b>are pictures</b>, they'll look at them. Typically, at our level there aren't. They'll start making <b>predictions</b> about what they're going to read, especially if you've read a chapter the day before you say, "I</p>	<p>RC - context RC - predicting RC - inferencing RC - summarizing</p>

<p>think that this is going to happen or what have you. They'll <b>make inferences</b> based on what they've read. Students will take what they know to make inferences. They'll ask themselves questions while they're reading like, "Why does the author say this or do this?" They're going <b>to summarize</b> obviously whether it be a small group discussion summary or response to questions, or what have you, they're still going to summarize what they've read. And then again <b>evaluate</b> what you're doing. You're going to have that <b>thought-provoking conversation</b> with one another and evaluate what the <b>author has done</b>, what you have done and <b>talk about the text critically</b>.</p>	<p>RC - evaluate D - thought-provoking conversation D - author's ideas D - talk critically about text</p>
<p><b>4. So, some of the practices that students use to comprehend reading, when they're younger they use the pictures in the picture books. They make predictions, inferences, ask questions, summarize as they're reading. How would you describe a reader who is struggling to comprehend text?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question/Summary</b></p>
<p>Ummm, well on a 5th grade level, what I typically will see are students who ummm, will <b>make up words</b> if they come to unknown words, they'll make them up. They will, if they're reading aloud to me at that particular time which we do, with the strugglers, if they're reading aloud to me they will <b>mumble</b> over the word, they will look at me and ask if prompted they will decode those words to try to understand. Ummm, you know I see struggling readers oftentimes will try to look like they're typical peers. For example, when they go to the library they often will not select text that is appropriate for them. They will try to select a book that their friends can read and ummm, they don't read it because they can't. They are frustrated about responding to text if they're asked questions about the text they can feel frustrated about it if they didn't understand what they've read and they're having <b>comprehension issues</b> with whatever.</p>	<p>SR - makes up words SR - mumble SR - comprehension issues</p>
<p><b>So if they didn't understand something that they had read, and they're having comprehension issues, what would be your plan of attack for that student?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>Typically I'll say, "Let's go back and <b>look at it together</b>." So the student and I will <b>read it together</b> and talk about it together and <b>discuss is together</b>. For example, I had a whole group with the book <i>Sounder</i>. It was on the level of one of my fairly high groups, but the <b>verbiage</b> that's used isn't exactly easy and I</p>	<p>RCP - reread I - scaffolding D - meaning making MS - dialect I - scaffolding - read it</p>

<p>found that the group was struggling to get through it and it's such a <b>great book</b>. I didn't want to lose that opportunity and so <b>we read it together</b>. I would read to them and they would follow along. We would talk about it and we would still have that <b>rich discussion</b>. We didn't quit the text. And so it was to me just as powerful for them to have appreciated that text then for them to have to just push it away and move on. Now, it would have been senseless for me to have expected them to read the book by themselves and respond and have this discussion about a book that they really weren't getting. Because it wouldn't have come out with the same level of meaning for them. So that kind of shows you on a level that I thought they would have done fine, but they just struggled. And I say they, it was the majority, like four out of five. For a lower level kid, again, I would just have them read with me and we'll work through it together and just meet their <b>challenges individually</b>.</p>	<p>together I - scaffolding discussion I - differentiation</p>
<p><b>So when they finished <i>Souder</i>, what did they think of it?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p><b>They loved it.</b> It was interesting because then they would go to the library, public or even the school library and they would still check the book out because they realized that the book had multiple covers and so they were like look here it is again. And I found that they were rereading it on their own because they did appreciate the book but they couldn't have appreciated it again at the same level had we not of worked though it together. But then after it was all over they really enjoyed the book and they saw that it was a good book, but that first time we just kind of struggled through it together.</p>	<p>LA - loved <i>Souder</i></p>
<p><b>Do you think their vocabulary grew based on the book?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>I do because we had dictionaries at our groups and they would <b>look up certain words</b> that they didn't know. They'd talk about the vernacular that was used because it was old African American English and so and then we'd talk about how one of the kids said, "You know my grandma says that word." And we would just talk about how our grammar has improved over time because we've had the opportunity to go to schools and everything.</p>	<p>I - vocabulary growth</p>
<p><b>5. How do teachers help struggling students to improve reading comprehension?</b></p>	
<p>Well, I think what I was saying, you again, you make sure</p>	<p>MS - must be leveled</p>



<p>you're choosing the <b>right text for students</b> and when you see that students are struggling, you can make a decision at that point, do you say to the kid, "This is a text that 's too hard and let's try something different or do you help them work through it?" I think definitely talking to the kids about these kinds of things <b>that they use and they don't realize that they use</b>, going back to those and helping them make <b>predictions</b> using what they already know, helping them make an <b>inference</b>, let's <b>go back into the text</b>, everybody turn to this page and find that information. And the more that you model it and <b>assist them</b> and <b>guide them</b> through it, the more that they can kind of do that on their own and <b>they become more successful</b>.</p>	<p>DM - continue or choose new text RCP - metacognition RCP - predicting RCP - inferencing RCP - rereading I - scaffolding I - facilitator TG - independence</p>
<p><b>Can you expand on that, the idea of modeling?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>So if I have generated a thought-provoking question in a guided reading group about what they're getting ready to read and I find that they're not able to tell me because they didn't understand for some reason, they didn't comprehend what they read then I would say, "Okay, I know that I just read this information, I'm going to turn to page whatever, so everybody let's turn to that page. I know that I found it somewhere on this page, I'm going to start here and then I'd go back through it and just verbally model my thoughts to them and demonstrate what I would be saying in my head to myself. And then that would allow for them to like I said, I would be able to release that and love for them to do the same thing as they have practiced it with me.</p>	<p>TA - demonstrating locating information</p>
<p><b>So you use think aloud for strategy instruction?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>Absolutely.</p>	
<p><b>But first you choose the right book, like you said Sounder. If you find it wasn't right for a number of reasons and you decided that you were going to read it aloud with them and work together on it. Are there other things you might do or is this a practice that you use regularly?</b></p>	<p><b>Follow-up Question</b></p>
<p>If for some reason it's not working, there are times if I see that they're just struggling to get through, they're comprehension is drastically decreased because they're missing every other word then I'll say, "You know what guys lets <b>scrap that book</b> and try something different. Yes, there are times I'll completely scrap a book and move on to the next thing.</p>	<p>DM - scrap the book</p>

<b>6. What are the effective practices that you use during instruction to help struggling readers to comprehend text?</b>	
<p>Again, I always look at <b>data</b>. I always take data from <b>observations</b>, just <b>anecdotal notes</b> that I might take, <b>assessments that they do</b>, I disaggregate them into the types of questions that they were and I might <b>pull out a small group of students</b> while the others are working on something our reading specialist comes in and I share that data with her and she will do pull out for small groups to target some of that. We have <b>read aloud</b>, students that have accommodations on their IEPS and that obviously very helpful. Sometimes you can't pick the text that is on a lower level. For example, I try to infuse a lot of my instruction with some of the <b>social studies or science</b> - content areas and I would <b>buddy them up</b> with someone who is a little stronger reader to help facilitate their reading. I <b>give students tools</b> that would help them. Some students read when you give them some kind of ruler or something to help keep their place while they're reading.</p>	<p>A - always look at the data  A - observations  A - anecdotal notes  A - tests  I - differentiate  MS - content  I - partner reading  I - scaffolding - give them the tools</p>
<b>What kinds of assessments do you use?</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
<p>I use a variety of assessments. But right now we are focusing a lot on open response assessments so we want to see what the student is able to tell us and not just be able to mark a multiple choice so with that I can kind of gather a student's understanding or a general understanding or completely off-base.</p>	<p>A - open response not multiple choice</p>
<b>What assessments do you use at the beginning of the year to form groups?</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
<p>For the small pull out reading groups we use the DRA. I think it's very appropriate. Recently, within the last few years they added the timed component. I think fluency is crucial but it sets some of the kids back because they meet all of the other benchmarks except that, but that's the only part that's sometimes a little unfair.</p>	<p>SG - DRA</p>
<b>Do you think it gives you a good idea of where they are and what you need to be focusing on?</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
<p>I do.</p>	
<b>Why have you chosen these particular practices for use during instruction?</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
<p>I try to focus on research based practices that are proven to be successful for students and that I have had success with in the past.</p>	<p>DM - research based</p>
<b>7. How do you decide which practices to use while</b>	

<b>instructing struggling readers?</b>	
<p>Well I think you have to <b>look at the kid first</b>. You know, you have to see, when you're looking at the practices you have to say, "Is this a kid that works well with a partner?" Whether it be can't get along with anybody or he doesn't do his work, he clowns than that might not be the best option so you have to look at the child first. And then you also have to see what aspect are they struggling in? Sometimes if they're you know we have kids that are on levels of their DRA in their 20s, the curriculum has to be <b>so modified that</b> you just try to do the practices that you see them being successful with. If you try something and it doesn't work out, <b>you try the next thing</b>. You just try to tweak it to see how was that student learning best, <b>what structurally</b> have you seen the best outcome with and then you kind of build on it from there.</p>	<p>I - differentiation individual I - modified curriculum I - trial and error AT - see what works</p>
<p><b>8. Do you use different practices at different times? Please explain.</b></p>	
<p>Yes. It <b>depends on the students and the class</b>. For example, last year, I had more students with IEPs than I had gen ed students so I had a lot of struggling learners in one classroom. It really wasn't effective to buddy them up because there wasn't a buddy at the higher level. It just didn't work. I also had more boys, I had 4 girls and the rest were boys so. I found <b>infusing technology</b> as much as I could was what seemed to keep them <b>engaged</b> and learning and wanting to do more. So, again, it depends on the dynamics of the group and the individual kid as a learner.</p>	<p>I - differentiation SE - technology infusion</p>
<p><b>9. Do you use different practices for different purposes? Please explain.</b></p>	
<p>Yes. Yes. Laughs. Well for reading specifically. See reading and writing it all goes kind of hand in hand. So the things I would use for some kids in a small group reading, that might not work in a word study group for example, because some of them might be a better speller than they are a reader but <b>I know them as a reader</b> when we look at features within text that they still have to be able to decode even though they're on a higher level. Different practices for different purposes would be more determined upon the kind of group that I'm doing the kind of instruction I'm doing and again the kind of learner that the <b>particular children in</b> that group are.</p>	<p>SK - knows them as readers I - differentiation I - learning styles</p>
<p><b>Do you use different practices with different students?</b></p>	

<b>Please explain.</b>	
Yes. Because every child <b>learns differently</b> so I have to make sure that I've reached each kid and each kid, you know, if they're a <b>kinesthetic learner</b> or it just depends, absolutely. Some kids learn differently and learn better in different ways so I'll do come on let's go to the back table and work on this a different way that's the only way I'm going to reach them.	I - differentiation I - learning styles

## Observation Axial Coding Sample

Missy

5<sup>th</sup>

Grade Observation 1

3/15/11

**1:00 – 1:20 -Whole Class Lesson - 19 students – 9 boys and 10 girls inclusion - Main Idea****“Flossie and the Fox” explicit instruction planning**

1. Watch the video. Students are working on **main idea and details**. This is a continuation of a skills that were introduced last week. They should be comfortable with the concepts. They have class recorders and a **graphic organizer** is displayed on the Promethean Board.

After listening to the story, **scaffolding** the students must select the main idea of the story from four selections. Missy reads the four choices aloud to the students **scaffolding** and they select the main idea. It is recorded for display to the class: one student chose A, one student chose B, one student chose D and the rest chose C. **assessing** Missy explains to the students why C is best choice. She will note who the 3 students were that selected the wrong answers and work with them individually **differentiating instruction**.

2. Next the students listen to a nonfiction video on pyramids **scaffolding**. Four statements are displayed. None of the students select A. Several students selected B and Missy asks why students made that selection. One student points out it was only a detail. The whole passage was not about pharaohs. C – Most students were here. The pyramids were built thousands of years ago. Missy **thinks aloud** for the students – longest answer is not always the correct answer. You don't just choose the answer because it's the longest. D- There are many pyramids in Egypt. This is the correct answer. All of the sentences had to do with the many pyramids in Egypt.

Again, Missy will go back and address this skill with students who need additional instruction **differentiating instruction**.

3. They go back to fiction and listen to a short video, “Pete’s a Pizza.” She stops the video to ask, “How does the author make the reading come alive?” **higher level question** She tells them this is done through the words, the descriptive words chosen. Students are making **predictions** about what the ingredients really are that are being used.

**Students are engaged the whole lesson. The texts chosen for the lesson are engaging. She uses videos because the reading level is appropriate for all and the pictures are engaging.**

He was running like the gingerbread man or the Stinky Cheese Man – **connections** by students.

Students must choose the main idea:

Pete was happy again

Pete’s dad tried to make him into pizza to cheer him up.

Pete was in a bad mood

Dad worked the dough.

All students choose the correct answer.

### **1:20 – 2:00 - Center Work and Guided Reading Groups clear plan and expectations**

The students complete worksheets on main ideas and details. They are also working on functional text because they did poorly on a reading test.

Group 3 – Guided Reading with Struggling Readers *Never Wash Your Hair*

This group has never passed a reading SOL test.

Students pick out a marker color and a slate. Books are passed out. They are talking about character traits with the professor.

What is the issue? S. His mother is feeling like things are turning crazy. (A chart with traits and feelings is displayed on the wall for students to refer to **scaffolding** ) His mother is worried, embarrassed. (**The students are making personal connections to text.**)

Let’s look at Ch. 4 – We will read pages 31-38. Here’s your question. How is the plot developing? **higher level questioning** What’s happening? You’re going to describe the characters and the events. She has this written on a sentence strip so that students can refer to it. **setting a purpose for reading**

M. asks a student to read aloud to her. She asks him what an overnight bag is. She says, “I saw the look on your face. What is an overnight bag?” **assessing** He looks confused. She says, “Do you ever spend the night with a friend? Okay. Well, what do you put your clothes in?” **scaffolding** Oh, now I get it. They continue to read together. She stops to **question** and **clarify** and help him to decode difficult words.

She moves on to another student. He has difficulty and is hesitant to read aloud to her. He covers his mouth with his hand. He begins haltingly. She **encourages** him. He gains confidence and reads more loudly and clearly. He stops on a word. “Come on, you’ve got this.” **encouraging** He is correct. “Nice job.” He reads another sentence. Does this make sense? They read it together. “There you go.” **positive** She says to the student when he is finished reading aloud to her, “Stop getting stressed every time I ask you to read out loud. You’re doing just fine.” **assessing**

**(She is very positive with all of the students. She encourages them to use word attack skills and context to decode for meaning.)**

When reading is complete, students address the answers on their slates. While they do this, Missy writes **anecdotal notes** about the students who have read aloud to her. Then the students share their answers with the group.

Missy - How do the scientist people get involved? Ss- There are no scientists. Missy - Okay, everyone open your books. **rereading** Let's go back to page 32. She reads it out loud and asks, "If I had monkeys in my hair would I be like everyone else?" They **discuss** and decide a scientist would be interested in studying this boy with monkeys in his hair.

Each child picks something to share about how the plot and characters are developing. S- More characters are coming into the story and more things are happening. M - "Who is coming into the story?" The student says, "The scientists and the professors are entering the story."

"You guys did a nice job today although I don't think you were all awake." **positive**

## **Group 2 – Struggling Readers on the borderline - 2:00 – 2:20**

### *The Personality Potion*

What is Martin pretending?

Let's look at the front cover and make some **predictions**.

"I think it's about a potion that changes a personality."

"He's going to use a potion to change someone's personality but they don't know it's happening."

"There looks like there's a mean person, maybe a bully, on the cover. Maybe he'll change his personality so he can fit in." **all involved and engaged**

Okay, let's open up your books. We're going to read chapter one – What is Martin pretending and why? **(She sets a purpose for reading.)**

She listens to a student reading aloud. The girl is mostly fluent.

The other students are **engaged** in their reading. One follows along with the student who's reading aloud and others read at their own pace. **choice**

Students say they have **connections** and **predictions**.

Missy asks the reader a question. S- "I forgot why." Missy - "Then what can you do when you've forgotten?" **explicit instruction** S- "I can go back into the book and **reread**." He does this and is able to answer the question that Missy posed to him initially.

A **student** relays her **connection** about her friend who had many large stuffed animals in his bedroom.

A student brings up all the double negatives in an earlier book. Missy – why did the author do that? “Because that’s how some people talk. It’s real.” They talk briefly about dialect adding realism to a story. It’s more authentic when the language is real. **explicit instruction**

They share out about their initial question - What is Martin pretending?

S1 - He’s pretending to be Kit Cane. S2 - He is pretending to be Kit Cane because it was a really interesting book. Missy - Okay, I like books but I don’t pretend to be a character. What’s a character trait that we could use to describe him? S3 – He’s an introvert. S4- He loves to pretend, just like I do Missy – So you’re making a **personal connection metacognition** to the character. You both like to pretend. S5 – Because it’s his favorite book.

When each of the students shares his thoughts about why, Missy **doesn’t confirm or deny accepting**) any of the answers. Then they discuss **predictions** for next time.

One child is so interested that he reads ahead. All are enjoying the book. Each is **engaged** in the reading and in the **discussion**.



## Frequency of Codes in Observations

Ashley – Observations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12

### Open Codes

A - assessing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

I - build background knowledge 2, 1, 1, 1

RCP - clarifying 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2

RCP - connecting 1, 2, 2, 2, 1

D - discussion 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1

SE - engaged 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2

I - explicit instruction 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1

RCP - graphic organizer 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1

I - higher level questions 1, 1, 3, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1

I - higher level thinking 2, 1

RCP - inferencing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

IRE 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1

A - monitoring 1, 1, 1

SE - on task 1, 1, 1

PO - positive 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

RCP - predicting 1, 2, 2, 1, 1

I - previewing 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

I - read aloud 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

RCP - rereads 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2

I - round robin 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

I - scaffolding 1, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1,

RCP - summarizing 1, 1, 1, 1

RCP - visualization 1, 1, 1

## Appendix N

## Codebook

**Axial Codes**

1. A	assessment
2. AT	assessing teaching
3. C	choice
4. CR	content refinement
5. D	discussion
6. DM	decision making
7. I	instruction
8. LA	literature appreciation
9. LC	literature circles
10. MS	materials selection
11. P	planning
12. PO	positivity
13. RC	reading comprehension
14. RCP	reading comprehension practices
15. RG	reading group
16. RR	reader response
17. SC	subject competency
18. SE	student engagement
19. SGB	small group benefits
20. SK	student knowledge
21. SR	struggling reader

22. SS	student success
23. TAT	teacher attitude
24. TA	think aloud
25. TG	teaching goal
26. TI	teacher impact
27. TSR	teacher student relationship

### Axial Codes with Participants

		Ashley	Connie	Katie	Missy
1. A	assessment	2/6/8	12/10	19/13/45	8/11
2. AT	assessing teaching	2/	0/6	0/11	1/0/33
3. C	choice		13/3		
4. CR	content refinement		0/3		
5. D	discussion - IRE	0/16/8 9	17/13/19	2/7/18	7/13/24
6. DM	decision making	2/	10/2	1/1	3/
7. I	instruction	49/20	53/13	29/10	24/16
	- background knowledge	5	0	7	1
	- clear expectations	0	13	23	5
	- explicit	11	0	19	13
	- HLQ	13	11	27	16
	- HLT	3	33	0	5
	- previewing	7	0	8	0
	- purpose for reading	0	0	7	16
	- read aloud	6	3	0	0
	- review	0	0	12	11
	- round robin	7	0	0	0
	- scaffolding	20	8	15	20
	- thinking	0	0	23	0
	- think time	0	0	16	0
8. LA	literature appreciation		0/1		1/
9. LC	literature circles	1/	7/3		2/2
10. MS	materials selection	2/8	15/5	4/10	3/12/6
11. P	planning	2/1	1/	4/4/12	0/0/10
12. PO	positivity	0/0/7	8/2	0/0/24	0/0/29
13. RC	reading comprehension	7/2	7/	4/2	6/1
14. RCP	reading comprehension practices	9/2	24/7	5/	8/2
	- clarifying	11		6	
	- compare/contrast	0		5	
	- connecting	8		16	15
	- graphic organizer	8		4	0
	- inferencing	9		6	5
	- predicting	0		0	8
	- rereading	8		15	15
	- summarizing	4		17	
	- visualizing	3		0	
	- scanning	0		9	
15. RG	reading group		0/1		
16. RR	reader response		1		
17. SC	subject competency			5/	
18. SE	Student Engagement	4/0/13	20/3/15	4/0/20	1/3/26

19. SGB	small group benefits	7/5	1/1		2/7
20. SK	student knowledge		2/1	7/2	1/2
21. SR	struggling reader	8/	9/	8/4	3/0
22. SS	student success	3/	16/1		
23. TAT	teacher attitude	2/0/5	1/	5/0/8	0/0/10
24. TA	think aloud		0/1	3/	1/0
25. TG	teaching goal		2/1	2/2	0/6
26. TI	teacher impact	0/2	9/1	0/3	
27. TSR	teacher student relationship	0/3	4/2	2/	

### Axial Codes with Open Codes

**Assessment** - Teachers use student assessment to inform and drive instruction.

DRA	talking	looking at work samples
oral questioning	mostly informal	read aloud to me
individualized	authentic	quick rechecks
treasure hunt	find examples	constantly check back on
drives instruction	valuable	more about instruc than
student eval		
quarterly tests	grouping	for student success
reading small passages	questioning	clarifying
rereading	vocabulary (pronunc)	decoding (chunking)
context clues	vehicle to drive inst	addressing needs of child
benchmark scores	nonfiction text	reteach functional text
grouping	grouping decision	drives grouping
knowing strengths & weak	find the problems	gathering data
observations	formal tests	word sort
Schloss	San Diego	observation
DRA	guides instruction	drives instruction
identify strengths& weak	ongoing	drives instruction
informal	drives instruction	to build instruction
drives instruction	must be ongoing	drives instruction
discussion	gathering info	classroom data
language structure	discussion	observing
discussion	student	teacher
failures on quarterly	oral language	baseline data
group formation	interest inventories	always look at the data
observations	anecdotal notes	tests
open response not mc	manipulate groups	challenging them
not frustrated	gets data from small group	individualizes instruction
red flag	drives instruction	informal
group placement	group placement	drives instruction

**Assessing Teaching** - Teachers reflect on their own instruction as it relates to student understanding. They decide how to proceed instructionally based on this self-assessment.

ongoing assess of teachg	continual refinement	ongoing
talking with child	assessing failures	making changes
Lit Circles changing	centers not working for SR	some won't pass anyway
reflection	assessing	reviewing
videotapes	student progression	teacher progression
for improvement	planning	for scaffolding
for student independence	reflecting	see what works

**Choice** - Teachers offer choice to students in reading and responding. They realize that students have unique strengths and weaknesses and play to strengths, while improving weak areas.

in products	marking what you want	partner reading
Independent reading	Group reading	read aloud
teacher read aloud	in responses	gist summary
personal responses	concrete	higher level thinking
evaluative	choose how to read text	students choose roles
top 4 roles		

**Discussion** - Teachers use discussion (transactions) between students and between teachers and students to build reading comprehension.

extends thinking stu to stu trans	richer writing follows dis	higher level thinking
multiple transactions	dialect	grammar
small and whole group	misunderstandings emerge	higher level thinking
extends thinking stu to stu trans	richer writing follows dis	multiple transactions
misunderstandings emerge	dialect	grammar
small and whole group	main ideas	student to text
what they noticed	what they marked	what they thought
dialogue of ideas	other viewpoints (s to s trans)	clarifying
metacognition	other ideas, clarifies	beneficial
clarifies	enlightens (stu to stu trans)	causes growth
important for reading comprehension	likes to do this	can with 4th grade
connections	interesting	imp for SE
connections	characters	SR SE
RCP	metacognition	SE
SR	SE	SR connections
SR higher level thinking skills	SR love it	very imp
improving understanding	you process	verbalizing
understanding	critical thinking	important
makes you think about reading	synthesize thoughts	transaction
building understanding	fuller comprehension	varying ideas
broader understanding	all of our understandings	thought-provoking
conversation	author's ideas	talk critically about
text	transaction	higher level thinking
meaning making	meaning making	grow from it
D - learn from it	opportunity for growth	new connections
life lessons	applying learning	dialogue
opens thinking to other possibilities		

**Decision Making** - Teachers are intentional in the decisions they make regarding reading comprehension instruction. They consider the student's needs in these decisions about instruction.

selecting right text	giving them time to read	not a stressor
content related	regrouping	restructuring
changing instruction	group	student's love
based on assessment	discussion	continue or choose
new text	research based	
scrap the book		

**Instruction** - What teachers teach is instrumental in the success of students and how they are able to grow as readers.

scaffolding to independence	love for literacy itself	connecting
guided reading	low level	short
don't encourage LA	not skill drills	develop a love for
reading	rich language	descriptive passages
explicit	identify strategies	metacognition
differentiate for need	don't kill the joy of reading	assistance
scaffolding	think aloud	question
explicit instruction	predicting	metacognition
read alouds	student to teacher transactions	scaffolding read aloud
student to tchr trans	assistance	scaffolding
think aloud	question	explicit instruction
predicting	metacognition	read alouds
text driven	think aloud	student support
explicit practice	differentiation	differentiation
scaffolding	differentiated	synthesis
scaffolding	displaying	compare and contrast
scaffolding w pg numbers	higher level and concrete	differen in mini-
lessons	writer's craft	student need
facilitation	scaffolding	metacognition
metacognition	differentiate based on specific need	writer's craft
not only strategies instruction	identifying and reinforcing	scaffolding
scaffolding (vocabulary	stories and questions	reinforcement
and understanding)	differentiation (needs of individuals)	new format
limit writing	limit drudgery	jot notes
Lit Circles	pass SOL tests	guided reading
assessment driven	small group	scaffolding
discussion	skills driven	assessment driven
scaffolding	more practice	slower pace
differentiation	IRL	division driven
interactive notebooks	SR reinforcement	data driven
no focus on LA	testing strategies	more reading needed
picture books to teach skills	no reading time - no SSR	IRL



differentiation	use actual literature	interactive notebooks
skills driven	reinforcement	stories and questions
shorter passages	IRL	15 minutes
scaffolding	scaffolding	differentiation
IRL	test strategies	manipulative
data driven	division driven	IRL
differentiated	teachers decide	differs by grade levels
differentiation	scaffolding	flexibility
differentiation	content area reading	differentiation
IRL	flexibility	change mat when nec
reteaching	differentiation	flexible grouping
flexible grouping	flexible grouping	small group for SR
flexible grouping	SR get lost	15 minutes
can't complete	3rd grade not enough time	reading story/ans
questions	motivation	reinforcement
division constraints	no practice time for reading	not enough time
creative	problem solving	goal in mind
trial and error	flexible	differentiated
build from strengths	differentiated	flexibility
make connections for kids	build on strengths	try different things
differentiated	providing connections	concrete
builds bridges	scaffolding	instructional level
creative	differentiation	trial and error
comparing	filling gaps	IRL
flexibility	tailor learning	scaffolding
synthesizing all RCP	scaffolding	RCP
IRL	questioning	higher level
questioning	modeling LA	try it
variety of genres	read, respond	scaffolding
scaffolding - read it together	scaffolding discussion	differentiation
vocabulary growth	scaffolding	facilitator
differentiate	partner reading	scaffolding - give
them the tools	differentiation individual	modified curriculum
trial and error	differentiation	learning styles
differentiated	differentiated	scaffolding
differentiated RCP	objectives focus	objectives focus
scaffolding	different learning styles	read aloud modeling
scaffolding (read aloud)	flexibility	flexible grouping
important	differentiation	flexible grouping to meet
kids' needs		

**Literature Appreciation** - Teachers help students to appreciate literature. They bring in story elements, imagery, voice and other elements to foster enjoyment and reading pleasure.

pleasure reading	lengthier text	reading improvement
attitude improvement	enjoy reading	enjoy the process
precursor to comprehending	joy of reading	pleasure
loved Sounder	didn't want to stop	protest end
no opportunity	good literature	relatable

**Literature Circles** - Teachers use this framework during reading. Students have roles and are responsible for contributing to the small group in this role and capacity.

keeps it interesting	switch to something else	choices
fifth grade	deeper conversation	student led

**Materials Selection** - Teachers select reading materials deliberately taking into account instructional reading level, student interest, goals for reading, quality of the text and other considerations.

chapter books	classics	quality lit at an early
age	careful consideration	interest
authentic literature	independent RL	choice
higher level	picture books	complex text
short mini-lessons	relate it to own life	young protagonists
relate it to own exper	historical figures	affect LA
appropriate	content	content of text
IRL	content	historical fiction
novels	picture books to teach skills	has her own
leveled readers	activities for RCP	IRL
manipulative	no basal reader	SE
lev rdrs go with basal	student interests considered	what triggers interest
and engagement	based on A	student interest
Info pairs	nonfiction	short
uncomplicated	led to deeper thinking	SK
IRL	interests for SE	discussion level
miss sometimes	dialect	must be leveled
content	interesting	connected to content
not basal	interest inventory	inviting to kids
flexibility with	hard book leads to frustration	fluctuate between
fiction and nonfiction	interest inventories	exposure to new
things	content	IRL
content	consults with others	

**Planning** - Teachers carefully plan their instruction for maximum impact on student reading comprehension

multiple objectives assess PLCs driven by A based on assessment	PLCs  gathering all the information for outcome goal scaffolding	lessons based on  based on A based on assessment materials
---	--	--

**Positivity** - Teachers are positive in the classroom with their students.

be positive laugh and enjoy the text together growth guidance celebrate	be enthusiastic point out strengths  of course he did believes in kids	point out strengths point out student  point out success
---	--	---

**Reading Comprehension** - The focus during reading groups is on improving reading comprehension with their students.

gains knowledge gains amusement feeling, questioning, wondering question text apply/understand apply understanding deeper discussion making meaning draw conclusions summarizing and understanding rdg inferencing goal	gains information understand subtlety total absorption writer's craft not decoding create something with the meaning need to practice rdg make connections SR don't context summarizing	gains pleasure interacting with the text - meaning understanding understanding with the meaning nonfiction text inference meeting their needs predicting evaluate
--	---	---

**Reading Comprehension Practices** - Teachers use the practices and strategies of current research in their reading instruction.

identify them when used sticky notes higher level thinking strategies instruction questioning questioning connecting clarifying metacognition built on questioning related to con higher level questioning small group instruction high independent	metacognition higher level thinking metacognition rereading higher level thinking predicting predicting choose what works meta imp for com meta critical context of reading ability grouping chapter books hi/med	metacognition connecting text to text think aloud higher level thinking connecting stud to text wondering visualizing not using all the time graphic organizer jot notes graphic organizers high center work based on novels
---	---	--

reader's theater	nonfiction text struc	IRL
explicit instruction	scaffolding	introducing or reinforcing
strategy		
scaffolding with intention of independence		inferencing
scaffolding	LC groups	critical thinking
connecting to their lives and world	deeper into the lit	reread
metacognition	predicting	inferencing
rereading	make connections to	characters and text
connections enhance understanding		

**Reading Group** - Teachers use reading groups to target reading comprehension improvement in their students.

all same IRL

**Reader Response** - Teachers use transactions (student and text, student and student, student and teacher) to help build reading comprehension.

higher level thinking

**Subject Competency** - Teachers have the knowledge about reading comprehension instructional practices. They know about best practice and current research on what struggling students need to improve their reading comprehension.

develop craft continually	know the content, strategies	know when to do
what		
adding to tool belt	know your craft	

**Student Engagement** - Students are engaged during instruction

selecting right text	giving them time to read	not a stressor
loved books	loved discussion format	read aloud
in text	connect to char exp & prob	want to read more
loved books	in text	want to read more
connect to char exp & prob	reading climate	actively involved in
text	students enjoy book	historical fiction no
reading time for kids to get hooked on reading		no practice to engage
motivation interest	using what interests kids	huge
interesting text	key to success	tech infusion
something they enjoy	interest inventory	students reread books

**Small Group Benefits** - Teachers believe that small group instruction is beneficial and it is instituted in their classrooms.

point out strengths	format for Jamestown book	each child participates
keep attention	focus	differentiation
SE	works	no more than six
flexible grouping	for SR	RCP
easier for SR	SR can focus	can monitor better
IRL	DRA	important
get to know kids better	IRL	like reading
get more accomplished	reach students	student engagement in
reading		

**Student Knowledge** - Teachers are knowledgeable about their students as readers. They understand their students' strengths and weaknesses.

know students' interests	considers students' capability	like nonfiction
know students	to know what to do	know pleasures
know needs	guides practice choice	to construct lessons
have to know	as readers, know them	know them as readers
help them progress	for grouping	
Struggling Reader - A student who is reading below grade level		
details	not main points in summary	differentiation
don't understand	may have decoding difficulties	can't recall
could be decoding	high listening comprehension	all are different
more instruction time	leveled readers	need explicit
instruction		
compartmentalize	need metacognition	decoding
don't know what they've read	can't retell	multiple reasons
daily instruction	learning gaps	not thinking
use buzzwords	don't own the strategies	makes up words
mumble	comprehension issues	

**Student Success** - The teacher is interested in her students' success as readers and develops instruction to help them to better comprehend what they are reading.

selecting right text	giving them time to read	not a stressor
in class reading	physically comfortable	questioning
encouraged		
no ridicule	teacher critical	reading climate
pillows	couches	music
calm	quiet	strengths
help to feel more secure	choice	variety
enjoyment	ownership	no reading practice
limited time	time constraints	

**Teacher Attitude** - The teacher enjoys what she is doing, is positive in her classroom, and wants to help her students achieve. She believes that each and every student can be successful.

positive	motivating	encouraging
disgruntled	powerless	needed
a lot with SR	modeling	drive success
willing to learn	try and fail	drop something and
try again		
success for students	interest in student	locating information
demonstrating willingness		

**Teacher Impact** - Teachers believe that what they do in the classroom has a direct impact on her students' reading comprehension abilities.

enthusiasm	interest in the text	interest in content
critical for student success	set the tone for the students	supportive
we're all progressing	text choice assist	encourage independence
large	content area rdg	understanding
huge	impacts student learning	large and important
large	modeling important	make or break

**Teacher Student Relationship** - Teachers believe that they must build a positive relationship with the students to help them become proficient readers.

reinforce what they do right	facilitator	tease
challenge	working together	sharing insights
motivate	encourage	motivate
important for success	they know you want to help	could confront
small group important		

**Teaching Goal** - Teachers have a goal in mind when instructing to increase reading comprehension.

thinking	no right or wrong	choice
variety	student success	enjoyment
ownership	make meaning	comprehension
independent learning	comprehension	understanding
independence	importance of rdg comprehension	students feel
accomplished		
reading growth	LA	students want to read
love reading	love learning	connection to reading
LA		

**Think Aloud** - The teacher models comprehension strategies by uses a practice of talking aloud about the thinking process that are occurring as she builds reading understanding

Ashley – Observations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12

Open Codes

A - assessing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 I - build background knowledge 2, 1, 1, 1  
 RCP - clarifying 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2  
 RCP - connecting 1, 2, 2, 2, 1  
 D - discussion 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1  
 SE - engaged 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2  
 I - explicit instruction 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1  
 RCP - graphic organizer 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1  
 I - higher level questions 1, 1, 3, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1  
 I - higher level thinking 2, 1  
 RCP - inferencing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 IRE 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 A - monitoring 1, 1, 1  
 SE - on task 1, 1, 1  
 PO - positive 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 RCP - predicting 1, 2, 2, 1, 1  
 I - previewing 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 I - read aloud 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1,  
 RCP - rereads 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2  
 I - round robin 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 I - scaffolding 1, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1,  
 RCP - summarizing 1, 1, 1, 1  
 RCP - visualization 1, 1, 1  
 Connie – Observations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12  
 Open Codes  
 aesthetic 4, 3  
 build background knowledge  
 calm environment 1, 1, 1, 1, 1,  
 comfortable environment 1  
 choice, 1, 1  
 clarifying, 1, 1  
 clear expectations 4, 1, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 clear plan  
 content integration  
 deeper thinking  
 discussion 1, 3, 1, 5, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3  
 efferent (5), 1, 1, 9, 6  
 engaged 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 flexibility 2, 1, 1  
 focused  
 formative assessment 1, 1  
 higher level questions 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 1  
 higher level thinking (9), 2, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 3, 3, 5  
 inclusive environment 2, 1, 1  
 interacting  
 off task 1, 1, 1

on task 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1  
orderly explanations  
organization  
planning 2, 1, 1  
positive 1, 1, 1  
positive student interactions 1, 1  
precision  
predicting  
quiz  
scaffolding, 1, 1  
student to student transactions 1, 2, 1, 4, 4, 1, 2, 1, 4, 4  
student to teacher transactions 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 3  
student to text transactions (many), 8, 7  
summarizing, 1  
think time 1  
wasted time 1 1  
organized  
word study 1, 1, 1



Missy – Observations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

### Open Codes

assessing 1, 2, 1, 3, 1, 2, 2  
 clarifying 1, 1, 1, 1  
 connecting 4, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 3  
 clear expectations 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 discussion 3, 3, 1, 3, 2, 1, 2, 2, 5, 2  
 encouraging 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 2  
 engaged 3, 3, 3, 2, 1, 4, 1, 3, 2, 2, 2  
 explicit instruction 3, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1  
 formative assessment 4, 2, 3, 2  
 higher level questions 3, 1, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 higher level thinking 2, 1, 1, 1  
 high interest text 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 inclusive environment 1, 1, 1, 1  
 inferencing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 metacognition 1, 1, 1, 1  
 planning 1, 1, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 positive 3, 4, 7, 2, 3, 2, 1, 4, 1, 2  
 predicting 4, 1, 2, 1  
 probing 1, 4, 1, 1, 2, 1  
 rereading 2, 3, 2, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2  
 review 2, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 scaffolding 5, 3, 3, 4, 1, 1, 1, 2  
 setting a purpose for reading 2, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1  
 student to student transactions 2, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1  
 student to teacher transactions 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1  
 student to text transactions 2, 1, 1, 2

Katie Open Codes - Observations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

I - build background knowledge 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

RCP - clarifying 1, 2, 1, 1, 1

I - clear expectations 6, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1, 2

D - discussion 2, 1, 2, 3, 2, 1, 3, 4

efferent 2, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1

PO - encouraging 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

SE - engaged 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3

I - explicit instruction 3, 1, 1, 4, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 1

A - formative assessment 3, 3, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1

HLQ - higher level questioning 4, 2, 2, 3, 3, 5, 4, 2, 2

TAT - inclusive environment 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2

RCP - inferencing 2, 4

SE - on task 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2

P - planning 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

PO - positive 1, 2, 1, 1, 3, 4, 1, 4

I - previewing 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

A - probing 6, 8, 7, 3, 3, 3, 8, 5

I - purpose for reading 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1

RCP - reading comprehension strategy - compare and contrast 2, 2, 1

RCP - reading comprehension strategy - graphic organizer, 2, 1, 1,

RCP - reading comprehension strategy - make connections 4, 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 2, 1, 1

RCP - reading comprehension strategy - rereading 2, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 2, 1

RCP - reading comprehension strategy - scanning, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1

I - review 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 1, 1

I - scaffolding 2, 3, 1, 5, 1, 1, 2

student to student transaction 1, 2, 1, 4, 2, 2, 2, 1

student to teacher transaction 1, 1, 2, 3, 2, 1, 1

student to text transaction 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1

RCP - summarizing 1, 3, 1, 1, 2, 4, 1, 1, 3

I - think time 1, 3, 3, 2, 2, 3, 1, 1

I - thinking, 1, 1, 4, 3, 2, 3, 2, 4, 1, 1, 1

## Appendix O

## Sample Reflexive Journal Entries

March 8, 2010	<p>I seem to have somehow gotten off track a bit. It took me looking back over papers about reading comprehension that I'd previously written to remind me of what is most interesting to me – reading comprehension instruction that is conducted during reading. This is the area that receives the least amount of emphasis and an area of extreme importance to reading comprehension. Studies have shown what good readers do to comprehend text. This is in stark contrast to struggling readers who seem to read without much active thought – the essence of reading comprehension. To get them to think actively while reading is laborious, time-intensive, and takes years to do well as a teacher.</p> <p>This is where I want to focus my research. What are teachers doing in the during- reading portion of reading instruction to help struggling readers to think actively about text in order to construct meaning? I'm not sure how this will be realized in an observation though. I'd begun to think that guided reading groups weren't the necessary focus. Now, however, it seems to me that if my focus is this small but crucial part of reading instruction, it does need to be during guided reading or some semblance of small group reading instruction.</p>
March 15, 2010	<p>I seem to be getting confused about what I want to do. I vacillate between reading comprehension in general and isolating reading comprehension instruction to just the during-reading portion of the instruction. This is because the research seems pretty clear about what is happening before and after reading and its effectiveness. We do know that setting a purpose for reading, previewing text, predicting, and other strategies to focus the reader work to do just that in the pre-reading portion of guided reading. We also know that writing, using graphic organizers, and asking and answering questions following reading works to reinforce meaning as well as clarify thoughts and ideas about the reading. This is overwhelmingly known and accepted throughout the field of reading comprehension research.</p> <p>However, though research indicates that specific strategies are effective during reading comprehension instruction, there is less information about whether or not teachers are actually using these strategies with their struggling readers. There have also been suppositions that it's not the strategies so much as the intense focus on the reading itself that produces increased comprehension. That is so interesting to me. I'm thinking that I may need to go back and revise my research questions to reflect this focus.</p> <p>On the other hand, I don't want to limit myself so much that I miss other pertinent practices that occur in instruction outside of the during-reading component of reading instruction. I think I may need to sit down with someone to discuss this fully in order to make a decision about which way to</p>

	go.
March 20, 2010	<p>I'm thinking that my theoretical perspective is constructivism. Students construct meaning from reading. Meaning is constructed from the text they read, their beliefs and experiences (prior knowledge) that they bring to the text, and the context of the reading. This is basically the reading comprehension definition that the RAND Reading Study Group constructed and that I find is the most meaningful and comprehensive. It's constructivist in nature so I'm thinking that my dissertation should be grounded in this thinking. I need to find out more about social constructivism which I think might be a perfect fit. Since I'm conceiving reading comprehension instruction in a social context (teacher and students), it seems logical to me that the co-construction of meaning would be apt.</p>
March 24, 2010	<p>I'm beginning to get a clearer picture of where I need to be heading in this study. Although I vacillate between reading comprehension instruction in general and guided-reading instruction specifically, I think I am getting closer to a conclusion.</p> <p>I am not sure exactly what I will find when I go into "effective" reading teachers' classrooms to observe reading comprehension instruction. When I did my field research project, it was clear that guided reading was defined and approached in different ways by different teachers. I was surprised by this. I thought we all had a clear understanding (mine) of what this looked like. Since this is not the case, why should I go into classrooms with an expectation for guided reading as I define it? Perhaps teachers will be doing different things that are equally effective! If I limit myself to my narrow definition, might I possibly miss out on potentially rich practices? I don't want to set myself up for a limited view on reading comprehension instruction with struggling readers.</p> <p>I think, instead, that my focus needs to be broadened. I want to see what is being done with struggling readers to strengthen their reading. If this takes place in a whole-class structure of instruction and it is effective, then so be it. I think I will be surprised but I need to see this.</p> <p>So, I will be observing instruction as it occurs in whatever format that happens to take.</p>
March 28, 2010	<p>I am reading more about Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory. She prefers that it be called, "transactional learning theory" as that is the emphasis on making meaning. It's the idea that a transaction occurs between the reader and the text and the "poem" that is created is unique. This idea rings true to me as I know how important experiences and background knowledge are to children's learning.</p> <p>I have been apprehensive about using this theory for my theoretical perspective because I thought it was too limited and didn't really include the instruction of reading comprehension. However, I have run across additional</p>

	<p>information which broadens the theory to include teaching and discussion. Basically, the theory has two phases. The first phase is the transaction between the reader and the text. The second phase is when teachers should help students “return to, relive, savor, the experience” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 276). This can be done through discussion.</p> <p>This seems to me to be just what I was looking to find – individually constructed meaning first, followed by socially constructed meaning through discussion that furthers the knowledge base of the struggling reader and helps him/her to make meaning.</p>
<p>April 1, 2010</p>	<p>As I have been writing my research design I am thinking more and more about my participants. It may be difficult to identify “effective reading teachers.” In reading over the research pertaining to these teachers, the criteria for selection has been primarily asking for recommendations from principals and reading specialists. This just doesn’t seem particularly valid to me.</p> <p>I have thought of two ways to identify them that I think is better. One way is to use Nationally Board Certified teachers endorsed in Literacy. This is a rigorous process and requires much reflection and demonstration of effective literacy practice. Another is to look at informal reading inventory scores from the beginning of the year to the end of the year and compare them for struggling readers. The teachers who showed the most student growth would be selected.</p> <p>With this in mind, I sent out an email to all elementary reading specialists in XXXX Schools. I have heard back from 90% of them. So far, there are only 2 NBCTs and they are support teachers now rather than classroom teachers. They conduct guided reading with struggling readers. I’m not sure this would work. Two of the reading specialists replied that even though they didn’t have NBCT teachers, they did have several that they thought were exemplary. I think that I may need to have a fall back plan!</p> <p>However, now I am thinking that struggling readers may not be receiving reading comprehension instruction from their classroom teachers. They may be getting it from these support teachers. This is something that I will need to investigate further as it has important ramifications for this study.</p>
<p>April 11, 2010</p>	<p>After discussions during my orals, I have been thinking a lot about my sample. It seems to me that my desire to have NCBT is a sound one. Their certification process is an arduous one and requires many months of reflection, work, and constant evaluation. These are teachers who are more likely to be very much interested in helping readers to excel. With that in mind, I found the database that has a listing of NCBT teachers and their specialties.</p> <p>I was able to locate about 20 teachers who are board certified. Many of them</p>

	<p>are in XXXX and XXXX. I know that XXXX tries to group teachers together as they attempt board certification to make the experience more collaborative and supportive. XXXX has no teachers certified, XXXX has none, XXXX has two, and XXXX has two (three if you count XXXX).</p> <p>Now that I have names, I'm not sure what to do next.</p>
April 21, 2010	<p>I have been working on my chapter 3 methods section. I have got to say that it has caused me some consternation particularly regarding the paradigm and the strategy. I have gotten many books and done much reading but I still feel very much the novice when it comes to fully understanding both of these constructs. I'm having a hard time differentiating them. I do think that I embrace the interpretivist paradigm as it "makes sense" to me. I do believe that each of us constructs our own reality and subjectivism comes into play in our lives daily. I also understand that I will be interpreting my findings through this lens and know that it is critical to have much data to interpret. But I don't really understand much more than that. So...I have a ways to go before I will feel proficient in this paradigm. I also understand very basically the strategy of phenomenology. It seems a perfect pairing for interpretivism or constructivism. Looking at a phenomenon deeply seems totally in keeping with my interpretivist choice for this study. But just like interpretivism, I have only a rudimentary understanding of what it entails.</p> <p>I suppose that as I continue to read, I will gain understanding. It was heartening to read a dissertation in which the researcher stated his discomfort over his lack of expertise. That's what I'm feeling right now about these.</p>
April 26, 2010	<p>I have gotten the email addresses of 4 of the 6 nationally board certified literacy teachers in XXXX. Patricia, from my reading correction class, teaches in XXXX and was happy to help me out. I am now going to contact a reading specialist friend of mine in the hopes that she can locate the two NCBT teachers in XXXX. My next step will be to contact them and to find out whether or not they are classroom teachers and if they teach in grades 3-5. I am also going to go on to the state site and try to find email addresses for the XXXX area teachers. People in other classes tell me there is a listing on the site.</p> <p>I need to think carefully about how I want to structure the email. I'm thinking that I will first tell them about my study, very briefly so as not to scare them off and then ask them for the information about their grade level. I think I also need to find out other information about their teaching, schooling, etc. for maximum variation. However, I think that this can be a follow-up email. I know that this is a very busy time for teachers right now with SOL testing and all the end of year work, but if I wait until after the end of the school year, I'm afraid I will not get any responses. Some teachers don't check their email accounts during the summer.</p>

<p>May 1, 2010</p>	<p>I am working on changes to my chapter 1. It's hard to go back and forth. I find that I have to keep thinking about intent in each. Though they should support one another, and they do, I still have to think differently as I'm writing each one.</p> <p>I needed to reorganize the chapter and use headings to make it flow better. I am seeing just how important headings are to the organization of a paper. They really help to lead the reader to new topics or concepts.</p> <p>It's hard to know how much is enough in my chapter 1. I don't want to put more in then is needed to effectively introduce my research study. If I do that, I will be repeating myself a bit in chapter 2.</p>
<p>May 5, 2010</p>	<p>I have begun to go back into the literature to see where I need to flesh out the review that I'm working on. I have again checked out the Handbook of Reading Comprehension (2008). Edited by Susan Israel and Gerald Duffy, two of the most prominent researchers in this field, it is the "bible" for research regarding reading comprehension.</p> <p>My plan is to read those chapters that most closely align to my topic for the dissertation and to make sure that I have all the references and the studies dealing with this area. I have a lot of work ahead of me.</p> <p>I also plan to go through Reading Research Quarterly by issue covering the last ten years. I want to make sure that I haven't missed any studies that didn't show up in my computer search. This was a great suggestion from Dr. Whalon and one that needs to be done.</p> <p>I am hoping to do this within the next two weeks so that I can continue to work toward completion of my chapter 2 – literature review.</p>
<p>May 8, 2010</p>	<p>It's slow going with the Handbook of Reading Comprehension. I am laboriously looking up each of the citations to see how they apply to my topic. Sometimes I find that the conclusions used to support their arguments in one of the articles, are not what I conclude from the studies. I guess this just goes to show you that you really need to check carefully for yourself.</p> <p>Focusing on instructional practices used by reading teachers in the classroom has made the reading a bit more manageable. As I find the articles, I am also looking at those citations to see if there are overlaps or if there are new references that I need to find.</p>
<p>May 10, 2010</p>	<p>As it gets closer to the end of the year, I'm thinking that I need to send an email to the teachers about possibly participating in my study. I have sent an email to Rob, a friend of mine who is an assistant principal who works in XXXX. I am hoping that he can give me the email addresses for the XXXX area teachers who are board certified in literacy. There are nine of them that came up on the website. Some of them are surely teaching in the intermediate</p>

	<p>grades. That will be my first question. After I have isolated those teachers, I will put out feelers to see who might be interested in participating.</p> <p>I'm not sure why I am so hesitant to make the initial contact. I haven't had time to think it through. Now that classes are over, I can really take the time to think about the best way to do this. I want to make sure that I get responses from these teachers so I think the wording is critical.</p>
<p>January 25, 2011</p>	<p>I heard from XXXX yesterday that they needed additional information. I actually talked to a human being on the phone this morning to make sure I was sending everything she needed. Now I have a contact so that I can keep apprised of what is going on with the application process. She told me the next step is to send the package to each committee member for approval/disapproval. When I queried her, she told me it usually takes about a week to get to each of the committee members. I also gave her the list of NBCTs so that she could tell me how many work with grades 3-5. So, all-in-all, it was a good contact! We shall see.</p> <p>I sent her the consent form and the interview guide. I also asked her to find out how many of the NBCT teachers are still there and with 3-5 graders. She said 7 of 8 are there and the majority of them are reading specialists. I hope I will have enough teachers for my study. I emailed back to ask how many are classroom teachers.</p>
<p>February 23, 2011</p>	<p>Interview #1 - Ashley</p> <p>My interview with Ashley went smoothly today. We got started right on time and it lasted about 55 minutes to include initial background information and observation scheduling. Ashley has been a reading specialist for 26 years, 19 in middle school and the last 7 in elementary school. She related that when she first began teaching in an inner city middle school, many of her 8th graders couldn't read. She made the decision at that point that she wanted to go back to school to become a reading teacher. She got her master's degree in reading and became a reading specialist.</p> <p>She decided to get board certified when she needed a change and a new challenge. Partnering with a 4th grade teacher, they worked together. It took 2 years. She failed the reading comprehension part and another that she didn't quite remember, redid them both and passed. She said this made her more proud than anything she'd ever done in her life.</p> <p>Ashley works in a Title 1 school. She does both whole group and small group instruction in a push-in mode. There are two reading teachers who work with 3-5 grades. She is the reading specialist. She prefers working with the third grade staff as they seem to reflect her reading practices and beliefs.</p>



	<p>Her school district has evolved in a way that is sometimes at odds with Ashley's beliefs. She believes that students need time to read during the school day but the district no longer supports DEAR or AR. She states that the students enjoyed Accelerated Reader but the division only supports the program if students are allowed to find answers in their books while they take the AR quizzes. Since this goes against the intent of the program, the school no longer uses the AR program.</p> <p>When asked about how students are grouped for instruction, Ashley relayed that third grade uses PALS and Scott-Forseman pretest for grouping and placing students into their instructional reading levels. Fourth grade uses the previous year's SOL test results and the SF pretest as does the fifth grade staff.</p> <p>I get the impression that the reading program is heavily weighted with skills and activities to build skills. There are "red packets" created by the school division that contain hands-on activities to teach skills. The pacing guide with embedded skills are followed carefully.</p> <p>The reading structure by grade level is as follows:  3rd grade - 3 groups - on grade level, middle level, developmental level  4th grade -  5th grade - whole class novels and a different novel for struggling readers</p> <p>I was surprised that many of her responses seemed to center on how her children "loved" certain activities and skills lessons. Rather than focus on how or why practices were implemented, as the questions were structured, Ashley would invariably talk about whether or not the children found them "fun."</p> <p>I'll be interested to see how others interpret my questions.</p>
February 27, 2011	<p>I just finished the summary of Ashley's first interview. I am surprised at the lack of time afforded to struggling readers for guided reading groups. Ashley meets with 3rd graders 3 times a week for 15 minutes. She meets with 4th graders twice a week for GR, and I'm not sure about 5th grade. But it all seems to be skills based rather than reading and discussing what's been read to establish meaning.</p> <p>I will start my observation tomorrow. It will be interesting to see what really happens in the classroom. I won't be looking at fifth grade because they are only working on prep for the writing SOL test.</p>
March 4, 2011	<p>After four days of observations, I am surprised at the amount of round robin reading and teacher's reading the text that occurs. In the whole class instruction, the teacher read aloud an entire book as the students wrote their summaries (class directed). Overall, my impression is that students read very</p>

	<p>little to themselves (no DEAR or SSR school-wide) and when working in small groups, they are either read to or read aloud rather than silently. If children don't practice reading silently and then forming their own understandings, how will they improve their reading comprehension?</p> <p>I also notice that the entire class focuses on the skills of the pacing guide and all do the same activities. They break up into small groups by ability level, but the text is the same for struggling readers and above grade level readers. The children are given many interesting activities to do.</p> <p>The text that is chosen by third grade is interesting to the students. Subjects such as Babe Ruth, crayons, and Michael Jordan (sports) seem to keep the children engaged although the crayon passage was too difficult for SR - A. really had to scaffold to build understanding and ended up re-explaining much of the text. Perhaps a summary with each paragraph would have helped.</p> <p>My impression of 4th grade is that many of the children are off task and not paying attention because the material is boring and the teacher plods through it. She doesn't really seem to engage most of the kids and they do other things (fool around in their desks, doodle, whisper to each other, and daydream). They are doing functional text and I think they could have chosen the examples that were more appropriate. It doesn't seem like much time was spent selecting text.</p>
March 7, 2007	<p>I checked with Ginny to find out about analysis during data collection. She definitely did this and said: I definitely analyzed as I was collecting data. My observations had a quantitative component to them which I calculated as I went, but as far as the qualitative portion went, after each observation, I typed up my field notes and categorized them according to my apriori codes. Since I also knew which interview question went with which apriori code, when it came time to write up my case studies, I was able to cut and paste a lot of it from my typed field notes and interview summaries. Also, as I went, I kept a list of recurring themes which also helped in the end.</p> <p>I asked Judi to take a look at my first set of observation notes and she said this: The observation notes look fine; they should support your examination of the data with reference to your research focus. My only suggestion would be to note/distinguish when you're reflecting about and/or evaluating what you're seeing (as in the last paragraph of this particular set of observation notes), as opposed to just describing it. Maybe a different text color? This will make it easier for you when you start to compile across-participant patterns in the data.</p> <p>The 4th grade lesson was much more engaging today as she really asked students to participate rather than taking the lecture mode of last week.</p>
March 10, 2011	<p>After three interviews, I am so surprised at how different each one is. The XXXX interview took 1.5 hours while the XXXX interview lasted about 35. Though they both talked about discussion, it was different. Connie was much</p>

	<p>more elaborative and clear in her responses. Katie was brief, speaking quickly and repetitively. It will be interesting to see what the observations reveal about their instructional practice.</p> <p>I am beginning to keep a change page for my dissertation so that when it is time to rewrite I will have all my notations at hand and in one place.</p> <p>I was concerned about Connie's students. My committee doesn't see it as a concern so I am forging ahead. Yes!</p>
March 25, 2011	<p>I have begun to think of intentionality as a possible theme. It is apparent that all four of these teachers are intentional in their actions for instruction. Intentionality can take various forms. Perhaps small group instruction is a way to be intentional in helping struggling readers to read. Having a plan of action in lessons that build on prior understandings is another way to be intentional. Knowing where you want the students to go with their discussion and forming questions that are open-ended can be an indication of intentionality.</p> <p>I need to consider more of this. It may just be an important theme.</p> <p>I am thinking about the second interview that I want to have with my participants. I have begun to jot down some possible questions. Perhaps I should include a question that ask about what their next course of action will be with instruction. That might give me some insight into where they think the students need to go.</p> <p>How does formative assessment inform your teaching practices?  To what extent can teachers impact reading comprehension?  How does instructional reading level factor into your reading comprehension instruction?  To what extent does flexibility...  Why did you choose to do literature circles with this group? How will this help with comprehension for your students?</p>
March 31, 2011	<p>It just struck me that Katie has been conducting her lessons on making meaning from an efferent stance. They are focused on nonfiction reading. She is helping the students to coax information from the text just as Rosenblatt explained in her reader response theory.</p> <p>Missy fluctuates between aesthetic and efferent as does Connie. I'll need to look closely at Ashley to consider her stance.</p>
April 5, 2011	<p>I'm thinking about questions for my second interview with the participants. One question I want to ask is about book selection. Three of the four teachers use novels to teach reading. How do they go about choosing books? Is it based on reading level, content, interest, or what exactly.</p>
4/8/11	<p>Intentionality based on student input. This is a possible theme that I'm</p>

	<p>thinking about. It seems to me that all of the teachers are very much focused on intentional lessons that are planned around the needs of the students.</p> <p>Students arrive at their own conclusions. Teachers allow students to have differing opinions based on evidence from the text.</p>
4/9/11	<p>Possible Themes:          Inclusive Environment          Intentionality          Student Driven Flexibility          Trial and Error          Teachers Engage with Students          Student Success - every child succeeds</p>
4/19/11	<p>It seems to me that a theme going through Missy, Connie, and Katie's instruction is that every child meet with success. When I talk with them about their students, they are very aware of who their students are as readers. They know their strengths and weaknesses. They all want to maintain positivity to try to strengthen those weak areas.</p>
4/25/11	<p>I have been thinking and thinking about why the coding I am doing isn't working for me. I think it's the format and the way that I structured the breaks. I really did it with space in mind rather than breaking on thoughts. That has proved to be unhelpful. So, I've decided to create charts and divide it by questions and answers. This seems to make sense to me. I've been working on Connie #2 and it's already much clearer to me. Bolding the thoughts and then giving them axial codes is so much more meaningful than trying to do this every line.</p>
4/27/11	<p>I had a wonderfully productive meeting with Judi yesterday. I explained my thinking to her about coding and she thought it made good sense. She just told me to make sure I went back into chapter 3 to change the writing so that it reflects what I am now doing.</p> <p>It will take several days (4?) to recode all 8 interviews, but I think it will be time well spent. The whole idea of getting close to the data will be realized after I've done this.</p> <p>She also gave me a helpful tip about my observation codes. She turned them on the sides to show me how it looked like a bar graph. Now I need to come up with a cutoff number for significant findings. I will do this after I've tackled my interviews.</p> <p>I asked Judi about themes and she suggested a very grounded approach to coming up with them. Interestingly, surfacing themes seems an apt conceptual way of thinking about what will happen. I will put each axial code on a note card and then compare each with another to see what themes are represented. This may take quite a while as I need to just let it happen and keep the data for</p>

each of the axial codes in mind. It's an interesting approach and I'm anxious to get started.

As Judi suggested, I will also have a notebook with me so that I can jot down thoughts as they come to me. She says that now is the time when that will begin to happen. I'm seeing it already. I woke up this morning itching to get started. It's quite exciting!

Ongoing thoughts - relationship between DM, CR, AT

## Appendix P

### Researcher as Instrument – Reading and Reading Comprehension

I cannot imagine a life without books; truly. Reading is one of the greatest pleasures in my life. I carve out time to read every day. I read the newspaper in the morning, drive to the gym listening to an audio book on CD, read while blow-drying my hair, read my Kindle on the elliptical or treadmill, and finish my day in bed curled up with a good book.

### **The Formative Years**

As far back as I can remember reading has been an important part of my life. When I was a young child, I remember my mother reading *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* to my siblings and me. There are five kids in my family so the title was particularly intriguing to me. I also remember *Laurie and the Yellow Curtains* as a favorite from childhood because the name Laurie was in the title of this book, and I had never met another Lauri before. I was disappointed, however, that this character spelled her name differently than mine. Thinking about both of these titles now, I understand that I made personal connections to each of them; this is an important aspect of reading. Though I'm sure there were others read aloud to me, these are the only two that I remember.

My middle school years are when I actually remember became engrossed in reading. Magazines, books, comics, you name it, I was interested; as long as it wasn't a textbook, I wanted to read it. Early on, I remember going over to a girlfriend's house and reading her Nancy Drew books. She seemed to have them all. I liked the comfort of a formulaic narrative combined with trying to solve the mystery of the title. It was fun

reading about familiar likeable characters and to watch them slowly become more fully developed as I read book after book after book. Decades later, when I watched children in my classroom reading *Magic Tree House* or *Junie B. Jones* series books, I was reminded of the joy I got reading a book series.

In high school, I began to check out books from the school library in earnest. I remember Taylor Caldwell and the Bronte sisters as particular favorites. After reading *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, I too wanted a Mr. Rochester or a Heathcliff in my life. Once I found an author I liked, I read all of his/her books; I do this even today. On Sunday afternoons in high school, I could invariably be found at Book and Card or a nearby drugstore buying magazines (*Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, or *Mademoiselle*) and the latest romance novels or bestsellers. I also read my mother's "women's magazines" and particularly enjoyed the short stories in "Good Housekeeping Magazine." I would hole up in my bedroom for hours immersed in another world that was far more exciting than my current life of teenage angst and insecurity. Reading opened a world of limitless possibilities. My sisters often became angry with me when I read in the family room because I was so engrossed in a story that I never heard conversations around me. This practice of total absorption continues to this day, much to the chagrin of those closest to me.

### **College and Beyond**

In college, I majored in sociology and minored in literature. I particularly enjoyed two literature classes: Women in American Literature and Contemporary Southern Writers. Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner became my favorites. I never enjoyed books that were too much work (in my opinion) like Shakespeare or

Dante. I remember Sunday afternoons lying on my dorm room bed or couch reading the day away and enjoying myself immensely. Particular titles don't readily come to mind, but I do remember discussing books with my friends and trading them with each other.

After college, I became an Air Force officer and continued to read whenever I could. My interests continued to gravitate towards bestsellers and popular women's magazines, but I also found myself reading books by authors of color. Toni Morrison became a favorite as did Maya Angelou. Reading the "Stars and Stripes Newspaper" regularly when overseas made the U.S. seem closer. While stationed in the Philippines, I was required to travel to the northern part of Luzon Island two weeks out of the month. During those trips, I inevitably landed in the tiny library overlooking the sea, reading for hours when the work day was finished.

When I had my children, I made it a point to read to them daily. It was a time for celebration when they got their first library cards. As a family, we made weekly visits to the library and birthday presents always included gift certificates to Barnes and Noble Booksellers. My children and husband love to read and conversations are often about what we are currently reading.

My idea of a great time is to go to the library or a bookstore where I'll spend an afternoon perusing the shelves. I enjoy the search, the reading of the dustcovers, and the decision to buy or check out books. I love to go to Costco and Sam's Club to look through their book stacks for the perfect book to take home. I buy many of my bestsellers from them and feel the elation of acquiring a new book at a good price. Stacks of books adorn my nightstand waiting to be read. Last summer, I purchased a Kindle and just love



the ease of taking it with me to the gym, on trips, or in the car. There is never a time when I have to be without a book.

As I have gotten older, my reading interests have broadened. I try to keep up with books that have won literary awards and read them with relish. Again, if I find an author I like, I read as many books as I can find that he/she has written. I also try to keep abreast of children's literature and young adult literature that is award-winning. Now that I have a baby grandson, I send wonderful books regularly to him.

I use the public library to find books about hobbies that I enjoy. Over the years I have studied: jewelry making, quilting, stained-glass, gardening, scrapbooking, cooking, cake decorating, interior design, self-help, and other areas. The library allows me to grow and learn continuously. I also use the William and Mary library extensively. When people say they have never been in it, I am amazed! I take great pleasure in walking the stacks and perusing titles with a reading focus.

I have a couple of friends whom I consider my book buddies. We have lengthy conversations about books. We exchange books and derive great pleasure from our book talks. Many in my extended family are avid readers. Our conversations inevitably shift to books we are reading when we get together. As with my reading friends, we exchange books regularly.

### **Teaching Reading**

When I resigned my commission from the Air Force in 1992, I had just finished an M.Ed. program from Old Dominion University which certified me as a fourth – eighth grade language arts and social studies teacher. I was hired to teach sixth-grade language arts and social studies for Newport News Public Schools at Huntington Middle School in

downtown Newport News. This school was undergoing a restructuring and many new teachers were hired under the Accelerated Schools Project.

### **The First Year**

The only class I had taken that prepared me to teach reading was a reading in the content areas class. I felt poorly prepared to teach reading though I loved to read personally. One of the veteran teachers at my first school used a reading and writing workshop approach during language arts, and I followed suit. I assigned students to reading groups based on personality rather than reading levels because all of my students were reading the same trade book regardless of their instructional reading levels. I cannot remember much about my reading instruction. I do remember being the first teacher into the building every morning, one of the last to leave at night, and constantly working on lessons when not at school. I fear that my reading instruction probably left much to be desired, but I was anxious to learn and willing to devote the time to becoming better. I cannot honestly say that I remember teaching a reading comprehension lesson during my first year of teaching. I cannot say that my students benefitted from my instruction.

I also remember working closely with the librarian, a dynamic and enthusiastic teacher, who came regularly to my classroom to give book talks. The students would come alive and listen excitedly as she spoke about titles and enticed them with a bit of the plot. She always left them wanting for more. That made a big impression on me, and I realized quickly that teachers can powerfully influence students' reading habits both inside and outside the classroom. It is a lesson that I have never forgotten. Enthusiasm is contagious.

### **The Second Year**

The Accelerated Schools Project failed before the year was out, and I was allowed to voluntarily transfer to a different school. I went to Gildersleeve Middle School where I taught civics to seventh graders. Even though I was not teaching language arts, I remember reading aloud to my students everyday and connected the trade books I read to social studies. After reading, we would spend a few minutes talking about the book before transitioning to the lesson for the day. Intuitively, I seemed to realize the importance of connecting civics to real life and did this through popular trade books. One book the students enjoyed very much was *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli, a popular young adult fiction writer. Themes in the book centered on homelessness and racism which logically tied into several seventh-grade civics lessons.

I was at this school for less than a year as my husband received a transfer assignment.

### **Years Three and Four**

With my husband's orders to transfer in hand, my family and I moved to Nellis AFB in Las Vegas, NV. We spent two years there. I was a substitute teacher for one year and the second year I co-taught with another teacher in a fifth-grade classroom with 45 students.

This was my first experience using a basal for reading instruction. I found that it was easy to follow, but I also thought it became rather boring and monotonous. Because all the lessons were spelled out for me, I spent little time thinking about effective reading instructional practice. I must have assumed that since all the information was in the teacher's guide, it must have been well-crafted and structured. I am embarrassed to say that we spent language arts time in round-robin whole class reading. My co-teacher was a

veteran with over thirty years of teaching experience, and this was how she conducted reading. Since I didn't know any better, I simply followed suit and did the same thing that she did. Again, I'm not convinced that I met the needs of any of my students. Since all were reading the same on-grade level basal, struggling readers and above-grade level readers probably had few of their needs met. I never thought to differentiate nor would I have even known how at that time.

### **McIntosh Elementary School**

My husband retired from the Air Force and we moved back to Yorktown, VA. I was once again hired in Newport News Public Schools, this time at McIntosh Elementary School. This was a school that was recognized for excellence. The year prior, the staff had been awarded the national Blue Ribbon award for academic excellence. Teachers at McIntosh routinely presented at workshops, professional development training, and local and state conferences. I was amazed at the work ethic and collaborative environment I was welcomed into when I began teaching there.

I was one of four fifth grade teachers. We were organized into two teams of two teachers per team. I was responsible for language arts and social studies while my teammate taught math and science.

Thankfully, the other team's language arts and social studies teacher was a veteran who was always trying to improve her craft. She took me under her wing and helped me to become the kind of teacher I had envisioned being. Under her tutelage and collaborative effort, I became an effective reading teacher.

It was also at this time that I began in earnest to attend workshops and professional development opportunities. I remember attending a 3-day workshop on how

to incorporate reader's workshop into reading. Reader's workshop is an independent reading program in which students read books and write about their reading in a journal on a daily basis. The teacher, in turn, responds to each journal and assesses what each student needs to become proficient. I came back to the classroom ready, willing and able to start. I found, however, that this particular practice did not work for me. I needed a way to reach my struggling readers and I only had an hour and forty five minutes in which to do it. I also had to teach social studies during this timeframe. All students reading different books independently did not allow me to meet their needs. I am not saying the Readers Workshop isn't effective. It just didn't work for me.

Next, I read about literature circles. In literature circle groups, students all read the same book or different books centered around a common theme, discuss their reading, and may also complete other activities in their groups to strengthen reading comprehension. This particular framework was a perfect fit for me and my students. It allowed choice for students, I was able to integrate the trade books we read with the social studies curriculum, I could teach mini-lessons to the whole class, and then I could conduct guided reading with my support level readers.

I enjoyed watching my students grow and mature as readers capable of discussing reading. It was an evolutionary process and one that required great patience and scaffolding of instruction. Students had to be taught how to discuss books effectively and also needed to learn how to take turns with various roles. However, even though it was extremely labor intensive, it was also rewarding.

The hardest part of literature circles is the preparation that goes into it. Much thought is given to books that are included for the groups. I always tried to have many

levels and told students to pick three that they were interested in reading. Though I couldn't guarantee that they would always get their first choice, I did guarantee that they'd get one of their top three. Since I always had six or seven for them to choose from they knew they would be reading something they had chosen. I believe choice is an important factor in reading motivation. This also allowed me to ensure that students would be reading at their instructional levels, which is critical during reading instruction.

I taught fifth grade reading for five years. During that time, all of the guided reading instruction was integrated with historical fiction. I sometimes felt badly about this. Though the students were allowed to read other genres during independent reading time, during instruction, we always used social studies oriented trade books. This was the expectation of the school, and I followed it without question. It was an effective way to enforce content and at the time, I thought it was a sound approach to instruction. However, if I were to do it again, I would insist on incorporating different genres into guided reading instruction so that I could teach instructionally about other genres: realistic fiction, mystery, science fiction, etc.

After five years, I finished my course work and became a library media specialist. I moved into the library at this same school. I became an advocate for independent reading time and was instrumental in a school-wide independent reading program. I started a "Book in a Bag" initiative in which kindergarteners took home a different book each night to read with their parents. This is my proudest achievement as I know how important it is to read at home. Most of our students didn't have many books at home so I felt strongly about increasing their access to books.

### **Reading Beliefs**

I believe that teachers are the single most important determinant of whether or not students are successful in their classrooms. When provided with a systematic reading plan based on best practices implemented at instructional reading levels, students can be successful. However, I also believe that teachers oftentimes enter the classroom ill-equipped to teach reading. It seems particularly at the 3-5 grade levels that little training in reading comprehension instruction is offered to teachers. That was certainly the case with me. Luckily, I got the training and assistance I needed.

I think the reading specialist and principal should assess the capabilities of every teacher of reading at their elementary school and decide what training is needed. Then that training should be provided. Since reading is crucial to academic success, this needs to happen as soon as the teacher steps into the classroom. There is no time to waste.

Guided reading instruction is best provided in a small group arrangement because it can be conducted at a student's instructional level which is the level best used for learning. However, I believe in flexible grouping and formative assessment so that students do not get tracked and forever placed in groups where there is no escape.

I believe that flexible grouping provides the optimal context for reading instruction because it allows for grouping based on many factors. For instance, should a teacher notice that students at various instructional levels are having difficulty with summarization, she might form a group to work on this particular reading strategy. If others need help with word attack strategies, students at the same instructional level can work with the same text to improve these skills. Flexible grouping provides much latitude to meet student needs. In my opinion it is differentiation at its best.

Connected text (text that has a coherent message, e.g. a story) should be used to the maximum extent possible. It is much more engaging than a worksheet and engagement leads to learning. Additionally, expository text needs to be incorporated extensively into intermediate reading comprehension instruction as it requires different skills and ways of thinking about text.

I have no prejudices about what kids should read. My feeling is that if they are reading something that they are enjoying than this is great. I remember how comforting it was as a child to read formulaic, predictable books. I made sure that my library was full of series books at all levels. Children love to read all the books in a series. However, my read alouds were always Caldecott, Newbery, or VA Readers Choice award-winning books because I wanted students to hear rich language and experience excellent plots. To me, this is not contradictory in the least. If I can entice a child with something they can succeed with and then move him to something of a higher quality, I've succeeded in my mission.

I think that reading teachers should love to read, should foster that love in their students, and should convey their enthusiasm for reading and the teaching of reading to their students each and every day. I listened to one teacher tell his students that he didn't like to read, and he understood how they felt. I was horrified! How on earth did he think he was going to affect reading with that attitude?

I do not think that I am willing to find effective reading teachers who don't enjoy reading and who use worksheets and a "drill and kill" mentality to teach reading. This goes against all that I believe about solid reading instruction. This does not mean that a teacher can never use a worksheet or never teach test-taking strategies so necessary in



today's SOL environment. It just means that I cannot endure the thought of this being the norm for teaching as I believe it kills the pleasure that should be a large part of reading in the classroom.

### **My Expectations**

When I enter classrooms to observe reading comprehension instruction, I expect to find enthusiastic, energetic lovers of reading. Since I am seeking effective reading teachers, I think that this will be the case. I expect to see students engaged in reading and teachers helping them to grow as readers. I expect to see many different strategies being used during instruction in a methodical and intentional way. I expect to see much discussion of reading, and I hope that students are encouraged to voice differing thoughts and opinions about their reading. I expect to see lots of modeling with teacher think alouds connecting text to personal experiences, beliefs, or other readings.

I hope to see practices in the classrooms of effective teachers that are new and different – as yet to be researched. I think that great teachers are a unique and special breed who are always learning, changing, growing, and implementing new ideas into their instruction. I wouldn't be surprised to see something I'd never seen before happening in an effective teacher's classroom.

### **Outcomes**

Should I observe practices or techniques that are new to reading comprehension instruction; my observations will serve to enlighten the field and perhaps even open up another avenue to explore. Should practices that are already girded in research be the outcome of my observations, they will serve to strengthen the literature base and contribute more evidence of effective comprehension instructional practice.

Additionally, I may find that reading practices that are acknowledged in the research as having a solid basis for instruction may not be being used in the classroom. If this is the case, this will provide additional information that is of value to the field.

I think that the depth of a qualitative study will add much richness to the knowledge base about reading comprehension instruction. This depth will provide specifics about how effective instruction is accomplished.

## Appendix Q

## Sample Member Checking

**Ashley**

On Tue, Jun 7, 2011 at 3:56 PM, Lauri Leeper <lmleeper@email.wm.edu> wrote:

Hi Ashley,

Well the end of the year is quickly approaching, isn't it? I hope you're not too exhausted! I have a request and hope it's not too intrusive at this time of year.

I have written my introduction about you and would like you to check the facts to make sure everything is correct. Please check for accuracy. The direct quotes that I've used from our interviews were transcribed verbatim. Don't be concerned about wording that may sound a little awkward; we don't often speak in complete, fluid sentences.

Thanks again for your assistance in this effort. Enjoy your summer break!

Lauri

Ashley to me

show details 6:49 PM (21 hours ago)

Looks great Lauri. I didn't like that I talked in fragments of sentences in that one part, but I suppose I did, because I was probably a little nervous. :-). Anyway, I changed 2 words from plural to singular on page 3 where I said it didn't matter if kids know how to read or enjoy reading ; don't think I would have said kids enjoys reading even if I was nervous. :-). Anyway I marked the s's in red where I think they should be omitted. Good luck with your dissertation and I enjoyed working with you. I am looking forward to my summer.

**Connie**

Sent: Tuesday, June 07, 2011 3:20 PM

To: Connie

Subject: Member Checking Request

Hi Connie,

Well the end of the year is quickly approaching, isn't it. I hope you're not too exhausted! I have a request and hope it's not too intrusive at this time of year.

I have written my introduction about you and would like you to check the facts to make sure everything is correct. Please check for accuracy. The direct quotes that I've used from our interviews were transcribed verbatim. Don't be concerned about wording that may sound a little awkward; we don't often speak in complete, fluid sentences.

Thanks again for your assistance in this effort. Enjoy your summer break!

Lauri

Connie to me

show details 3:34 PM (1 hour ago)

It sounds very gracious, Lauri! I think you worked some magic there. It is fine, as far as I can tell. I'm glad you said the interview didn't have to be complete, fluid sentences, though!! I certainly saw a lot that weren't.

Hope all is going well for you! Yes, the school year is winding down. Next week will be quite busy and hectic, trying to get all the last minute things and all the "packing up" of the room so the floors can be waxed.

Best wishes to you as you complete your work!

Connie

**Katie**

From: Lauri Leeper [mailto:lmleeper@email.wm.edu]  
Sent: Tuesday, June 07, 2011 3:46 PM  
To: Katie  
Subject: Accuracy Request on Teacher Intro

Hi Katie,

Well the end of the year is quickly approaching, isn't it? I hope you're not too exhausted! I have a request and hope it's not too intrusive at this time of year.

I have written my introduction about you and would like you to check the facts to make sure everything is correct. Please check for accuracy. The direct quotes that I've used from our interviews were transcribed verbatim. Don't be concerned about wording that may sound a little awkward; we don't often speak in complete, fluid sentences.

Thanks again for your assistance in this effort. Enjoy your summer break!

Lauri

Katie to me  
show details 4:20 PM (57 minutes ago)

Hi Lauri,

Your introduction is completely correct and your request not intrusive at all. I truly enjoyed working with you and wish you all the best as you finish your doctorate! This school year definitely FLEW by!

Katie

**Missy**

From:  
Lauri Leeper <lmleeper@email.wm.edu>

To: Missy

Date:  
06/07/2011 03:34 PM

Subject:  
Accuracy Check Request

Hi Missy,

Well the end of the year is quickly approaching, isn't it? I hope you're not too exhausted! I have a request and hope it's not too intrusive at this time of year.

I have written my introduction about you and would like you to check the facts to make sure everything is correct. Please check for accuracy. The direct quotes that I've used from our interviews were transcribed verbatim. Don't be concerned about wording that may sound a little awkward; we don't often speak in complete, fluid sentences.

Thanks again for your assistance in this effort. Enjoy your summer break!

Where is your daughter going to attend college next fall?

Lauri

Missy to me

Hi Lauri,

I was going through emails and I CAN'T BELIEVE I hadn't responded to you. I am so sorry. Life has been CRAZY!!! I do apologize. Once again you have made me sound WONDERFUL! This is great.

I wish you so much luck in all your future undertakings.

My daughter got wait listed for xxx, so she will be attending xxx as of now. Everything happens for a reason though.

Enjoy your summer!

Missy

## Vita

Lauri M. Leeper

Birthdate: March 24, 1957

Birthplace: Fontainebleau, France

Education: 2007-2011 The College of William and Mary  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy, Planning, and  
Leadership

1990-1992 Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, Virginia  
Master of Science in Education

1987-1989 Chapman University  
Orange, California  
Master of Science in Human Resources Management and  
Development

1975-1979 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Blacksburg, Virginia  
Bachelor of Science