

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SIX FIRST-GRADE
TEACHERS USING READING MASTERY PLUS
CURRICULUM IN HIGH POVERTY
SCHOOLS

By

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PRELUDE

“Who’s Going to Know?” Schools of Inequity

At first I had mixed feelings about including Micah in my study. He was so eager and willing to meet with me that I could not refuse him. It was hard enough to get teachers to send back the initial questionnaires and his was one of three that arrived within the first week of beginning my project. I was reluctant, because during a phone conversation he mentioned he was a PE teacher and had no real experience with reading instruction. “Great!” I remember thinking sarcastically, “this research project just keeps getting better and better.” What I did not know was how much Micah had to offer; or how his innocent statements about the lights in his gymnasium brought to life the many inequities that are still present in our schools, many of which are hidden and eventually forgotten about.

Students in poverty enter classrooms each day where many middle class citizens would never dream of leaving their children, let alone entrusting their children’s education to occur in places such as these. Micah was critically aware of the social injustices found in his school and was learning how to cope. As I left him that day I prayed he would not become another teacher silenced by the hopelessness many of us felt.

Micah was talking about schools where he had worked before. He said, “You don’t have schools that are poorer than the other, because all the teachers, all the board gets it (money) and they divide it around. Here they get it from the state for how many kids and then they go and I think divide it unevenly.” He went on to describe his frustration with the school district. When he arrived at the beginning of the school year, Micah realized the lights in his gym needed to be replaced. He said the kids were playing in the dark and that it wasn’t safe for them. So, following the proper protocol he placed a work order for the district’s maintenance crew to come and fix the lights. Seven to eight months later his lights were replaced. Discouraged by how long it took the district to respond to the work order, he asked the maintenance man if it always took that long to get things fixed in the district. The man responded, “I just get the orders, but I’ll tell you one thing, we have been to some schools twice before we came here. We’ll go there twice before going to your school... I don’t think it’s fair either. I just get the work orders.” Micah said there was no more discussion.

As our interview progressed I asked him why he thought this happened at his school. He answered, “I think parents in some schools have more voice than parents in other schools. Parent involvement here is nothing like it is at other schools... Well if you come to a school that doesn’t have parent backing, well you know, they’re not going to, you know, well, no one is complaining if we don’t give them what they want, you know? Who’s going to know?” I could tell this was not Micah’s personal line of reasoning, but I could also tell this act of inequity had bothered him on some level.

Who’s going to know?

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“In most states, access to public education is limited to one’s neighborhood. The effect is that wealthier families have access to schools with more robust funding than do their poorer neighbors. Segregation by social class is the rule, not the exception.”

(Sizer, 2004, p. xix)

Young children in economically disadvantaged schools have greater difficulties in early literacy achievement than in schools of middle and higher income households (Allington, 200; Garan, 2002; Strickland, 2001; Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). It is understood that effective early reading instruction from experienced and knowledgeable teachers is key to early literacy success (Adler, 2001; Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). However, in high poverty schools, plagued with higher teacher attrition rates, more inexperienced teachers, chronic student transience, and lack of economic resources, the chances of early literacy achievement is significantly diminished (Meier, et al., 2004).

Furthermore, teachers in schools of poverty face increasing demands to know and implement legislative mandates, to provide high-quality education for their students with limited budgets, and to understand and meet the needs of their students (Cummins, 2007; Sizer, 2004). And yet, these teachers are expected to close the reading achievement gap

between children of poverty and middle and upper class students and have their students reading on grade level by the end of third grade according to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Quick Fixes

In an effort to improve reading achievement and to meet legislative mandates set into motion by political movements such as the Reading First Initiative, a component of the No Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), school districts nationwide are searching for “proven” methods to increase their students’ abilities to read (Allington, 2002; Milosovic, 2007). According to Allington (2002), these scientifically-based reading research (SBRR) also referred to as *proven* reading programs are just insufficient *quick fixes* to complicated problems in literacy education. Rather than resorting to faddish and expedient methodologies, leading reading researchers believe it is crucial to give at-risk students experienced and knowledgeable teacher-experts (Allington & Walmsey, 2007; Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Collins Block, & Mandel Morrow, 2001).

These teachers-experts’ abilities equip them with the kind of guidance and facilitation needed to help them achieve reading success (Allington, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Large sums of federal moneys, \$4 billion since 2002 (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007), are being allocated to these high poverty schools through grants like the Reading First Grant, based on the Reading First Initiative (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). In order to purchase and implement programs based on Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR), reading curricula teachers in schools have to agree to follow specific guidelines

binding them to grants such as the Reading First Grant (Bree – a pseudonym, fieldnotes, 8/10/06).

However, Allington stated that *quick fixes* are questionable. One so-called *proven* reading program cannot meet the needs of all students (Allington 2002; Garan 2002; Milosovic, 2007). The government is looking for reading programs to fix our students' achievement instead of relying on the knowledge, professionalism, and discretion of the teachers who serve our students. As Allington (2002) stated, "Programs don't teach. Teachers do." (p. 17).

The Reading First Initiative

"Reading First, a component of NCLB, is a competitive grant program created to help states and school districts set up 'Scientific Research Based' reading programs for kindergarten to third grade students" (Womble, 2006, p. 8). The ultimate goal of the Reading First Initiative is to have all students reading on grade level by the end of third grade (www. ed.gov retrieved 8/10/2006). With more demands being placed on reading teachers and schools to improve their students' achievement and abilities to read, some schools have chosen to use scripted reading curricula such as SRA McGraw Hill's Reading Mastery Plus series with the aim of developing a consistency of reading instruction for their students in the face of factors endemic to schools in poverty - high teacher attrition rates, inexperienced teachers, and student mobility (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/2006).

An Urban Midwestern School District: Grover Public Schools
and the Reading First Grant

In an effort to improve reading achievement in five of the neediest schools in their district, Grover Public Schools (a pseudonym) applied for and received the Reading First Grant. As a condition of participation, administrators in Grover Public Schools signed the State of Oklahoma's assurance agreement in order to qualify and receive funds from the Reading First Grant (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/06).

Furthermore, Grover Public Schools was required to employ a Reading First Coach to facilitate the implementation of the SBRR program (ultimately Reading Mastery Plus) used; to commit to full cooperation with the Reading First Coach; to select a common, comprehensive reading program, based on SBRR; guide reading instruction in grades K-3 in all schools participating in the grant; to provide students with 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily; to administer the common sets of state required assessments based on SBRR; to provide more intensive reading interventions for students not progressing; to work cooperatively with Reading First Specialists from the state; to require participation in professional development; to complete surveys and interviews; to submit to site visits from the Oklahoma State Department of Education; to participate in evaluation activities; and to adhere to all state and federal Reading First requirements (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2004).

The Grover Public School district's first application for the Reading First Grant was declined, because the district chose two SBRR reading programs, namely Scott Foresman and Reading Mastery Plus, to be implemented. The state asked the district to revise its application and submit only one SBRR reading program (Bree, fieldnotes,

8/10/06). The principals in these five schools met, discussed, and agreed to use the Reading Mastery Plus program as the core reading program in the five schools participating in the grant.

According to Bree (fieldnotes, 8/10/2006), the Reading First Grant Coordinator for Grover Public Schools, the principals in the five Grover Public Schools were the only ones who participated in the decision-making as to what reading curriculum would be used in their kindergarten, first, second, and third grade classrooms. The teachers in these five schools had no voice or choice in determining what reading program would be selected for their students (Abigail, personal communication, 3/7/07; Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/06). In my efforts to understand the issues teachers face under NCLB and what it is like to teach reading under the Reading First Grant, I was curious about how choosing a reading curriculum, without the input or support of teachers, affected the teachers in these five schools. How did the teachers respond to and implement a scripted reading program in their classrooms? There is no current research that examines the lived experiences of teachers in schools participating in the Reading First Grant where scripted reading curricula are used.

Statement of Problem

Following a scripted curriculum can prove to be difficult for experienced teachers (Holcomb, 2005). Often times they feel curricula do not meet the needs of their students (Holcomb, 2005; Ryder, Burton, & Salinger, 2006; Starnes, 2001). Ryder et al. (2006), found that reading teachers using a curriculum such as Reading Mastery Plus believed the curriculum could not meet the needs of their students. These teachers found the scripted curricula too limiting and believed their students needed more guidance and tailored

instruction from them as their teachers. Other than Ryder, et al.'s study, little is known about how and why some teachers adapt scripted programs, what types of alterations are made, and how teachers feel about using these kinds of scripted programs for beginning reading instruction under the Reading First Grant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of six first-grade teachers using Reading Mastery Plus in schools participating in the Reading First Grant. This study describes the teachers' experiences of working in a school participating in the Reading First Grant. First-grade teachers were chosen for this study because for the past century, reading instruction has generally begun in the first-grade (DeVries, 2008).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-grade teachers involved in the Reading First Grant using the scripted Reading Mastery Plus curriculum perceived and implemented the scripted reading program. More specifically:

1. How do first grade teachers respond to and implement Reading Mastery Plus in their classrooms?
2. What types of instructional changes are made during Reading Mastery Plus instruction?
3. Why do first-grade teachers feel they need to intervene and/or make adjustments to Reading Mastery Plus instruction?
4. How has working in a school participating in the Reading First Grant

affected their reading instruction?

5. How do these first-grade teachers perceive the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum?

Significance of the Study

With No Child Left Behind and the Reading First Initiative in motion, schools nationwide are looking for ways to improve reading achievement and to raise test scores (Holcomb, 2005). This means that schools receiving federal monies are made to use curricula following SBRR specifications, such as Reading Mastery Plus, that have “scientifically-based research” backing their programs’ effectiveness in order to meet the federal goals set for the schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Interestingly enough, the schools that are most in need and are most affected by the federal mandates of No Child Left Behind are also schools in high poverty that already experience great difficulties associated with low socioeconomic status (SES) (Allington, 2002; Garan, 2002; Milosovic, 2007).

Perhaps, implementation of scripted programs goes against the better judgment of teachers who work side-by-side with our children and know their backgrounds and educational needs? Although school districts obligate teachers to use these curricula, how teachers implement the scripted programs is another issue (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/06). This study will describe how six first-grade teachers under the Reading First Grant perceive Reading Mastery Plus, how they implement the curriculum, whether or not they adjust the scripted program to meet the needs of their students, as well as what it is like for them to teach in schools participating in the Reading First Grant.

Definition of Terms

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was an educational reform signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. NCLB is the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Meier, et al., 2004).

Reading First Initiative(RF)(<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06) is an aspect of No Child Left Behind that emphasizes the use of evidenced-based reading programs to improve reading achievement for kindergarten through third grade. Since 2002, more than \$4 billion dollars has been spent to improve beginning reading instruction (Teale, et al., 2007).

Reading First Grant (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06) is a formula grant in which federal funds are allocated to states for improvement of reading instruction. Schools are encouraged to use reading programs that follow the guidelines of Scientifically Based Reading Research.

Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) (also known as. “proven”) is research that

- (i) at minimum, employs systematic, empirical methods;
- (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that, when relevant to the line of inquiry or purpose of the investigation, are adequate to test a stated hypothesis and to justify general conclusions drawn;
- (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data from the investigators and observers involved in the study, and provides reliable and valid data from multiple measurements used, and observations made in the study; and

- (iv) uses every opportunity to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest (Wilde, 2000).

Sizer (2004, p. xxi) argued that this definition of SBRR is narrowly and “largely settled on specific pedagogies and curricula that are ‘measurable.’” Sizer (2004) asserts that many other kinds of research (e.g., qualitative research) had been ignored in defining SBRR (p. xxi).

Direct Instruction (DI) is a “technologically based approach to remedying and preventing skill deficiencies” (Becker, Englemann, Carnine, & Maggs, 1982, p. 153).

The Direct Instruction model originated in the Carl Bereiter-Siegfried Englemann Preschool at the University of Illinois. Bereiter and Englemann hypothesized that instruction needed to take place at a faster-than-average rate to help below-average readers catch up to their above-average peers. Englemann developed a sequenced step-by-step scripted curricula that attempted to break down complex tasks, such as reading, into incremental lessons (Ryder, et al., 2006).

DISTAR “also called Reading Mastery is a scripted program that relies on phonics for teaching beginning readers” (Gelberg, 2008). According to Allington (2002) this DISTAR program is the same program that was used thirty years ago. He claims that the publishers of this Reading Mastery program have merely changed the covers of the curricula and changed the illustrations. He asserts that this RMP program is the same as DISTAR (2002).

Scientific Research Associates (SRA) is a division of McGraw-Hill publications that publishes the Direct Instruction curriculum Reading Mastery Plus (www.sraonline.com, retrieved 8/10/06).

Reading Mastery Plus (RMP) is a scripted reading curriculum developed by Engelmann (Ryder, et al., 2006). It is one program that is authorized under the Reading First Initiative (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/2006).

Social Economic Status (SES) is a term used in educational research describing the socio-economic conditions in which the people of the community, schools, and or students live.

Mutual Adaptation in Curriculum refers to the ability of teachers to use professional autonomy in modifying curricula. This occurs as teachers make necessary changes according to their judgments.

Fidelity of Use in Curriculum refers to how well a curriculum is followed and implemented (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Strict fidelity of use will be discussed in this research study. Teachers in this study were expected by their administrators to have a high fidelity of use of the Reading Mastery Plus program (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/10/2006).

Assumptions

This study is based on the following assumption:

- First-grade teachers who implement the Reading Mastery Plus reading program actually care about what reading program works.
- First-grade teachers who will be used in this research study will share honestly what they believe about the Reading Mastery Plus program.

- First-grade teachers who use Reading Mastery Plus under the Reading First Grant implement these programs consistently and use the scripts provided.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to the following limitations:

- Schools used in this study are not identical demographically but are comparable.
- Teachers in this study are limited to first-grade classrooms. For the past century beginning reading instruction usually occurred in the first-grade (DeVries, 2008).
- As a reading specialist, who has been trained to use Reading Mastery Plus, I realize I have some of my own notions about the scripted reading program.

Personally, I believe in professional autonomy and in teachers' intuition to make instructional judgments necessary to meet the needs of students. While being trained in Reading Mastery Plus I began to feel confined and restricted. It is my belief that adhering to a scripted program squelches professional autonomy and limits interactions between teachers and students.

- As a qualitative researcher, I realize I am the instrument that guided the direction of my research and I had to be mindful of where the research needed to be led as stated through the participants, not necessarily of where I wanted to lead the research.

Addressing these assumptions and limitations, especially my personal beliefs about the Reading Mastery Plus program, was imperative to this study. I was not able to share my beliefs and biases with participants. I never wanted to influence their responses to my

research questions. I had to stay focused on my research questions while interviewing and observing them.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction of the study including the statement of the problem, purpose for the study, an explanation of significance for this research, and assumptions and limitations regarding the study.

Chapter II reviews the literature regarding this research topic, namely characteristics of high poverty schools, the rich and poor achievement gap in reading, teacher agency in curriculum implementation, early reading instruction, “proven” reading programs and mandated reforms. Chapter III presents the research methodology for this study, including information, my research questions, research design, research procedures, research participants, data sources, data analysis, my role as researcher, and ethical issues. Chapter IV presents a report of the data collected and Chapter V summarizes the findings, as well as describes implications and possible future research associated with this research study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review literature regarding the characteristics of high poverty schools, teacher agency in curriculum implementation, early reading instruction, so-called proven reading programs and mandated reforms. Understanding what teachers have faced as they have been forced to follow guidelines for their instruction set into motion by non-educator outsiders, becomes of important to this research project. How has constantly working in difficult and hard pressing situations, like those of high poverty schools, coupled with the inability to veer away from a scripted curriculum and the dominating force and usage of specific curricula affected the teachers? All of these topics closely relate to my particular research topic of understanding the lived experiences of teachers using scripted curricula in schools participating under political mandates such as the Reading First Initiative, a component of No Child Left Behind. Further, this chapter will create a background for understanding the kinds of reading instruction and problems teachers face in educating children of poverty in today's classrooms by including an actual script used during a Reading Mastery Plus lesson.

Schools in Poverty

“This is my life. It isn’t all I dreamed of and I tell myself sometimes that I might have accomplished more. But growing up in poverty rules out some avenues. You do the best you can.”

-Student interviewed by Jonathan Kozol in Savage Inequalities (1991, p. 26)

American students in poverty face many more obstacles than their middle and upper class counterparts (Allington, 2002; Kozol, 1991). Poverty creates different life experiences for children (Bell, 2004). Students who attend lower socioeconomic status (SES) schools are less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade (Adler, 2001). Higher teacher attrition rates, larger percentages of minority children who qualify for free or reduced lunch, overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, inexperienced and alternatively certified teachers, high student mobility rates, higher dropout rates, parents with limited educational backgrounds, and narrowed curricula focus are common characteristics of schools with low socio-economic status (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Horn, 2007; Ferguson, 1998; Miller, Diffy, Rohr, Gasparello, & Mercier, 2005; Miller-Cribbs, Cronen, Davis, & Johnson, 2002; Roza, 2001; Smith, Fien, & Paine, 2008; Taylor, Teddlie, Freeman, & Pounders, 1998).

Some researchers go beyond the classroom walls and blame social inequities, referred to as non-school problems found in our nation, as the culprit to many problems our poor students face in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kozol, 2007; Rothstein, 2008). Children in poverty are less likely to have preventative and on-going healthcare leading to more school absences due to illness, their families repeatedly fall behind in rent and have to move more frequently, poorer children are not read to as often

or exposed to parents with large vocabularies, many come from single-parent homes where they receive less adult interaction, and they experience fewer trips and opportunities to broaden and develop their future horizons (Rothstein, 2008). Sizer (2004) stated as follows:

Compelling research on larger themes – the social reasons for school dropouts, the weakness of social capital in regions with apparently ‘low performing’ schools, the misdesign of many schools, the evidence of growing inequities among population groups and communities, the impact of ubiquitous media on the basic learning of children and adolescents, find no place in the act [NCLB] (p. xxi).

These common challenges that children in poverty face contribute to how well they learn and achieve in schools. To discount or disregard the effects of these problems on learning is both unfair and unrealistic.

Ideally, education has been viewed as a leveler of opportunity; however, researchers have found that there are huge discrepancies in the educational opportunities that children of poverty are afforded (Kozol, 1991; Meier, et al., 2004; Miller, Duffy, Rohr, Gasparello, & Mercier, 2005; Rothstein, 2008). Although obstacles children in poverty face in and out of the classroom affect how well they learn, a consensus on the causes of this achievement gap are still not agreed upon. Some research suggests that students who go to schools with larger percentages of minority students are already at-risk for academic failure because of related social segregation that is created by pockets of homogeneity (Bankston & Caldas, 1998). Other studies have found great differences in vital educational resources (i.e. experienced teachers, technology, adequate school

buildings) between schools of affluence and those of poverty (Biddle & Berliner, 2003; Kozol, 1991). Allington (2002) and Rothstein (2008) stated that young children entering our nation's schools are already years behind their higher SES counterparts, because of deficient resources for books and the lack of actual reading experiences in their homes. These discrepant issues of equity affect how well students read by the end of third grade (Foster & Miller, 2007). Fielding (2006) stated that students in poverty who come to Kindergarten already two to three years behind may need to achieve seven years of academic growth in four years. Couple this institutionally hobbled development with high student mobility and or inexperienced teachers and the student is already failing before she even begins school.

High-performing high poverty schools have common characteristics, such as experienced and dedicated teachers, strong leadership, an emphasis on early literacy, specialists' support, materials, and extensive community and parental involvement (Cunningham, 2006; McGee, 2004). Researchers of successful, poorer schools have found that knowledge, commitment, and cohesiveness of teachers are the key component to literacy achievement. In these cases, teachers worked together writing and discussing reading instructional lessons from different reading curricula to meet the needs of their students, and the teachers played integral roles in the leadership of their schools (Adler, 2001, McGee, 2004). Bell (2004) reported that in twelve high-performing high poverty schools, teachers were not inundated with bureaucratic paperwork and were sheltered from political agendas that could distract them from helping their students succeed. These teachers were focused on creating a supportive environment in which their students could achieve.

In many cases, high poverty schools have an extremely difficult time recruiting and maintaining high quality teachers (Allington, 2002; Kozol, 2002, 2007; Fram, et al, 2007; Roza, 2001). Experienced teachers do not necessarily want to teach in an at-risk environment. In low performing high poverty schools, teachers appear to have less professional autonomy and are forced to use mandated curricula (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Machtinger, 2007; Milosovic, 2007). In taking away teachers' ability to identify, understand, and meet the needs of their students, are we disregarding our teachers' knowledge of teaching by forcing them to use "teacher-proofed" curriculum, such as Reading Mastery Plus? Instructional adaptability is not allowed when teachers are forced to use a "one size fits all" predetermined curriculum in their classrooms (Milosovic, 2007). These "Rigid mandates can be misapplied to the disadvantage of the students and teachers they are intended to help" (Farstrup, 2006, p. 108). These teachers are already at a disadvantage when they cannot use what professional experience and judgments they have. These mandates sometimes interfere with teachers' abilities to make necessary instructional adaptations to curriculum.

Teacher Agency in Curriculum Implementation

"We destroy children's desire to learn by the mindless curriculum we inflict on them"

Silberman (1976).

Marsh and Willis (2003) claimed, "Curriculum implementation is the translation of a written curriculum into classroom practices." As those planned curricula become the enacted curricula, teachers interact with them and, if given the liberty, adjust the particular curriculum to meet the needs of their students- this is adaptation (McLaughlin,

1987). Not all teachers have been given this professional autonomy (Allington, 2002; Goodman, Shannon, Goodman, & Rapoport, 2004). Even before enactment of No Child Left Behind, many educators in schools of poverty were left out of the rethinking of school organization and curriculum implementation in their schools (Goodman, et al., 2004).

Still today, these educators' input and professional judgments on what needs to be done for the students they serve on a daily basis does not appear to be part of the major school reform effort. Outsiders, such as politicians and State Department of Education representatives, have made decisions about what needs to be taught, when and how it should be taught, and by whom it should be taught (Paris, 1993). In these cases, teachers' engagement in matters of curriculum is restricted to merely implementing the curricula that were selected *for* them and *for* their students by outsiders (Goodman, et al., 2004).

Limited Engagement

“Teachers are typically trapped in the role of passive recipients rather than
of active creators of their teaching”
Ayers (2003).

Current trends in curriculum selection have lead to the rebirth and use of scripted programs (Gelberg, 2008). By using and implementing curricula that is predetermined, scripted, and “teacher-proof” in nature, teachers' engagement in curricular matters becomes inactive, limited, and stifled (Apple, 1986; Flinders, 1989; Paris, 1993; Silberman, 1970). Smith (1986) sees the use of programs such as DISTAR, a.k.a. Reading Mastery series (Gelberg, 2008), as a way of further separating teacher from student and teacher from curriculum. This rift created between teachers and students makes it easier for politicians and other unqualified non-educators to control what is

being taught in American classrooms. It causes disengagement between teachers, professionalism, and their work (Smith, 1986).

Curriculum Adaptation

Teachers need to have the flexibility to make the kind of instructional decisions needed for their students (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Ben-Peretz (1990) discussed the importance of professional autonomy by describing how teachers “cherished their curricular autonomy” (p. 21) and needed the right to choose from various materials in teaching their students. Teachers tended to rely on a variety of texts, not just one particular text, in order to make these kinds of necessary professional decisions about their students (Ben-Peretz, 1990). Fullan and Pomfret (1977) found that teachers made adaptations to curriculum as they used it in their classrooms. Adaptation of curriculum refers to the ability of the teachers to modify curricula as needed in their classrooms curriculum adaptation occurs as teachers make necessary changes (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

Curriculum adaptation epitomizes the need to change curricula as they become enacted with students. McLaughlin (1987) believed it was essential for teachers to modify and adjust the curricula as they found necessary in order to get the greatest possible results for the students they served. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) found that when the curricula were not highly specified, or predetermined in nature, they were much more conducive to adaptation by the teachers as long as teachers were given this kind of professional autonomy.

Teacher Agency

Teacher agency in curriculum matters is nothing new. According to Paris (1993) teacher agency characterizes the relationship between teachers and curriculum in that teachers have personal initiative and a moral responsibility that involves action in critiquing and creating curriculum. In this sense, teacher agents view curriculum as constantly evolving as learning occurs and individuals' needs are met (Paris, 1993). It seems for years teachers have struggled to gain control of their own teaching and the curriculum used in their classrooms (Paris, 1993). Apple (1986) stated that as early as the twentieth century, curricula in American classrooms were determined by the growing belief that the requirements of society was what should be taught, rather than meeting the individual needs of the students. Paris (1993) stated

By mid-century, curriculum had come to refer to a stable and reified product separate from and requisite to teachers' work-as opposed to an evolving process negotiated between teacher and child. The relationship of teachers to curriculum was reduced to the receiving and implementing of curricula by teachers without their having engaged intellectually in their creation or critique. (p. 7)

This view created a "teacher as technician" (p. 25) role for teachers and diminished the professionalism of educators (Silberman, 1970), and goes against the idea of teacher agency. Following this idea, teachers could be viewed as dispensers of knowledge without necessarily having to understand what it was they were teaching; teachers could be seen as transmitters. Smith (1986) contended such developments in curricular matters distanced teachers further from engaging with the curricula they used in their classrooms.

What appears to be more natural for teacher agents is for them to respond to and adapt curriculum that appears inadequate for the students they teach. Paris (1993) reported that teachers for many years have reorganized, embellished, refined, or rejected curricula that did not meet their students' needs. Such teacher-agents have created their own curricula in times when nothing could otherwise aid them in their instruction. However, some current curricular practices limit these kinds of teacher agency interactions, leaving the teachers no choice but to follow and never to veer away from the curriculum given to them, regardless of the negative effects (Allington, 2002; Goodman, et al., 2004; Meier, et al., 2004). This literature indicates that we have made little progress, in ways, since Silberman (1970) said this of his studies in the 1970s,

Teachers, no less than students, are defeated and victimized by the way in which schools are presently organized and run. Certainly nothing in which schools are built and run suggests respect for teachers as teachers, or as human beings...

What educators, and the rest of us, must recognize is that how teachers teach, and how they act, may be more important than what they teach.

Silberman (1970; 1976) was concerned that there was too much mindlessness in our schools and in our implementation of curriculum. He got to the heart of teacher agency and wanted educators, politicians, and parents to ask critical questions like, "Why are we doing what we are doing in our classrooms?" As Paris (1993) pointedly stated, "teachers remain receivers and implementers of curriculum created or selected by others rather than active agents in the creation and critique of curriculum."(p. 10). Teacher agency in literacy instruction may prove crucial in meeting the needs of beginner readers.

Early Reading Instruction: Learning to Read

The importance of learning to read in our world today cannot be overemphasized. Our students need to know how to read and write in order to live and grow in our global society (DeVries, 2008). Teaching children to read can be a daunting task because our students come to schools with a wide range of literacy experiences (DeVries, 2008). Most students in high poverty schools enter classrooms already years behind in their literacy development (Strickland, 2001). To neglect literacy instruction in these struggling and at-risk students is to leave them behind.

Effective early literacy instruction research has been conducted for years (Pressley, et al., 2001; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2006). Researchers have found that successful early literacy teachers meet daily with students in small, flexible groups, facilitate many literacy activities throughout the day (including reading to students, have students write for a variety of purposes, and create literacy rich environments), use ongoing informal and formal assessments to guide instruction, and making instructional adjustments based on professional judgments they regularly made (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley et al., 2001; Ruddell, 1997; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Other researchers have found that effective early literacy instruction includes teachers scaffolding students by modeling productive reading processes, such as seeking clarification, self-questioning, making connections to prior knowledge, and making, revising, and confirming predictions (Pressley, Brown, Beard El-Dinary, & Afflerbach, 1995; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Research has shown that effective early literacy instruction is viable, cooperative, and constructive in nature when teachers interact with students (Dorn, et. al, 1998).

The International Reading Association (IRA) issued a position statement in 2006 describing a research-based explanation of effective classroom reading teachers. IRA (2006) described these teachers as having several qualities and characteristics, such as:

1. They understand reading and writing development and believe all children can learn to read and write.
2. They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experience.
3. They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
4. They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
5. They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students. (p. 1)

Effective early literacy instruction requires a lot of knowledge and experience from teachers (Allington, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998). How reading teachers use comprehensive and constructive instructional practices such as interaction, guiding, and modeling for their students determines how well their students succeed (Taylor, et al., 2000).

Direct Instruction and Scientifically-Based Reading Research Reading Programs

The creator of Direct Instruction (DI), Engelmann, views effective teaching practices from a different perspective. According to Adams and Engelmann (1996, p. 7) effective teachers need to be adequate presenters, motivators, and a basis for corrections

and student feedback. They view teachers as the deliverers of the curricula and not as facilitators of knowledge (1996, p. 31). Adams and Engelmann (1999) stated that “Direct Instruction teachers do not have to create the details of instruction through elaborate lesson plans; teachers just follow the script.” (p. 10). This behaviorist theory of education varies greatly from the principles of effective reading instruction research as seen from the International Reading Association’s point of view described earlier in this chapter.

Becker, et al (1982) claimed that the Direct Instruction curricula (Reading Mastery Plus is one curriculum in the DI series) were based on beliefs:

- (a) that voluntary behavior is learned, (b) that learning is dependent on the environment, (c) that the teacher controls the environment, (d) that intelligent behavior is learned and therefore can be taught, (e) that the rate of learning is largely controlled by the teaching, (f) that successfully taught students have greater gains than other students, (g) that thinking processes can be taught overtly, (h) that the nature of the skill, not the differences in the individual, is the logical determinant of the program’s sequence, (i) that when multiple interpretations might be learned, it is most efficient that the teacher sequence skills so that only one interpretation is learned, (j) that it cannot be assumed that skills will transfer to related tasks unless the student is taught commonalities in the tasks, (k) that the quality of the instructional process is controlled by careful, systematic monitoring of student responses and feedback to the student, and (l) that failure is a function of the instructional sequence, not the student (Becker, et al., 1982, p.).

It was their belief that the implementation of these principles and the fast rate of the RM program would keep the students engaged in learning to read (Becker, et al., 1982). This rigid parts-to-whole approach to teaching of reading does not allow teachers to adjust their instructional interactions with students. These curricula developers want teachers to limit themselves to what is already available in the curricular programs (Ben-Peretz, 1990). Individual needs of the students are not taken into account (Milosovic, 2007).

An underlying belief with this behaviorist theory of learning is that knowledge is already known and preexists outside of the learner. It follows what Freire (2003) referred to as the “banking concept of education,” (p. 73) where the teacher deposits information into her students. Here are some characteristics that Freire described (2003).

- (a) the teacher teaches and the student are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen- meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (p. 73).

Freire's concept of banking learning theory relates to the same kinds of principles as those found in the Direct Instruction Reading Mastery Plus series (See Appendix H). No real interaction or dialogue is necessary between the teacher and student, but merely a dispensing of knowledge from the teacher *to* the students and not *visa-verse*. The teacher, by following the scripted curriculum, controls exactly what is taught, how it is taught, at what rate it is taught, and what is deemed important to know and assess (Freire, 2003). Here is an example from Reading Mastery Plus. The scripted lesson dictates what the teacher is to say and how the students are to respond.

226 Appendix A: Sample Lesson 54

EXERCISE 13

Children identify, then sound out an irregular word (of)

a. (Touch the ball for **of**.) Everybody, you're going to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Move your finger quickly along the arrow.) **Of**. Yes, of.

b. Now you're going to sound out the word. Get ready. (Quickly touch **o**, **f** as the children say ooofff.)

c. Again. (Repeat b.)

d. How do we say the word? (Signal.) **Of**. Yes, of.

e. (Repeat b and d until firm.)

f. (Call on different children to do b and d.)

EXERCISE 14

Children identify, then sound out an irregular word (to)
(Repeat the procedures in exercise 13 for to.)

EXERCISE 15

Children read the fast way
(Touch the ball for **that**.) Get ready to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Signal.) **That**.

EXERCISE 16

Children sound out the word and tell what word

a. (Touch the ball for **cōat**.) Sound it out.

b. Get ready. (Touch **c**, **ō**, **t** as the children say cōōōt.)
• (If sounding out is not firm, repeat b.)

c. What word? (Signal.) **Coat**. Yes, coat.

EXERCISE 17

Children sound out the word and tell what word

a. (Touch the ball for **gōat**.) Sound it out.

b. Get ready. (Touch **g**, **ō**, **t** as the children say gōōōt.)
• (If sounding out is not firm, repeat b.)

c. What word? (Signal.) **Goat**. Yes, goat.

EXERCISE 18

Children read the words the fast way
(Have the children read the words on this page the fast way.)

EXERCISE 19

Individual test
(Call on different children to read one word the fast way.)

24 Lesson 54

Do not touch any small letters.

Today, the most widely used reading curriculum that utilizes the Direct Instruction approach is the Reading Mastery series (Ryder et al., 2006). Some schools participating in the Reading First Grant, such as Grover Public Schools, use Reading Mastery Plus because of the data that supports its effectiveness (Bree, personal fieldnotes, 8/10/06). The concept of Direct Instruction (DI) can be followed back to the “behavioral analyses of decoding tasks and process-product analyses of teaching” (Ryder, et al., 2006). Direct Instruction takes a complex skill and breaks the skill down into incremental and sequenced tasks. Teachers model the expectations of each task and then provide praise, feedback, or corrections to the students as they learn the pieces of the complex skill (Sexton, 2001).

According to Ryder et al. (2006), teachers use fingers, hand signals, or specified words or phrases to cue and correct their students. Wood (2004) described teachers’ frustration with using scripted curricula like Reading Mastery Plus as, “Teachers across the map complain that the joy of teaching is being drained from teaching as their work is reduced to passing out worksheets and drilling children as if they were in dog obedience school” (p. 39). These teachers complained of being trained for many days on how to implement the script and then were warned not to change anything about the program (see Appendix H).

Stahl, Duffy-Hester, and Stahl (1998) stated that the Direct Instruction (DI) approach to teaching reading is associated with three main principles of teaching, namely language is broken down into incremental components where it is taught in isolation away from meaningful context (and authentic literature), learning is highly teacher-centered and directed, and thirdly students have little input and limited participation in

what is being learned (consistent with Friere's banking concept). Language found throughout NCLB implies that these behaviorist models of teaching, such as Reading Mastery Plus, are proven to work based on the empirical data associated with these programs (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006).

Today, the most widely used reading curriculum that utilizes the DI approach is the Reading Mastery Plus series (Ryder, et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Ryder et al. (2006) teachers were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of Reading Mastery (RM) in their classrooms. Teachers responded with concerns about RM and stated it was by no means a good fit for their students based on what they assessed to be their students' needs. Many teachers reported that they had to supplement the program and help students build background knowledge that the RM program assumed the participants already had (see Appendix H).

Teachers revealed deviating from RM's script in order to give their students what they believed to be better instruction. These teachers reported that comprehension skills were not emphasized in the RM program and that, again, they had to supplement the program to meet the needs of their students (see Appendix H). Teachers commented on how varied students' reading abilities were in their classrooms and that they believed they, as teachers, were ill-equipped with the scripted program to meet those needs of their students because of the stringent and inflexible nature of the RM program. Ryder et al.'s (2006) data from the teachers' interviews described some of the concerns teachers had while implementing Reading Mastery; this study was the only one available regarding teachers' perceptions of a scripted reading program. With prominent school reforms like

NCLB, how teachers perceive the curricula they are forced to implement may prove to be critical to reading instruction.

Mandated Reforms: No Child Left Behind

“Under the NCLB the children of the poor will receive even more limited instruction, curriculum, and school experiences because their schools will be first to be reported in need of improvement.”

(Wood, 2004, p. xii)

“Too many of our neediest children are being left behind.” President George W. Bush

The No Child Left Behind Act was an educational reform movement passed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002 attempting to improve student achievement and to close achievement gaps by closely monitoring achievement results on standardized tests (Poplin & Soto-Hinman, 2006). Politicians claim that the bottom line of the No Child Left Behind Act is that all children learn to read at grade level by the end of third grade and that all students have opportunities for success

(<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). What American would not want that?

Interestingly enough, researchers in the field of education have consistently found that schools in poverty do not have the same resources or opportunities for success that children in middle and upper income households have in school (Allington, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Meier, et al., 2004; Rothstein, 2008), so the NCLB law cannot make opportunities for success obtainable by merely enacting one law or close an achievement gap because a

law demands accountability and so called proven methods of teaching to be used in classrooms. It goes much deeper than one law. There are many other factors (i.e. those mentioned earlier in this chapter) that affect when and how a child learns to read that occur both inside and outside of our elementary schools (Allington, 2002; Goodman, et al., 2004; Meier, et al., 2004; Rothstein, 2008).

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the U.S. Congress reauthorized the earlier Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The ESEA law was the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school that provide all children with a fair and, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a quality education. The revision and amendment of the ESEA became the No Child Left Behind Act (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). NCLB has an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006).

While most educators feel the ramifications of NCLB, it was not a law that evolved in and of itself. It had been in the making for many years, the government claiming its roots in the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/12/2006). However, the specificities used for the reading components of the NCLB law began with the creation of the National Reading Panel (NRP). It was the NRP that has greatly affected what has been deemed as effective reading instruction for the past decade and continues to affect reading instruction today (Reading Today, February/March, 2009).

In 1997 Congress called upon the director of the National Institute of Child Health Development (NICHD), Duane Alexander, in consultation with the Secretary of

Education, Richard Riley, to assemble a panel of educational experts in order to investigate and establish effective literacy instructional practices for teachers and students in our nation's classrooms (Shanahan, 2003). Riley and Alexander created the National Reading Panel and its members consisted of 15 experts-namely a physicist, a professor of curriculum, one reading teacher, one certified public accountant, one principal, and ten professors of educational psychology (Reading Today, June 1999). When this panel was formed, other reading researchers in the field were concerned that "classroom-based researchers" were not represented on the panel (Reading Today, 1999). In this article, Allington stated,

The panel consists of a group of widely respected scholars. I have no concerns about the professional qualifications of the individual members. However, I am concerned on two points. First, classroom-based researchers are substantially underrepresented. Given that the panel intends to offer judgments about the adequacy of research answering questions about 'best practices,' I think that the inclusion of a large number of scholars familiar with the difficulties of field-based experimental/intervention studies would be more critical than including laboratory-based scientists... My point here is just that the panel members, while distinguished, seem drawn primarily from an experimental psychology pool (p.3).

Allington foresaw how lopsided the NRP was and how this could greatly affect the outcomes of their research, that was to discover through a meta-analysis the 'best practices' of reading instruction.

The NRP's report was released in 1999 and stated that five components of reading instruction were crucial for reading achievement, Phonemic awareness, phonics,

vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Shanahan, 2003). Since the NRP report in 1999, these five aspects of reading instruction have become known as the pillars of reading instruction and the NRP's findings laid the groundwork for much of what would be defined as SBRR in NCLB (Reading Today, March, 2009; Reading Today, June 2005). It was this panel that established the term "Scientifically-Based Reading Research" that has affected many policies regarding education.

The No Child Left Behind Act emphasizes the use of educational programs and practices that clearly demonstrated effectiveness through rigorous scientific research (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR) is research that:

- (i) at minimum, employs systematic, empirical methods;
- (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that, when relevant to the line of inquiry or purpose of the investigation, are adequate to test a stated hypothesis and to justify general conclusions drawn;
- (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data from the investigators and observers involved in the study, and provides reliable and valid data from multiple measurements used, and observations made in the study; and
- (iv) uses every opportunity to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest (Wilde, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education (2002) also emphasized that schools use reading programs that not only met those guidelines of the SBRR, but that core reading programs must also include the five essential components of effective reading instruction established by the National Reading Panel (1999). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002) these five components of reading must include explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) also stated that these SBRR programs must be implemented daily for 90 uninterrupted minutes, must have an assessment strategy for diagnosing needs of students, and must include professional development training for teachers who are using the program (Wilde, 2004).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06) the Reading First Initiative (RFI) is built on the findings of the National Reading Panel. The funds associated with the Reading First Initiative are allocated through the Reading First Grant (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). The Reading First Grant, a part of the No Child Left Behind Law, was created to replace the Reading Excellence Act (1999) and to make states and local educational agencies (LEA) implement scientifically based reading research to improve reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>, retrieved 8/10/06). The main purpose of the Reading First Grant was to ensure that all American children learn to read well and on grade level by the third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The U.S. Department of Education (2002) stated that the Reading First Grant would aid States in finding and implementing reading programs that had empirical data that supported their effectiveness. However, great pressures have been put upon school districts to choose certain reading curricula namely SRA McGraw Hill series – Open Court and Direct Instruction [a.k.a. Reading Mastery Plus series (Gelberg, 2008)] (Wilson, Marten, Poonam, & Bess, 2004). Supposedly, these reading programs have the SBRR that is demanded by NCLB.

Reading First focuses on what works, and will support proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. The program provides assistance to States and districts in selecting or developing effective instructional materials, programs, learning systems, and strategies that have been proven to teach reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The government's push for finding programs and practices that are SBRR and are proven to work is oversimplified. The adoption of prescriptive reading curricula may not make effective readers. Teachers should be able to focus on the needs of their students in order to help them become successful (Wilson, et al., 2004).

Criticisms of the Reading First Initiative:

Curricula are Being Funded

Much controversy has been raised over what curricula are funded and which are not since the beginning of the Reading First grant. The International Reading Association (IRA) has recently claimed foul play and corruption regarding how some curricula have been accepted, adopted, and funded through the Reading First Initiative.

They stated that some so called proven curricula have been chosen over others and federal grants have been given to fund programs like Reading Mastery Plus, a scripted reading program (Reading Today, October/November, 2006). According to an Inspector General's audit, an internal auditor and separate arm of the department, Department of Education officials gave contracts to favored textbook publishers. These officials made certain that members on grant panels were in favor of some reading curricula and refused to fund grants for other reading curricula (American School Board Journal, 2006). Some school districts complained that the federal guidelines were too prescriptive and appeared to favor certain curricula over others (Reading Today, October/November 2006; Reading Today, February/March, 2003). Although these kinds of allegations have been made regarding which curricula have been funded and which ones have not, teachers in the field of education are not happy with the forced implementation of such curricula (Ryder, et al., 2006).

Summary

Students in poverty and the teachers that teach them are affected by political mandates and allocations of federal moneys, like the No Child Left Behind Act and the Reading First Initiative. These political mandates affect how teachers and students live and learn in their schools. Even making it harder on these teachers is that they teach in schools where at-risk students face difficult circumstances as well, inevitably affecting their learning process. These teachers and students are in schools with higher teacher attrition rates, lack of monetary resources, higher student mobility rates, and higher dropout rates (Fram, et al., 2007; Ferguson, 1998; Miller, et al., 2005; Miller-Cribbs, et al., 2002; Roza, 2001; Taylor, Teddlie, et al., 1998; Smith, et al., 2008). These students

come to schools already years behind academically because of the influences outside of school that affect how they live, grow, and learn (Bankston & Caldas, 1998).

Making the learning process even more difficult, teachers who work in schools of poverty are often times not given professional autonomy and are told how to teach the students they serve. Some teachers are forced to use curricula that have been selected for them and their students by unqualified non-educators outside of their classrooms. These outsiders base their decisions on what curricula should be used in American classrooms on what they have been told by research panels that they have created (e.g., the National Reading Panel) further distancing the teacher from his students. These rigid mandates, such as NCLB and the Reading First Initiative, may well force teachers to go against their better judgment and implement scripted curricula supposedly having SBRR that will ensure their students' success.

Panels, such as the National Reading Panel, influence the politics of education and affect students and teachers in American classrooms. These panels can disregard the years of experience teachers have and the research conducted in the field of education by constricting their research focus to narrow definitions of what qualifies as research (e.g., SBRR) and using such research to determine their findings. A lot of power is given to a few people and these few people can affect what is done throughout our nation. The National Reading Panel's decisions, from the late 1990s, about what qualifies as effective practices of teaching reading continues to affect reading instruction and federal funding even today.

Couple these societal problems with teachers' lack of professional autonomy and their inability to make educational decisions about their own classrooms because of the

strict guidelines being followed by their schools through the grants they participate in and it even becomes harder for teachers to do what they think needs to be done for the students they serve.

Understanding how teachers working in schools that participate in federal grants like the Reading First Grant is important to study. Observing life in these schools with teachers and students would possibly help those in the field of education better realize what is happening in our schools.

INTERLUDE

Differences

As I drove to Westside of town to drop off my teachers' transcripts from their interviews with me I noticed how the fallen debris from the devastating ice storm in December still covered the streets in this area. It was May. That winter ice storm was so awful that many of us sat in our homes for days and even weeks without electricity, stores were closed, gas stations were shut down because there was no electricity to pump the gas, and ancient trees were destroyed because of the heavy precipitation that weighted down their limbs. I sat for a moment and looked at all the branches, twigs, and tree trunks piled as high as six feet and twenty feet across lined the many streets on the Westside. I was lost again searching for the three schools where I had conducted my research. I couldn't understand. It had been five months since the ice storm hit our city, but from what I saw, over here on the Westside, it looked like it could have happened earlier that week.

I slowed down and drove cautiously as I thought about the many children who probably played in these streets daily and how dangerous these tree limbs and branches could be for their safety. Cars would not be able to see them if they were outside playing hide-and-seek. Why hadn't anyone come out and taken care of this mess? This was the only part of town still covered in a mess of broken down trees and twigs. I sighed and remembered how furious my neighbors were and the commotion in my neighborhood because it took our little suburban town two weeks to come and pick up our debris from the storm. Our streets had been cleaned by Christmas. The people who lived over here have waited for five months? Why?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to capture the lived experiences of six first grade teachers' responses to and implementation of Reading Mastery Plus in their classrooms in schools participating in the Reading First Grant. My research study examined how the Reading First Grant affected these teachers' reading instruction. Data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and fieldnotes.

The methodology of interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) guided and structured my attempts to understand and describe the lived experiences of six first-grade teachers teaching with Reading Mastery Plus. This chapter includes my research questions, research design, research procedures, research participants, data sources, data analysis, my role as researcher and theoretical perspective, and ethical issues.

In this research pseudonyms have been given to all participants. My intention was to keep these participants' anonymousness.

Statement of Research Questions

As stated in Chapter II, more investigations need to be made regarding the implementation of reading curricula under the Reading First Grant and what it is like for

teachers who use such programs in their classrooms. To date there are no studies that describe teachers' responses to and implementation of Reading Mastery Plus under the Reading First Grant.

My major research questions in this study were:

1. How do first-grade teachers respond to and implement Reading Mastery Plus instruction in their classrooms?
2. What types of instructional changes are made during Reading Mastery Plus?
3. Why do first-grade teachers feel they need to intervene and/or make adjustments to Reading Mastery Plus instruction?
4. How has working in a school participating in the Reading First Grant affected their reading instruction of students?
5. How do these teachers perceive the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum?

Research Design

Interpretive Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Qualitative research methods best served my research question in which a theoretical framework of critical literacy and socio-constructivism was used. This framework was used to understand and provide insights into the beliefs, realities, and lived experiences of six first grade teachers who implemented the Reading Mastery Plus reading curricula in their classrooms.

Hermeneutics etymologically comes from the Greek verb meaning to “understand” or to “interpret” as it relates to its primary concern which is to understand experiences in the world (Holroyd, 2007). Phenomenology is a philosophy based on the

idea that reality consists of objects and events-parts of everydayness- as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness (Cerbone, 2006). Thus, hermeneutic-phenomenological research

tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is *interpretive* (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there is no such thing as uninterpreted phenomena. (van Manen, 1990, p. 180)

By applying hermeneutic-phenomenology I attempted to understand and relay the lived experiences of six first grade teachers. “Hermeneutic theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, a praxis, or a situational context, whether one is reporting one’s own findings or reporting the perspectives of people studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Through hermeneutic phenomenology I recorded the teachers’ perceptions, responses, and actions as they were explained through their own words and by my observations in their classrooms. Their interviews and my observations gave me an opportunity to catch a glimpse of what Reading Mastery Plus and the Reading First Grant meant to six first-grade teachers.

Phenomenology’s foundational question is, “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 104) The goal of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). This methodology requires careful description about how people experience different life phenomenon, “How they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk

about it with others.” (Patton, 2002, p. 104) Phenomenologists get to this deeper understanding by talking with people, listening to them describe their experiences, and by observing/participating with them. Van Manen (1990) stated the best way for us to really know what another person experiences is to go to that source of experience and experience it through in-depth interviews and participant observations.

Methodical Structure for Human Science Research:

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Van Manen conceptualized an elemental methodical structure as it related to hermeneutic phenomenological research. His conceptualization guided how I collected data, analyzed, and reported my findings. Van Manen (1990) stated the following research activities interplay, interrelate and are components of hermeneutic phenomenological research:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than how we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomena;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30-31)

These activities were present as I conducted my research and collected my data. The research process did not take a linear fashion (i.e., I did not follow step 1, then step 2, and

then step 3), but emerged as I revisited my research questions, contacted teachers, collected, analyzed, and represented my data (Creswell, 2007).

Lived Experiences

Hermeneutic phenomenology does not give us definite answers as to why things are the way they are in our world, but it gives us “plausible insights” that help us understand each other and lived experiences in our world better (van Manen, 1990, p.9). Lived experiences cannot be quantified or studied by using formulas or identifying variables. Instead we investigate by encountering, living in our worlds, and by creating meaning through use of our language (van Manen, 1990). This is how we come to understand phenomena.

Using this hermeneutic phenomenology helped me hear others reflect on their lived experiences with the Reading Mastery Plus program and observe them in their classrooms; experiences in this study that could not be assigned numbers or be quantified, but that are meaningful to understanding teachers and the pedagogical issues they face. I do not attempt to say that all teachers who use Reading Mastery Plus have the same exact experiences as those expressed and experienced by the six teachers with whom I worked. However, commonalities between the six participants emerged. “Phenomenologists are rigorous in their analysis of the experiences, so that basic elements of the experience that are common to members of a specific society, or all human beings, can be identified” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). These six teachers’ reflections and discussions about their experiences with Reading Mastery Plus are their distinctive understandings of their use of

the program. Hermeneutic phenomenology makes it possible for us to dialogue, reflect, question, and explain our experiences in our lifeworlds.

Research Procedures

This section summarizes the steps taken during the course of my research study. I followed guidelines of my university's Institutional Review Board, the district in which I collected data, and the steps taken by other researchers using hermeneutic phenomenology.

Contacting the School District for Approval

As I began this research project I approached the Director of the Reading First Grant in the Midwestern Urban School district where I wanted to conduct my study. She briefly discussed the protocol that I should follow in contacting schools, principals, and teachers for my research. She told me about the five schools participating in the federal Reading First Grant and the fifteen first grade teachers in those schools. All five schools used the Reading Mastery Plus curricula in their schools as the core reading program (Bree, fieldnotes, 8/20/06). She gave me contact information for the schools and teachers, but suggested that I first meet with the Director of School Research for the district level approval.

The following month I met with the Director of School Research. During our meeting she asked me questions regarding my study, I shared my research and Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal, and addressed any questions or concerns she had with my project. The director read over the materials and told me that she agreed

with the research project and believed it would not hurt any schools, teachers, or students in her district. She also stated that the district would not force the five schools under the Reading First Grant to participate in my study. She indicated each principal at the individual schools should be contacted for their approval of the project. The director then submitted a letter of approval from the district to Oklahoma State University.

University IRB Approval

Understanding that I could not begin any research until I had letters of approval from each principal, I immediately began to communicate with the five principals. My first step was to email the principals with a description of the research study (see Appendix A) and I attached a sample letter of approval (see Appendix A) that they might send to the university stating they agreed to allow me to conduct research at their schools. In this same email, I included the teacher questionnaire (see Appendix B). I wanted to inform these principals about my project and encouraged them to contact me if they had any questions.

In these emails I also asked the principals for permission to contact their teachers and to conduct research in their schools if their teachers agreed to participate in my study. After little response the first email was then sent out again two weeks later to each of the three principals who had not responded to the first email. After receiving no response from the three principals, I began scheduling appointments with them to meet them individually at their schools. I met with each of them face to face and discussed my research topic, showed them my IRB proposal, and the teacher questionnaire. After

meeting with these three principals they all agreed to participate in my study if their teachers agreed as well.

After receiving district level permission and school level consent from four of the five schools, I contacted the IRB office and was granted university approval. I immediately began contacting the first-grade teachers.

Participant Selection: Purposeful and Snowball Samplings

In determining what kinds of participants I needed for my study, and in order to answer my research questions, I decided purposeful sampling was the best fit for my project. Purposeful sampling means the researcher selects individuals and sites of study that can purposefully contribute to the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006). From the original twelve first-grade teachers, only three initially responded to my questionnaire. Because I wanted more than three teachers' perspectives, I contacted the Director of the Reading First Grant to refer me to other teachers who she thought might be interested in participating in my study. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) then became a part of my study as leads for possible teachers introduced me to other teachers in the field who became interested in my research project.

After receiving IRB approval I began the next week contacting teachers in the four schools. I left packets of information for each of the potential twelve first grade teachers at their schools in their school mailboxes. These packets included teacher letters (see Appendix C), teacher questionnaires, (see Appendix B), and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their completed teacher questionnaires. In my letter I asked that they send their completed questionnaires back to me. As part of my incentive for

teachers to participate in the questionnaire, I offered to send them a ten dollar gift certificate to a teacher store for their completed questionnaires.

Questionnaires and Teachers Responses

My purpose in using the Teacher Questionnaires was to get a feeling of who might be interested in participating in my research study (see Appendix B). I was not interested in using the data from the questionnaire for any results and chose not to report any findings. Using the contact information on the questionnaires gave me an opportunity to meet teachers who might be interested in my study.

Within the first week I received three completed questionnaires. As promised I sent each of the three teachers a gift certificate. Those three questionnaires were the only ones I ever received from teachers. No more questionnaires came in the mail and I was a bit concerned because more teachers had not responded. I used the contact information completed on the questionnaires to reach the three teachers who had initially responded. I tried to call each of them by phone and asked if they would allow me to interview them.

Initial Interviews

Two of the three teachers, who initially responded to my questionnaires, taught at the same school. After reaching only one of the two teachers by phone (Ava- my first teacher participant), I decided to stop by and introduce myself to the other teacher who had not responded to my phone call (Abigail- my second teacher participant). After I introduced myself and described how she might be a part of my study then she agreed to meet with me that same day for her initial interview. The following day I met with Ava

and conducted my initial interview with her. The following week I met with the third teacher (Micah-my third teacher participant), who taught at another school, for my initial interview with him.

At first it was rather difficult to get teachers willing to participate in my study, so I contacted the Director of the Reading First Grant again to ask if she knew of any teachers who might be willing to be a part of my research project. I only had three teacher participants representing two of the four schools. I had not received any more completed questionnaires and I needed more teachers for my study. She recommended that I contact a teacher from another school. When I tried to phone her I was misdirected and received another first-grade teacher by mistake (Emma-my fourth teacher participant). I discussed my project and she told me that she would be interested in being interviewed and becoming a part of my study. Her friend, the teacher I was originally trying to reach by phone, also agreed and wanted to meet me (Sophia-my fifth teacher participant). I met with my fourth teacher the following day and set a date for the following month with the fifth teacher participant.

Once I met with Micah, he informed me that he taught in another first-grade teacher's classroom. Micah was a Physical Education teacher who was told by his principal to work in Madison's class (my sixth teacher participant) every day during the 90- minute reading block. After my first interview with Micah I decided to approach Madison about her participation in my study. Once Madison and I met she agreed to become a part of my research project.

Research Participants

These six first grade teachers, Ava, Abigail, Micah, Emma, Sophia, and Madison, from the Grover Public School District agreed to participate in my research study. Their experiences varied and ranged from many years of teaching experience to first year teachers. Two of the six teacher participants never received reading methods classes during their college coursework. One teacher was alternatively certified.

Data Sources: Close Observations, Interviews, and Fieldnotes

In the beginning stages of my project I had hoped to meet weekly with these six teachers for observations and interviews. I soon realized that this would not be possible. These teachers had very hectic school lives and were extremely busy, so I had to adjust my schedule to meet their busy schedules. They had Reading First Grant evaluators from the State Department observing each month, the Director of the Reading First Grant for the district conducting weekly meetings, and Literacy Coaches in their own schools coming in daily to observe, discuss, and plan with them. Not to mention the grant guidelines stipulated that a representative from SRA McGraw Hill observe and evaluate each teacher participating under the Reading First Grant twice a year, so these teachers and students had many observers coming in and out of their classrooms on a daily basis (Ava, personal communication, 3/8/07; Emma, personal communication, 3/29/07). Establishing times and dates to observe them became rather difficult. I encouraged the first grade teachers to let me know what worked best for them. I wanted to observe each of them four times and wanted each observation to include their entire reading instruction

block while they implemented the Reading Mastery Plus program. Over the next three months I observed these teachers at least three times each.

These three observations followed what van Manen described as *Close Observations*. “Close observation involves an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meanings of those situations” (van Manen, 1990, p.69). During these observations I would go into each classroom, find a desk or a chair to sit in, make fieldnotes about the class, watch the teacher’s interactions with her/his students, and note the implementation of Reading Mastery Plus. As a phenomenologist, my primary objective was to describe in detail the flow of the experience by noting characteristics that I found in the setting (Cerbone, 2006). Many times, as my place in the classroom became more frequent and established, students would come up to me, tell me how they were doing, ask me for help, and/or read to me. In essence, I became a part of the classrooms (the lived experience) and my presence affected the teachers and students with whom I researched. These were very “close” observations in that I was immersed in the field that I was studying.

Making fieldnotes during these close observations created another form of data in which I could reflect, try to understand, and relate to the lived experiences of the six first grade teachers in my study. My fieldnotes journal was a place where I could interpret (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995), jot down what I saw, heard, was processing, and felt while I was in the five classrooms. This journal served as a place where I began my data analysis and saw patterns and regularities in my observations (Patton, 2002). “Fieldnotes are distinctively a method for capturing and preserving the insights and understandings

stimulated by these close and long-term experiences” (Emerson, et al., 1995, p. 10). As I continued to observe teachers, teachers’ interactions with students and/or curricula, and the everyday phenomena of the scripted Reading Mastery Plus, I wrote down everything I believed important to my research questions and to the teachers’ conversations with me from their first interviews. I reflected on what each of them said to me during their first interview as I observed them in their classrooms. What the teachers had to say about their use of the program and their responses to it was of critical importance as I observed them and made notes of what I saw in their classrooms. Throughout these observations I used my fieldnotes to jot down questions raised from my work as a researcher, classroom teacher, and Reading Specialist, in my efforts to make sense of what was unraveling before my eyes in the five classroom settings (Emerson, et al., 1995).

Final interviews were scheduled after the three observations took place. I was only able to interview four of the six teachers for final interviews. Abigail told me, “Elizabeth, you have seen all there is to this program. I don’t have anything else to say.” She did not want to discuss the Reading Master Plus curricula any further. Ava had to take personal leave and was unable to be interviewed. The remaining four teachers, Micah, Emma, Sophia, and Madison met with me for their final interviews.

Six months later I sent each teacher copies of their transcribed interviews and asked review what was said. They were encouraged to add, revise, or omit whatever they wanted. No teacher responded to these member checks.

Interviews are people’s stories and a way for us to understand them through their own language (Seidman, 2006). Every word that people speak becomes a piece of their consciousness, a way of them making sense of their world (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 236-237).

Interviews help us get to our interviewee's meanings and perceptions of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006; van Manen, 1990). Interviewing in essence is the "borrowing" of people's experiences in order to make sense or gain a deeper meaning of an aspect of that experience (van Manen, 1990).

I used an informal, conversational type of interview in which I introduced myself as a former classroom teacher, Reading Resource teacher, and Literacy Coach in their school district, gave them my background as a current doctoral student, and tried to set their minds at ease while building a collegial rapport (Moustakas, 1994). I wanted them to feel like they could trust me. I assured them that I would be using pseudonyms to protect them in my research. I audio-taped our interviews and told them that I would transcribe them word for word. I also told them that I would send them copies of their transcripts (member checks) so that they could make changes, go into more depth, and eliminate or re-explain what had been said. I wanted them to know that what they had to say was very important to me. They could explain themselves further if they wanted to.

Interviewing is not always an easy process. Two different situations during this research process taught me how reluctant people can be about sharing their lives with complete strangers. My first instance happened during my only interview with Abigail. She stopped talking when I pulled out my tape recorder and shook her head "No" at me. I had to turn it off until she felt comfortable with me. I had to build her trust and it took several minutes. The second situation happened during Micah's first interview. He told me as he chuckled and looked at me for a response, "You can use this (interview) as long as you don't use it against me." In both cases I had to reassure these teachers that I was

only using their words for my research purposes, but I became empathetically aware of their concern and/or need for protection.

Data Analysis

“We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves.”

Van Manen, 1990, p. 53

Using van Manen’s Methodical Structure of Human Science Research that was mentioned earlier in this chapter, I will describe the data analysis used in this study and the interrelatedness of the six research activities he explained.

Steps in Data Analysis

Step 1: Turning to Phenomenon Which Seriously

Interests You and Commits You to the World

Van Manen (1990) described turning to a phenomenon that truly commits you to the world is one in which a “deep questioning” occurs. He said that in this kind of research a person sets out to understand more fully and to make sense of a certain part of human life. This is what drove me to do this research project. I was compelled to understand how fellow teachers experienced using the Reading Mastery Plus program. It was my own wonderment that instigated my asking of other teachers what it was like for them. I was curious as to what affect Reading Mastery Plus had on other teachers, if it did at all.

Step 2: Investigating Experiences as We Live It Rather than as We Conceptualize It

This component of my research meant that I had to look at the teaching of Reading Mastery Plus from multiple perspectives; I was not merely allowed to think in my own terms but to hear and look at it from many views (van Manen, 1990). How I went about collecting data from multiple perspectives was in choosing to add more teachers to my project. My first intentions were to interview and observe three teachers, but as I went out into the field, I felt the need for more teachers and more perspectives in order to better understand this phenomenon.

Step 3: Reflecting on the Essential Themes Which Characterize the Phenomenon

As I read, reread, and searched my data fundamental themes emerged that described the essence of the lived experiences of these six first grade teachers using Reading Mastery Plus. These themes helped me identify the undercurrents of what it was like for these teachers to use the program during the era of accountability and No Child Left Behind. Some of these themes may not have been emic terms per se but were present in the everyday life of the classroom and were observed by me as I interacted with these teachers.

Step 4: Describing the Phenomenon Through the Art
of Writing and Rewriting

Van Manen (1990) called phenomenology the bringing of language and thoughtfulness to a lived experience. Thus it is through writing (language) that phenomenon is given words and more fully described. This generative description and talk helps us better understand the phenomenon.

Step 5: Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation

It was of the utmost importance to listen to and observe what my teachers were telling me about their lived experiences regarding Reading Mastery Plus. Their words and their teachings of the program constantly tuned me into my major research questions. As I observed and at times become distracted by things occurring in the classroom I would rein myself back in and ask myself, “Does that phenomenon have to do with your research question?” If it did I would make note of it. If it did not pertain to my question then I would continue my observations and concentrate on what needed to be observed. In the field, I found it easy to distract myself with students and teachers. I had to purposefully focus on my research questions.

Unless the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question or notion, there will be many temptations to get side-tracked or to wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations, to settle for preconceived opinions and conceptions.

(van Manen, 1990, p.33)

Step 6: Balancing the Research Context by

Considering Parts to Whole

It was easy to become overwhelmed with all of the data collected (Patton, 2002). I found it necessary to distance myself (Bailey, notes from class) from my data and look at it again and again. I read and reread transcriptions. I looked at fieldnotes and triangulated themes that I found in the fieldnotes with phrases and experiences from my interviews. It was through this process van Manen (1990) described the importance of the researcher taking a look at how each small part (e.g., fieldnotes, occurrences in the classrooms, or words found in transcriptions of interviews) contributed to the whole of the research project.

These six research activities, turning to the nature of the lived experience, investigating experience as we live it, reflecting on essential themes, writing and rewriting, maintaining a strong and oriented relation, and balancing the research context by considering part to whole, all played a role in how I collected my data and the steps taken and retaken in the analysis of my data.

Steps in Data Analysis

The major steps taken in my data analysis were data management, reading, describing, and interpreting (Creswell, 2007).

Data Management

Data management, or data organization, was not an easy task for me (Creswell, 2007). As I began collecting my data (i.e., transcriptions, notes from observations) I had

no real way of organizing my information so that I could easily access my data as I began to analyze it. I had several different notebooks and folders until I created my fieldnotes journal. It was in this journal that I kept all transcriptions, notes from interviews, interview questions, questionnaires, personal journal entries, demographics from schools, and bits of information from my research project. I wrote in pencil, inserted tabs to separate each teacher's data, and used Post-It notes as my initial ways of moving and reorganizing my data until I was ready to analyze it.

Reading

During the reading phase of my data analysis I read the transcriptions of the interviews over and over trying to understand what each teacher was saying and how this related to my overall, arching question of, "What is it like for first grade teachers to implement Reading Mastery Plus under the Reading First Grant?" I read and reread the transcriptions in their entirety (Agar, 1980). I also looked over my fieldnotes and tried to get an understanding from my observations of each teacher. After reading transcriptions and examining my fieldnotes, I began to do what van Manen (1990) referred to as the "Selective Reading Approach", that is I read transcriptions and fieldnotes and asked myself, "What statement or phrase seems essential to the lived experiences of first grade teachers implementing Reading Mastery Plus?" The "Selective Reading Process" aided me as I began to describe my findings and as themes emerged.

Describing: Themes Emerged

As the reading of data occurs, descriptions began to develop and themes emerge. “Here researchers describe in detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own view or views of perspectives in the literature.” (Creswell, 2007, p, 151) Themes are the capturing of phenomenon one tries to understand (van Manen, 1990). Themes that emerged in parts of my data were found recurring in other parts of my data. As my themes developed they helped me understand the essence of the lived experiences of these six teachers with whom I worked.

Interpreting

Interpretation means going beyond the descriptive data to make sense of the data (Patton, 2002). In hermeneutical phenomenological research van Manen stated that interpretation is,

Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure-grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of “seeing” meaning. (van Manen, 1990, p.79)

After rereading and revisiting the data continuously, I began to interpret it and tried to find the meaning and the essence of the lived experiences of the six teachers. In phenomenological work interpreting data is meant to shed some light on the meaning of various human experiences. In this kind of research one interpretation is not the end all

be all, but rather there are many possible interpretations because no one person interprets her own experience the same as another does (van Manen, 1990).

My Role as Researcher and Theoretical Perspective

“To be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon.”

Van Manen, 1990, p. 57

My research question about the lived experiences of teachers using the Reading Mastery Plus program evolved from my own personal and professional turmoil/experience with the scripted program. During my years in graduate school, I served my school district in many capacities; namely I was a classroom teacher, a Reading Resource teacher, and a Literacy Coach. These different job positions provided me with opportunities to closely work with fellow teachers in developing their reading instructional practices.

Through these close interactions and conversations with colleagues I began to hear the disenchantment and dissatisfaction of the teachers who were using Reading Mastery Plus program. Teachers described their lack of professional autonomy and worried about the kind of instruction they were encouraged to use in their classrooms with the scripted program. I, too, was trained in Reading Mastery Plus and shared many of the same concerns. I was approached by my principal to begin teaching the Reading Mastery Plus program the following year to new teachers and teacher assistants so that we could implement the program school-wide. Knowing how I felt about the scripted program and having recently completed my master’s degree in literacy instruction made me question whether or not I could teach others how to use the program. My socio-

constructivist philosophy of reading differed so greatly with the behaviorist model of reading instruction found in the Reading Mastery Plus program, I knew I would be at odds with myself had I decided to stay and teach others how to use the scripted reading program. I would have seen myself as someone perpetuating the very kind of reading instructional practices that I had set out to change.

I decided to leave the school district because I saw the direction in which reading instruction was going; not only in my school and district but across the nation as the No Child Left Behind Law took root. I began my doctoral work at Oklahoma State University and continued to keep in touch with teachers who were using the Reading Mastery Plus curricula. Their beliefs about the program had not changed and so I decided to pursue the question of what it was like to teach Reading Mastery Plus in first-grade classrooms of schools participating in the Reading First Grant for my dissertation work.

Doing as van Manen (1990) said in “Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world,” I began my research. I believe and have found (in this study) that many teachers feel disempowered and are not even considered a part of the process in determining which curricula should be used in their own classrooms. I believe my role as a researcher was to hear teachers and observe what was happening in their first-grade classrooms with the Reading Mastery Plus curricula. I do admit to my own bias of not encouraging teachers to use scripted programs, as I feel professional autonomy is critical to good teaching practices. I further admit that I do not believe any one curriculum is able to meet the needs of all students and that we, as Americans, have some false sense that we can create curricula that can ‘fix’ our students. I believe

learning is a natural but sometimes a very complex process in which many factors affect and shape its development. In my opinion the goal of teaching is to facilitate learning experiences, not predetermine them and deliver them to students in some scripted fashion.

Although I have shared my own personal biases here, I did not share these beliefs with the six first-grade teachers with whom I worked during my study because I did not want to shape or affect their conversations with me about their own lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). My goal was to capture their experiences with the Reading Mastery Plus curricula and to hear their voices, not mine. I do acknowledge that my own biases might have affected what I chose to note or emphasize but I tried to be very cognizant of this and reported what I found in the field, what I saw and heard. I cannot say that I am completely free of any subjectivity as this is impossible to say of any researcher, whether qualitative or quantitative (Creswell, 2003). I was the research instrument from which decisions were made (i.e., who would be in the study, what questions were asked, or what schools were used); therefore, I do not claim to be completely “objective” as that is just not possible.

My Theoretical Perspective: Socio-Constructivism
and Critical Literacy Theory

“It is better to make explicit our understandings, our beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to keep them at bay.”

Van Manen, 1990, p. 47

Socio-Constructivism

Reading Mastery Plus was founded on the behaviorist theory of education (Ryder, et al., 2006) which differs from my socio-constructivist philosophy of teaching. Social constructivism is an educational theory that emphasizes the importance of the social setting in which students learn and construct meaning for themselves. Simply put teachers cannot impart learning or easily “fill” or “bank” students with knowledge (Freire, 2000), but teachers recognize that the learning process is one that takes active participation from the students as they develop their own individual knowledge (Smith, 2003). The teachers’ role in this socio-constructivist educational theory is one of a facilitator of learning; many times the teacher is just as much a part of the learning process as her students are. Freire (2003) referred to these kinds of reciprocal relationships in which a teacher would become a teacher-student and the student would become student-teacher.

The Socio-constructivist theory, based largely on the works of Vygotsky, views each participant, whether teacher or a more capable peer in the learning process, as bringing some knowledge to share and contribute to the educational experience. The teacher’s main focus is to support and scaffold her students as they learn and to provide them with opportunities to explore, question, internalize, and develop their own awareness of their world (Freire, 2003).

At the heart of the socio-constructivist theory is the notion that children must learn and transform complex information as they build their own knowledge for themselves. As students interact with teachers and more capable peers they begin to internalize and process information from their social experiences in the classroom

(Vygotsky, 1978). This exposure to how teachers and more capable peers think is internalized, processed, used, and reshaped continuously as new learning occurs. This internalization process builds what Vygotsky referred to as the “inner voice.” He stated that every aspect of children’s development and learning appeared twice; once at the social level, and once at the individual level; meaning first learning happens between people in social settings and then it happens within oneself (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). The “inner voice” that develops within the children as they go through the learning process, helps them reflect and face difficulties as they approach new questions that they encounter while learning new information (Vygotsky, 1986).

Mediated Learning: Top-Down Approach

Vygotsky viewed learning as profoundly social in nature and believed that language played a critical role during these experiences. Language in these cases is used by teachers and children to mediate learning (Cazden, 1988; Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). He believed that dialogue was a critical tool for the mediator, whether teacher or more capable peer, to use in order to scaffold or support the learner. Vygotsky believed that mediated learning should take the form of challenging work for students in which they are given complex and difficult tasks, but are also supported at the same time so that they can achieve the tasks (Slavin, lecture notes, retrieved 3/2/2006).

Mediated learning also involves a great deal of teacher support at the beginning of new learning experiences. Initially the teacher works closely with students and guides and supports them, and then as the lesson develops and the child begins to internalize, she lessens her support shifting the responsibility of the learning to the child (Kozulin &

Presseisen, 1995). The teacher's scaffolded instruction, via modeling and demonstration of how to solve new problems, enables the student to internalize ways of learning. Teachers need this flexibility, this professional autonomy, in determining how best to guide and help their students. The students begin to mimic and understand what the teacher is demonstrating, thereby taking note of how to address new learning situations in the future (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995).

This release of "learner responsibility" can be associated with top-down teaching; this too is associated with socio-constructivism in that children are given complex, realistic problems to solve from the beginning. While discovering and solving these problems, students learn the use of basic skills that aid them in finding solutions to/or understanding the given problems (Slavin, lecture notes, retrieved 3/2/2006). This teaching philosophy is quite different from the behaviorist model found in the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum in which basic skills are broken down into small, incremental, and sequential steps, and then later after basic skills have been mastered are slowly built back up (Ryder, et al. 2006).

Critical Literacy Theory

"Critical Literacy Theory challenges the traditional belief that education is a politically neutral process designed to promote the individual development of all children."

Tracey and Morrow, 2006, p. 115

Critical Literacy Theory is another important aspect of my theoretical perspective. It is one part that continues to evolve as I teach, read, write, interact with students at the elementary school and college levels, and live in our world.

Critical Literacy Theory considers the political aspect of literacy education such as ways in which schooling reinforces persistent inequalities in contemporary society, and the opportunities that exist within education to empower individuals to overcome social oppression (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 6).

This lens continues to develop and drive me as I think about the kinds of education many of our American children receive. Kretovics (1985) described the importance of Critical Literacy as, “Providing students with not merely functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices.” He stated that it was not only important that people learn how to read (i.e., the actual reading process) but how to use the act of reading to help change the world for the betterment of all people (i.e., to use the acts of reading and writing to help create social justice).

Critical Literacy Theory enables us to look at the relationships between power, language, and education (Freire, 1987). It helps us identify the contexts of our world and express ourselves creatively to describe our being in the world. Critical Literacy Theory teaches us to question the status quo and to use our reading and writing of words to change our world. Central to this theory is the idea that the role of language “facilitates or hinders” the achievement of social justice (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000). I believe it is crucial for educators to be open to and to teach children to “question” and to ask why things are the way they are.

I may appear to have a strange intertwining theoretical relationship between Socio-Constructivism and Critical Literacy Theory. For me, these two theories help me view how we learn with why we need to learn.

Ethical Issues

My particular research interest of what it is like to teach Reading Mastery Plus in schools participating in the Reading First Grant could have posed some possible ethical issues regarding the teachers who chose to be candid and open with me. I made it one of my top priorities to guard my teachers' names and secure their identities with the use of pseudonyms. To put these teachers further at risk or to marginalize them in any way was considered as I wrote this dissertation and made choices about how to write my findings (Creswell, 2003). I was not deceptive nor did I try to trick my teachers by creating questions that might persuade them to give me answers some people may think I wanted (Neuman, 2000). My research was about their lived experiences; my own experience with Reading Mastery Plus only began my wonder and queries about other teachers' practices and implementation of it (van Manen, 1990).

In making sure that I understood the teachers correctly and included everything they said or wanted to say during our interview sessions, I sent a transcribed copy of each interview to the six first grade teachers (Patton, 2002). This kind of member check was used in order to represent the teacher participants as best I could. None of the six first-grade teachers made comments or corrections. Triangulation of the data, such as the transcriptions, was also important during the analysis and interpretation phases. I compared what I read from the transcriptions and heard during the interviews of my teachers with what I observed them doing in their classrooms. I also looked for repeated phrases and uses of similar phrases between participants in checking with consistency of

what I was finding in my data and in my efforts to reduce my own biases (Patton, 2002).

All of these measures were taken in my attempt to be ethical and represent the data as

close to the lived experiences as possible.

INTERLUDE

Carpool and Private Schools

Every morning one the parents drives forty minutes to get Rachel and the four other kids from our neighborhood to their private, catholic school. Our kids don't go to the most expensive private school in town, but they go to one where many middle-class mommies volunteer on a daily basis, the teachers know the students by name and the names of their siblings-who they have had in class or will have in class, and if some one misbehaves everybody in the school knows about it before the end of the day. This morning it was my turn to drive. I had to drop off our kids before I made my way to the other side of town to do my research.

As Rachel, my daughter, jumped out of the minivan in her plaid jumper and said her goodbyes, I sat and compared the learning experiences my child had at her school with the learning experiences of those first-graders in schools where I was conducting my research.

Rachel spent her school days in a safe, loving environment, one that was academically challenging, where her peers excelled and never doubted going to college. Was this true for the many first-graders from the Westside of town that I had interacted with recently? I am not so sure. I would say that for the most part those children were cared for but not academically challenged and I doubt that many of them would make it to college. I hated to be so pessimistic, but I was being honest with myself. As I left the

parking lot I realized that the children in Rachel's school had a much better chance of succeeding in our society, I knew that many would become professionals and leaders in our city whereas the children at the high poverty schools where I was spending a lot of my time didn't have as much of a chance. I wonder if their parents knew that? I wonder if they drop their kids off hoping the education their children are receiving will change their lot in life.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter provides data analysis and findings. I will discuss themes that emerged from my triangulation of data, i.e., interviews, observations/fieldnotes, and my understandings of the six first grade teachers' explanations of their lived experiences in their schools. These themes emerged as I listened, observed, and completed the analysis process. The broad overarching themes are the challenges of teaching in schools of poverty, constraints of life in schools with the Reading First Grant, and the teachers' perceptions of the Reading Mastery Plus program. These six first-grade teachers expressed the trials and tribulations they faced daily from being in a school where a scripted reading curriculum was implemented. Before I discuss these themes, it is important to become acquainted with the schools and the six first grade teachers who shared their experiences.

The following quotes and data referred to in this chapter came from my interview transcripts and fieldnotes.

Schools

All three of these schools were similar in many ways. They were schools situated in poorest of the poor areas in town. It was the Westside of town, known to many native citizens as the place where the African American community resided. This kind of

segregation has occurred in this city since its earliest histories. Many times I got lost when I was trying to find my schools thought I have lived here for thirty-five years. At one point I got out of my car and asked an older man how to get to one of the schools. He got in his car and had me follow him in my car. Once I got to the school the secretary warned me NEVER to do that again. She told me, a white woman, it was not safe for me to get out of my car on the Westside.

As I drove around the Westside I looked around to see what landmarks and kinds of resources the children in these schools had in their immediate areas. I noticed the boarded up windows of many stores that looked like they had been closed for years. Spray painted graffiti covered most buildings I saw. Chain linked fences with barbwire and razor wire strung at the top were around many of the dilapidating old businesses that appeared to be closed for business. I noticed a lot of parking lots filled with crumbling asphalt and huge pot holes lining the streets. They looked as if they had not been maintained for a long time. It seemed like there were many churches on the Westside of town, more than I was accustomed to seeing. You could not drive half a mile without encountering one or two churches. A few convenience stores were located near the three schools, but I never saw a grocery store. Later I found out that there was not a single grocery store on the Westside. My friend, who grew up on the Westside and lived there, said that it was too dangerous there and that meant a lot of shoplifters and storeowners just did not want to be open for that kind of business. She said she had to drive weekly for miles to get to a store and was a lucky person who owned a car to make that even possible. Others from the Westside had to either walk or ride the bus in order to go

shopping for food and regular household items (friend, personal communication, 10/15/2007).

Neighborhoods that surrounded the three schools looked like areas that many middle-class people might refer to as the “ghetto.” Many decent houses had ironclad windows and high fences to protect their yards and homes. Worn out toys crowded many of the yards or the porches where old Lay-Z-Boy recliners and older living room furniture sat. Every now and then I would discover a newer, better built house and I found myself wondering why anyone would choose to build a newer house in this area. I noticed some of the roofs on the other rundown homes had open holes that you could see from the street with makeshift tarps covering the holes to keep the outside elements outside. Broken down cars were usually parked in the driveways or on the yards of the homes. Many cars looked as if they had not been driven in years and were missing tires as they were jacked up on some kind of mechanism. I was surprised to see satellite dishes around many of the homes that I drove by. I never saw a public park or large playground equipment where children could play. The only places with such equipment were those playgrounds that belonged to the three schools.

The school campuses were older with simple buildings and little landscaping or anything ornamental to enhance their appearance. As you entered the schools you had to press what looked like a doorbell button so that the secretaries in the school offices could look at you from their cameras and unlock the main doors for you. All three schools seemed cold and industrial to me. They were all clean and sterile, but not as warm or inviting as my own children’s schools. I noticed few pictures or children’s work hung in the halls as I went to find the school offices. In one school there was a stuffed buffalo,

the school's mascot. It was so sun bleached that it looked like it should be thrown away. Instead it welcomed visitors to the school office. The office staff at all three schools appeared friendly and offered to help me find the classrooms where I interviewed and observed the six teachers.

All of the three schools were Title I schools, schools identified as receiving federal moneys. Jennings stated that the purpose of Title I school programs, "... was the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to school districts serving concentrations of poor children" (Jennings, 2001). Ninety-eight to one hundred percent of the children in the schools, where I conducted my research, qualified for free/and reduced breakfast and lunch. Minority students filled the halls of these Westside schools. High percentages of Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans made up the schools' populations. The schools held anywhere from 200 to 350 students and were considered larger elementary schools for the district. Portable classrooms lined the playgrounds of two of the schools because of the growth in student population in their neighborhoods. When these schools were built they were not expected to house so many students.

Classrooms in these schools varied from teacher to teacher. The six first-grade teachers I observed had warm but worn out furnishings in their classrooms. Old living room furniture and worn out area rugs provided students with areas to sit and read or to work independently. These six teachers worked hard and used what they had to make their classrooms comfortable learning environments.

Teachers

As you will see these six first grade teachers were each unique individuals with differences in educational philosophies, educational experiences, and beliefs. At times these six diverse teachers faced similar concerns about the students they taught. I attempt to paint a picture of each teacher as I describe them in these vignettes that follow.

Ava

At first Ava would not look me in the eyes. She appeared shy with her face turned down and her gentle smile setting to the side of her mouth. She was young, (I would guess in her mid to late twenties) tall, and a larger built African American woman. Dark thin braids fell down her neck and a big smile emerged as she motioned me to come into her classroom from the hallway. Her eyes still did not meet mine and it made me a little unsure of myself. In a kind, comforting voice she welcomed me and asked me to sit down in a chair next to her at a child sized table. She explained that her students were at their gym class and told me that we had plenty of time to talk. As I sat down next to her I took a moment to examine her classroom. It was homey, smelled clean, and even though it was cloudy and raining outside I felt comfortable in her room. She was an organized teacher with neat stacks of tubs with children's names on them, books lined neatly on bookshelves surrounding her desk, and children's work displayed proudly throughout the classroom. Desks were clustered together in numbers of four or six. Traces of her handwriting were still on the chalkboard in meticulous manuscript. There were bean bags and little stools arranged on a large carpet near the table where we sat for our interview.

As we talked she began to look at me. I began introducing myself and thanking her for her time. She smiled and began her story in a quiet but distinct tone. She told me she had taught at this elementary school for the past four years. Her first year of teaching began during the middle of the school year because she had been hired to replace a teacher who had fallen ill and died. She said this with a bit of sadness in her voice. She appeared sad for the children's loss of their teacher, but commented how happy she was to be a part of this particular school. She loved teaching and this showed in her interactions with students as I watched her the following months and listened to her guided instruction. As I came to know Ava I was amazed and intimidated by how methodical, engaging, and inspirational her teaching abilities were. She was a person who appeared to have been teaching her whole life, not for just four short years.

Abigail

I was afraid of Abigail at first. Even though she politely smiled at me in the hallway, I could tell she was not very eager to participate in my research study. She seemed awfully busy with her classroom phone constantly ringing, scattered papers settled on her desk, colleagues walking in and out of her classroom during our interview. Abigail was always concise with her word choice and was passionate about her profession. At first, I thought maybe I had irritated her by leaving a phone message asking her to be a part of this study. She seemed reluctant and unsure of me as she took me into her classroom. She never returned my phone call and I just took a chance and introduced myself hoping she would be a part of this study. I was not sure she would agree to an interview, but caught me off guard when she agreed and said, "What about

right now?” Being an inexperienced interviewer I had not come prepared for her time, but asked if I could go out to my car to retrieve some paper and my recorder. She agreed and waited for me.

Abigail was a tall, African American woman (I would guess in her fifties) with shoulder-length thick, beautiful hair. She was one of the three teachers who sent my questionnaire back to me within the first week of receiving it and so I hoped against hope this meant she was interested in my topic or might be willing to talk with me. As I pulled out my tape recorder and turned it on, Abigail began to shake her head “no” at me. I immediately turned it off and explained how I was going to use the tape as a way for me to transcribe her words and I promised to send a copy to her. I told her that anything she would not want in the transcription could be omitted and I promised to use only what she would allow. She reluctantly agreed and we continued. She began her story with how she believed children were so different today. She had taught for over 20 years and she described her concerns about how disrespectful children and their young parents were today. These were Abigail’s first words but as she became more comfortable with me she let me in and told me how much she loved the children she taught. You had to love the kids at her school because according to her you would not stay if you did not.

Micah

Micah was the only teacher to return my phone call. Although I could tell Micah was very eager to join my study, at first I was hesitant to ask him to participate. Over the phone he told me that he was a first year gym teacher and did not know a lot about teaching kids to read, but was interested in sharing with me, if I wanted. I was still

unsure but agreed to meet with him. He enthusiastically met me in the school office on the day of our first interview and guided me to his office in the school's gym. He looked like a gym teacher. He was a Caucasian male (in his mid twenties I would guess) with a muscular build, short and neat haircut, knit polo shirt tucked into a pair of nylon sweatpants. He offered me a piece of gum and took one for himself as he pointed to the comfortable office chair for me to sit. I looked around his office and saw how tidy it was. He motioned towards a bathroom and commented on how he was lucky to have his own bathroom. I smiled and agreed. He admitted that he was a bit nervous about talking to me and joked about me using his transcriptions "against him." I assured him that was not my intention and so he began his story.

Micah was having a challenging year at his elementary school. He talked about the kids that he taught, mostly African American kids, and how it took them a while to accept him. He attributed that to his being "white." He felt as if his school did not get the funding it should have and he believed that he, his school kids, and their school were forgotten by the district. He also explained his use of Reading Mastery Plus and how hard it was for him to keep his students engaged during instruction. He described some games he created and added to the reading program so that he could "keep them paying attention."

During his interview Micah admitted that he never took a reading methods course during his undergraduate years. He wished he had now but never foresaw needing a reading class because he was only interested in teaching gym. He was shocked when his principal approached him and asked him to help Madison, his colleague who also participated in this study, with her first grade class. He was leery about teaching reading

but was told that all he had to do was “follow the script” and he would be fine. He began teaching in Madison’s class every day during the 90 minute reading block. At first he was not thrilled about this change in his schedule but later, after interacting with the kids, he enjoyed going and being with Madison’s class each morning. He was asked to teach reading because Madison was having a hard time controlling her students during the reading block.

Madison

Madison stood in the doorway of her classroom and gently waved to me as I walked down the corridor to her. She confidently shook my hand, looked me in the eyes, and introduced herself. She was a tall, young, and slender African American teacher who had a pleasant smile on her face. We sat down at a kidney bean shaped table in little children’s chairs as she began to talk about her experience with teaching and Reading Mastery Plus. She described herself as a “new teacher” and said that she had been through the State’s Alternative Certification process in order to teach. Her degree was in Fashion Merchandising and she worked in the business world for a few years before deciding she would rather be teaching. She came to her elementary school during the second month of school and this was her first year of teaching. Her students had already lost one of their teachers and Madison explained that high teacher attrition rates were common in her school. With no reading methods classes during her college experience, implementing Reading Mastery Plus was something she did not mind. It gave her support in teaching students how to read. She believed that she really did not have a handle on the scripted program at first, but then found herself “getting the hang of it.”

Her principal asked Micah to work in her room towards the middle of the year, so that her students could benefit from two teachers and because she was having a difficult time managing her class during the school reading block.

Emma

Emma is the teacher I happened across by chance. In my attempts to reach Sophia, her colleague and sixth teacher participant in this study, I was accidentally connected to Emma's classroom telephone. She immediately agreed to be a part of the study. She was eager and willing to meet as often as I wanted and invited me into her class even after the research study had ended. She, like Micah and Madison, was teaching for her first year. Emma was a young Caucasian woman (maybe in her late twenties). She had recently graduated from college and had a difficult time finding a teaching job until the principal at her school contacted her.

After we began talking about her experiences with Reading Mastery Plus she told me about her school. Sophia was her mentor this year. They worked across the hall from each other, loved working together, but disagreed with many of the mandates they had to follow under the Reading First Grant. Emma said that her school had already been through several first grade teachers that school year. Students had different teachers coming and going in her school and this made it hard for her students to travel out of her classroom during the reading block. Emma stated that her own students travel among different teachers and grade levels during their school-wide reading block. She was told that her students needed to be grouped according to their reading abilities and they were forced to go to other classrooms. Emma was not fond of this practice, did as she was

told, but shared concerns with me regarding the kind of instruction some of the other teachers on her faculty provided her students. Emma was worried about the inconsistencies in reading instruction her students faced as they returned to her classroom each day. She explained that this was part of what it was like to teach in a school with the Reading First Grant.

Sophia

Sophia was of average build and height, Caucasian with strawberry blonde hair, and had a sweet disposition not only with me but with her students. I had noticed how friendly Sophia was with her students as I had walked the halls to and from Emma's classroom. Sophia was always talking to her students in a calm, comforting tone. You had to listen carefully to hear what she was saying in her classroom because she was soft spoken. As I observed Sophia I noticed how she spent most of the 90 minute reading block on the floor with small groups of children. She traveled from group to group after she finished her mandatory Reading Mastery Plus lesson. She was different from the other five first grade teachers in that she did not allow the Reading Mastery Plus program to be her sole focus during the scheduled reading block. She created literacy centers that played a critical role in her reading instruction. The centers were filled with children writing, playing phonics or comprehension games, reading children's literature off of the classroom bookshelves, working on the computers, partner reading, and working in smaller groups with Sophia.

Sophia told me that she learned how to create these literacy centers through her Literacy First professional development training. She credited her Literacy First training

as pivotal in her development as a reading teacher. It was during her first year of teaching that she attended several Literacy First workshops. Although she was very confident in her abilities as a reading teacher, she often described how much she was learning on a daily basis with her students and how she still needed to know more in order to help her students achieve. Sophia explained that in her Literacy First training each child's reading developmental needs are assessed and then met through individualized scaffolding and small group instruction. She described the importance of whole group instruction, but said that she spent very little time teaching the whole class all at once. She realized that there were many different reading abilities and needs present in her class and that each one needed to be addressed.

While interviewing Sophia, I found that this was only her third year to teach and her second year at her current school. I was shocked at how little experience she had in the classroom because in my opinion she taught with ease and expertise. Her enthusiasm and love of teaching was evident in her classroom. A quilt nailed to the wall above her desk read, "A teacher is a special friend whose love and kindness never end."

Each of these six first grade teachers brought their own philosophies, personalities, and experiences with them to their students in their classrooms.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Teacher	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience	Certification
Abigail	Female	African American	Over 20 years	Elementary Education
Ava	Female	African American	Four years	Elementary Education
Emma	Female	Caucasian	First year	Elementary Education
Madison	Female	African American	First year	Alternatively Certified
Micah	Male	Caucasian	First Year	Physical Education
Sophia	Female	Caucasian	Three Years	Elementary Education

Emerging Themes

Reviewing transcripts, listening to audiotapes, and rereading my fieldnotes from my research experiences with the six first grade teachers helped me recognize different themes. Because my interviews were more conversational, I encouraged the teachers to talk most about what reading instruction was like for them in their schools. The overarching themes were challenges of teaching in high poverty schools, the constraints of life in schools with the Reading First Grant, teaching students with limited resources, and the teachers' perceptions of the Reading Mastery Plus program. In this first section I will explain what the teachers describe as their lived experiences of teaching in schools of high poverty.

Challenges of Teaching in High Poverty Schools

Many of us, as teachers, may only read about what plagues schools in poverty and may never experience these schools firsthand, but for other teachers, working in high poverty schools is just part of teaching. As I listened to Abigail, Ava, Micah, Madison, Emma, and Sophia I heard them describe what they faced each day in their classrooms. They all gave me consistent accounts of what it was like to live and teach in their schools. These six first grade teachers were all challenged with issues of teacher stress, high mobility rates among the children, and inexperienced teachers.

Teacher Stress

“We’re (teachers); everyone is stressed every other day.” (Abigail)

Stress in high poverty schools is very common (Machtinger, 2007; Miller, et al., 2005). Teachers find themselves working very hard, doing what their administrators are asking, and then maybe not getting the results everyone, including the public, wants (Abigail). These teachers experience stress on a daily basis as they work with children who come to their classrooms already years below grade level because of outside factors, i.e., food, shelter, healthcare, unrelated to the classroom and beyond teachers’ control (Rothstein, 2008).

All of the teacher participants referred to the stress they felt being in “at-risk” schools under the Reading First Grant. They referred to being constantly monitored by inside and outside observers, i.e., literacy coaches, the district director of the Reading First Grant, their principals, observers from the State, and SRA representatives (Abigail; Ava; Emma; Sophia; Madison). Abigail stated, “You have so many people coming in to

observe and it's really hard, it's hard for the kids because they're trying to figure out why all these people are standing around." Madison refers to these kinds of experiences as "nerve-wracking" (Madison). "She's [SRA representative] looking for me to be on the script, and if I haven't been on the script then, when she's in, and I am trying to do the script, then it throws the kids off" (Madison). Madison described how it made her feel "claustrophobic" when she was being observed and how difficult it was for her to stop herself from making instructional changes she felt she needed to make in front of observers. These experiences of being observed were common to all six teacher participants. Each spoke of these visits either in passing or taking a longer time during the interview to describe their feelings about them.

As I interviewed these teachers two stories from two different teachers stood out in my mind as they all described the stress which they continuously worked. Abigail and Emma both experienced outside SRA McGraw Hill Reading Mastery Plus consultants coming into their classrooms and interrupting their reading instruction to correct them. These stories were both in the forefront of these two teachers' minds as they discussed common stresses in their lives as teachers in their schools.

Abigail's story began in her classroom as she described one of the visits with the SRA McGraw Hill Reading Mastery Plus consultant and what happened as she veered away from the Reading Mastery Plus script.

I was being observed by the SRA Lady. She stopped the [Reading Mastery Plus] lesson, "Oh stop the lesson! Stop! Stop! Stop! You can't do this!" I mean why can't I go on and give them something they [her students] can remember? They are going to need anyway. (Abigail)

Abigail was distraught by this consultant's presence and interference in her classroom; after all she had taught first grade for over twenty years. She sought her principal's advice. She continued with her story,

Well everything was put on us. So these programs we didn't ask for. So we have to do what they gave us. Like I said he [the principal] said, "Do what we have to do to get us off this [at-risk] list." That's what most of us are here to do. (Abigail)

On the one hand Abigail was giving the instruction she believed her students needed (i.e. her purposeful deviation from the script-mutual adaptation of curriculum), and then she was corrected by the outside SRA observer/consultant in her classroom in front of her students. Abigail was told by the outsider what kind of predetermined, scripted instruction she should have been giving her students. Having an outsider tell you that your students need for you to not deviate from the script would be more than many experienced teachers could stand. To be called out in front of your students and being told that you are giving them the wrong instruction would be unbearable. This type of consultation undermined Abigail's professional judgment and autonomy that was based on over twenty years of her teaching experience.

Like Abigail, Emma described a similar kind of stress during her initial interview. Emma, unlike Abigail who was a veteran teacher, was a first year teacher. She described a stressful encounter of outside observers during her third week of teaching and her third week of teaching the Reading Mastery Plus program. During this particular visit she was being observed by four people at the same time. Emma described her experience.

They came into my classroom. It was the Reading First Director, the principal, the literacy coach, and the person from the State. They came in and were looking

at their, they carry a copy of their stuff [Observation Guide], and they were just pointing at them [Observation Guides] going 90 to nothing and talking and I was like, “I’m doing something wrong,” and I was literally my face was hot, I thought I was going to pass out, I swore I was going to pass out... It was really high pressure at that moment in time. (Emma)

Later the literacy coach informed Emma that she was not following the Reading Mastery Plus’ script well enough for the person from the State’s liking. The State rep felt like Emma needed to follow the script more closely than she was (fidelity of curriculum). Keep in mind that this visit occurred not only during Emma’s third week of teaching in her first year of teaching, but it was also only her third week to use the Reading Mastery Plus reading program, and she had four outside observers observing all at once. This was not the only time that Emma endured stress from outside observers. At another time the SRA McGraw Hill Reading Mastery Plus consultant came to observe Emma’s delivery of the Reading Mastery Plus lesson.

The SRA coach, she interrupted one of my lessons before I could, she said I wasn’t giving the kids enough individual turns, well, it doesn’t say to do it until the very end of the second grade lessons. And so she stopped my lesson, and I was like, I was not very happy. I was like, I’m doing it according to the book, I was following the book’s script, and so, they said I wasn’t doing it, and I was showing, showing them again. (Emma)

Emma’s confusion and frustration with the SRA consultant was part of the daily stress she endured at her school. She was constantly monitored on how well she stuck to the script and delivered the Reading Mastery Plus lesson to her students. Teaching under

these circumstances for both Emma and Abigail proved to be extremely stressful. The constant interruptions and evaluations disrupted the kind of instruction they wanted to and were able to give their students.

High Student Mobility Rates

Another sub-theme, that emerged under the overarching theme of challenges teaching in high poverty schools, discussed by all six teacher participants (either in passing or as a major concern) was the high mobility rates among the children they served. “We’re highly mobile. The students are highly mobile meaning, you know, they moved around a lot” (Ava). Students they taught moved in and out of their classrooms sometimes two to three times in one year (Abigail). The teachers described how hard it was for the students to move back and forth throughout the year. The teachers were concerned that such movement affected how well these students learned. The lack of stability, such as having a constant home, was expressed by all of the six teachers. Micah described how difficult it was to teach these students and to help them develop as readers because, “They come and go, even in school, I’ll have a new kid, one leaves and one [new] comes in.” This kind of mobility disrupts the instructional opportunities children receive in schools (Machtinger, 2007). “Mobility is a common phenomenon that disproportionately affects students in high poverty schools” (Smith, et al., 2008). Also as children move schools within a school year their academic achievement declines (Engec, 2006).

High-mobility rates among the students also concerned some of the teachers because as the children came and left the schools the teachers believed that many of the

students did not have a strong reading foundation. It was the belief of the teachers that solely using Reading Mastery Plus with their students was not enough to prepare them for other kinds of reading instruction they might encounter in other schools. Abigail described her students as being so far behind other students because they moved from this home to that home so much. She said that at the end of the month her classroom numbers would change because parents moved their children from her school when they could not pay rent. Children moving from place to place really concerned her. Abigail believed she could not always prepare her students and /or bring them far enough along in their reading development in case they were to leave her school. She described it like fighting an “uphill battle.” The high mobility rate among students is just another reality for educators who teach in high poverty schools.

Students with Limited Resources

The six teachers who worked in these three schools all commented on how poor their students were. “Poor” as they described it, meant not only economics and having limited finances, but they also discussed how their students lacked experiences and opportunities associated with children who lived in different financial situations. Their students lived in “complete poverty, one hundred percent” in which “they had such instability at home.” (Emma) “School” for many of these students was their only stability and their hope for an education and future because of their limited resources.

Abigail talked about her students in this way:

A lot of kids in this area haven’t left this side of town. The biggest mall they have ever seen is the strip mall across the street. And I am telling you I have taken kids

[students] home because we have horses. And I let them ride the horses and one child was so amazed that we have a garage door come up as I pulled into my driveway because she was like, “How did it know you were here?” She didn’t even know that garage door openers even existed. I take them to the malls. Out to Springs Mall and the thing that excited them most was riding the escalator.

They didn’t even realize we were in the same city where they lived. (Abigail)

She further described her students as being “stuck in one little box” and not being afforded many common experiences that middle class children grow up with such as regularly going to the mall, watching a movie at a theater, or playing at a safe, public park. Micah also discussed this. He thought his students’ backgrounds were far behind those of other students he had interacted with from different areas. He said, “I think they need to catch up with other [middle class] students’ backgrounds and I feel we need to do more, more attention, teach more because of the type of kids we have” (Micah, personal communication, 3/15/07).

Micah, coming from a White, middle class background, [and his assumption that this kind of background was normal] grappled with what exactly was so hard for his students and why they struggled to succeed. He went back and forth; trying to make sense of what it was that caused problems for his students and limited them. Micah also thought that this lack of resources was because of the lack of parent involvement in the lives of their children and in the school where he taught. He had this to say:

Some schools have, the kids are well rounded because of the parents’ abilities.

These kids don’t have the abilities to go and watch a baseball game, go watch a basketball game. See they don’t have some of the basics that another kid would

have. I feel that some of these kids' backgrounds are just not, not what you'd expect. We're trying to teach them, we assume they already know some of this stuff and they don't. (Micah)

So, I think it's just, there are so many in that [poverty] category and I don't know what parents have kids but don't have time to spend with their kids or raise them the way our society wants them to have you know, be ready for school... I think parents in some schools have more voice than parents in my school. You know, parent involvement here is nothing like parent involvement on the other side of town. (Micah)

Micah struggled with how different life was for his students. Micah noticed that he was just beginning to question why his students came to school unprepared and years behind other students he had encountered. This first year teacher was just stumbling across an unfamiliar world.

Madison shared the same students with Micah. It was her first year as well and she recognized the many obstacles their students had to face on a daily basis in and outside of their school.

My school, I love it, I really do. It can be hard, it can be hard to work with the students. It's um, a lot of kids from lower income families. Really high percentage of the kids are in foster care and uh, so, that's just some of the stuff that goes along with the behavior. We have to really build a rapport and build that security with the students so that they feel safe, and you know in a nice comfortable, learning environment. (Madison)

Even Abigail, the veteran teacher in this study, recognized differences and limitations her students suffered. She described children who lived on the opposite side of the city.

And those kids out East [opposite side of the city] I mean I am not saying they are privileged or whatever, but they have things. They have people they can depend on. And a lot of kids here [Westside] just don't have that. (Abigail)

All six teachers described the difficulties, the lack of resources, and the limitations their students faced. They never once used these descriptions as excuses for why their students did not achieve; they were merely explaining the learning circumstances they encountered and how their jobs as teachers adapted to meet the needs of their students. They understood the gaps that their students had in their experiences and wanted to facilitate their students' learning to enable them to succeed.

Inexperienced Teachers

Another sub-theme that emerged from the overarching theme of challenges of teaching in a high poverty school was the abundance of inexperienced teachers found in these school buildings. "It was really hard to find certified people to teach in schools like ours" (Abigail). Working in schools of poverty is difficult and many experienced teachers choose not to teach in these schools. Often principals from high poverty schools are left to hire teachers with less experience (Allington, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Rothenstein, 2008). Abigail described how over the years she had seen so many new teachers come and go from her school sometimes even within the same school year.

They [inexperienced teachers] come in and go out. If you can work here and stay you can work anywhere in the world. (laughs) We we've got a couple of new

teachers now that are so frustrated the look in their eyes when they pass are like “Please help me!” because they have no control. (Abigail)

She later explained that the [school] system did not set these inexperienced teachers up for success. Often times they did not even have mentors to help these new teachers because of such diminished resources and a lack of time. “You know and another [thing], they send a lot of inexperienced teachers to this area... They are just thrown into a classroom. There is really no one there to help them.” Abigail also recognized the inexperience of some of the new teachers and how they do not even relate to minorities or children who live in poverty. “They [inexperienced teachers] don’t understand some of these children. And no desire to understand. You know? To even stifle some of these kids from speaking their own language. It’s horrible. You know? Instead of trying to understand them.” (Abigail)

Abigail saw that having inexperienced teachers in her school building affected the kind of attention and instruction her students received. She described how reluctant she was to send her students on to some of the inexperienced teachers in her building because she knew her students would not reach their full potentials with the new teachers (Abigail).

Inexperienced teachers were not exclusive to Abigail’s school. In my own small study of six teacher participants, three of the six were first year teachers. Two of those three first year teachers never had any reading methods courses during their college experience, and out of these same two teachers one teacher was alternatively certified by the State and the other was only certified as a Physical Education teacher.

Micah, the gym teacher, described how he was told to teach reading in Madison's (the other first year teacher) first grade classroom because she was having trouble controlling her students during the reading block time. When Micah acted hesitant about teaching reading, because it was the first time in his life to do so, he was told by his principal to not worry. She told him all he had to do was "Follow the [Reading Mastery Plus] script" and he would be fine. After months of knowing and observing Micah, he was still unsure of his abilities to teach reading when he finished his part of my study. "I don't know. I never. I mean, I never took the [reading methods] class. I was kind of, I didn't think I'd be teaching reading, so I didn't do a [reading] course. But they said just pretty much just read what's in the book." (Micah)

As Micah described his own reluctance and inexperience at teaching reading, he was encouraged by his principal to try because a colleague, Madison, needed him in her classroom. Both Micah and Madison talked about how hard it was for them to teach reading at the beginning of the school year. They both admitted to not knowing what to do with their students. They were trying to learn how to manage a class first and foremost, but then the added stress of teaching the unfamiliar subject of reading to struggling readers made it all that much more difficult (Micah; Madison).

Placing inexperienced teachers in schools of poverty, where many challenges are already present, compounds the problems in these schools even further. Students in high poverty schools need experienced teachers who are adept and able to meet their many needs (Allington, 2002). New and inexperienced teachers need the support of their colleagues to further their own professional development. Emerging themes, such as having inexperienced teachers, students with limited resources, high student mobility

rates, and teacher stress are the sub-themes of challenges in schools with high poverty I found consistently in my data.

Constraints of Life in Schools with the Reading First Grant

As I began to analyze my data and collect my findings, another theme emerged. All six teachers talked about how life in their schools was constrained by the Reading First Grant. The underlying feeling I gathered from these teachers was one of tension and of pressure from the grant because they felt a lack of professional autonomy, they were affected by the grant as their students traveled to and from other classes each day for reading instruction, and they were confused about what exactly participating in the Reading First Grant meant for their schools.

Teachers' Lack of Professional Autonomy

All six teachers described their lack of professional autonomy in their classrooms. Feelings of limitation, lack of freedom, and the need for changing instruction were words that echoed throughout the interviews and observations. Teachers used these words, as if they were the same person repeating themselves. It was a very strong theme that emerged because I could hear the frustration of these teachers for being left out of the decision making process of finding programs that would best meet the needs of their students. Listen to their words.

Limited. It [Reading Mastery Plus] makes me feel limited. Well, everything was put on us, so these are programs that we didn't ask for, so we have to do what they gave us... We, the teachers, uh-huh, we're not able to choose what we're

working, they're pulling things, and its like every program that comes off of an airplane or from a different state, my school district buys and then here it is.

“You're doing this! You're doing this! You're doing this!” (Abigail)

Abigail strongly believed that experienced teachers knew their students and knew what they needed. She hated the fact that people outside of the classrooms were making important decisions for her colleagues and for her that ultimately affected the students they taught (Abigail).

Micah was another teacher who described his feeling for the lack of professional autonomy he experienced while teaching. His words were interesting to me because of his lack of experience in teaching reading. I was surprised as he reflected on how he felt while using the Reading Mastery Plus program with his students.

It should be up to the teacher, what they're good at, because as a teacher you want to fit what's best for you and the kids and also, you don't get to adjust to the kids, it [Reading Mastery Plus] it doesn't adjust to the teacher or the kids. It's just, “Here it is! It's good for everyone. Every class. Every situation.” (Micah)

Although Micah openly admitted that he knew very little about teaching reading he felt the constraints this Reading Mastery Plus program had on his teaching abilities and his students' learning. He talked about the need to “Change it [Reading Mastery] up” in order to engage his students and facilitate their learning. Although Micah lacked the teaching experience Abigail had, he felt the need for professional autonomy in order to meet the needs of his students.

Confusion about the Reading First Grant

What shocked me while I was collecting my data was how these six teachers really could not give me specific information regarding the Reading First Grant. They all six seemed confused about the grant and what participating in the grant meant in their schools. All six teachers knew that they had to teach Reading Mastery Plus for 90 minutes every day, they knew their own students traveled to and from other classrooms during that 90 minutes, and they knew they had to use the DIBELS test and report data to their literacy coaches in their buildings, but in the end that was as specific as the teachers could get. One teacher confidently told me that her school was participating in their fourth or fifth year of the Reading First Grant when in actuality they were only going through their second year of the grant (Ava). What I discovered was that confusion and strange rules were associated with the Reading First Grant.

As I observed three different classrooms, in two of the schools, I noticed first graders frequently begged their teachers to use the restroom, but were routinely told to sit down and to wait because their 90 minute reading block was not over. When I asked these teachers why they could not let their students use the restrooms, they all three said because it was part of the grant. They were not allowed to let any students leave because all students were supposed to receive 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction and therefore their students could not leave their classrooms even if they needed to use the restroom.

Here are some of the teachers' responses about the Reading First Grant.

I know we have it [Reading First Grant]. I really don't know that much about it, to tell the truth. I know we have it, because we have to have the 90 minute block, I know that. I really don't know more than that. (Emma)

Emma was not the only teacher confused about what the grant was and how they were participating in it. Abigail told me at the beginning of my interview with her that, "We are um... working I don't know how many different programs [Under the Reading First Grant] here!" (Emma)

When the teachers were asked about the Reading First Grant they really did not know how to respond. They knew that their schools were participating in the grant and that certain guidelines were to be followed because of the grant, but they were not able to ever give specifics. The Reading First Grant was something that these teachers knew existed in their schools, but they all appeared to be confused and uncertain about how their school was really connected to the grant, other than their mandated use of the Reading Mastery Plus program. Some situations I observed, like the traveling of students from classroom to classroom during the 90 minute reading block, was not attributed to the Reading First Grant but was seen as part of school-wide reading instruction. This practice did not necessarily have anything to do with the Reading First Grant. I found that the Reading First Grant was never really discussed in and of its self, but rather teachers were just told what to do in their classrooms.

Students Traveling from Classroom to Classroom

In all three schools students traveled from classroom to classroom during the 90 minute reading block. This meant that the six first-grade teachers did not have their

whole class for reading instruction, that they did not necessarily get their own students for the 90 minute literacy block, various teachers taught other teachers' students, and that all students traveled to ability leveled groups throughout their school buildings (observations and interviews). While speaking to Abigail, I was curious as to how many different classrooms her own students were traveling to during the 90 minutes of reading instruction. She replied, "I can't tell you how many, what different places they're going to right now." Abigail did not know where her students were because the students moved around a lot as they were assessed. Her first graders may have gone to three or four different teachers within that school year (Abigail).

Abigail, a veteran teacher of many years, was one of the teachers who did not care for the traveling of her first-grade students. She described the kinds of confusion that arouse because of the displacement of her students. "You have to, when you get your own kids back, you have to work them that much harder to kind of get them back where you really want them, especially from teaching those sounds the wrong way." Abigail did not believe many of the teachers in her building were as capable as she was at teaching her students to read. Throughout her interview she described her reluctance to share her students with other teachers. She believed she had higher expectations for her students and that they achieved more in her classroom. She was a teacher who had been in the same school for many years and watched as new teachers came and left her school each year (Abigail).

Ava, like Abigail, was another experienced teacher who had trouble with letting her students leave her classroom each morning for reading instruction.

You know, you don't really get that everyday connection, you know, with that student. It's just, you know, you're not their reading teacher so. You can do little activities with them in the morning BUT you don't really get that full understanding of where they are. (Ava)

Ava viewed this kind of instruction as disruptive to her flow of teaching that normally occurred in her classroom. She liked the one-on-one instructional setting and gave her students as much individual time as she could (Observations). She believed that by working individually with each child she could identify individual needs of each of her students. Traveling had caused her to lose this kind of teacher-student interaction that Ava valued as a reading teacher.

Emma, a new teacher, described her reaction to her students traveling for their reading instruction.

Actually, it does not bother me. I guess I've never even thought about it, but it doesn't, it doesn't hurt my feelings or anything, because I know that my kids are with the teacher across the hall [Sophia's classroom], they're getting what they need, and my kids go to the other teachers, they're getting what they need, and if I had all twenty-one of them in here, on all different levels, it would just be insane to try to get each, each kid on their level. (Emma)

Emma, unlike the more experienced teachers, saw traveling as an opportunity for her students to receive the reading instruction they needed. Possibly because she was a new teacher she could not fathom how she could go about breaking her whole class into smaller groups for more individualized reading instruction. Emma saw traveling as giving her students what they needed.

Students traveling from classroom to classroom during the reading block time was not an agreed upon instructional practice. It appeared that the more experienced teachers wanted their own students in their classrooms for more individualized instruction. Whereas one of the first year teachers was not bothered by the practice, she herself did not feel that she could give all of her students the instruction they needed because there were twenty one students in her class.

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Mastery Plus in Their Classrooms

As I reviewed my interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and observations I noted that all six teachers described their perceptions of the implementation of Reading Mastery Plus in their classrooms. They all had strong feelings about what this program was like for them as teachers and for their students who participated with the program daily. All six teachers discussed leaving the Reading Mastery Plus script on a regular basis, some teachers described how the Reading Mastery Plus stories that their students read did not make sense and were quite unauthentic pieces of literature, some teachers described the curriculum as not academically challenging for their students, and all six teachers discussed the difficulties they had in keeping their students engaged during the Reading Mastery Plus reading lessons. I sensed these teachers' frustrations with the reading program as they conversed about it.

Departing from the Reading Mastery Plus Script:

Mutual Adaptation

Certain words from the teachers stuck in my head as I heard each one of them describe how they frequently left the Reading Mastery Plus script in their classrooms. They all explained that they chose to leave the script in order to give their students the instruction they needed. Being forced to follow the script had made some of these teachers feel “limited” (Abigail). Sophia described it this way, “I feel like a puppet. I don’t feel like I’m really teaching. I feel like I am just reading a script.” Sophia described how following the Reading Mastery Plus script made her feel inept and unprofessional because it did not take much effort for her as a teacher to deliver her reading lessons.

In a conversation later that day Sophia mentioned how silly it seemed for her to even go to college and earn a degree in education if all her administrators wanted from her was to read off of a script. She did not consider that to be teaching. She believed teaching children to read involved a lot of interactions between teachers and students that could never be predicted, much less scripted (Sophia). “We’re supposed to just go right off that script, not deviate, not vary, and that’s not appropriate, I don’t feel because it doesn’t meet the need of every learner.” Sophia’s need to leave the script dealt with her own teaching philosophy of working with students, not filling them with knowledge, but letting them experience and interact with their classmates and with her (Observations).

Ava, like Sophia, admitted to veering away from the Reading Mastery Plus script; as she spoke with expression and determination she said, “I ALWAYS GO OUTSIDE THE SCRIPT! I am sorry. I just do!” Ava felt the need to apologize for doing what she

thought best for her students. Who was she apologizing to? She was just doing what other teachers consider to be common teaching, i.e., scaffolding their students where and when they need their teachers' direction most. During their interviews Ava and Micah both ironically used the term "freedom" and their lack of it when they described using the Reading Mastery Plus script in their classrooms. Ava said, "I don't have the opportunity to really have FREEDOM to just do, you know, my own thing. You know? Not my own thing, you know, something that is NOT scripted. (Ava)

Micah wanted freedom to change the Reading Mastery Plus instruction so that he could better engage his students in their reading instruction.

I'd rather have the freedom of choice to change it [Reading Mastery Plus] up. I do think kids get kinda bored with doing the same routines without changing it up. If I want to change it [Reading Mastery Plus] I don't feel it doesn't give me that option. (Micah)

These feelings of limitation and restriction were not unique to just one of these teachers; they all felt the unnatural approach of delivering a predetermined script went against their ideas of teaching.

Madison, an inexperienced teacher, described how she changed the Reading Mastery Plus script because her children were not comprehending the stories they were reading. She mentioned they were not making the necessary connections and understanding what they were reading. She decided to change the script so that they could grasp what they were reading.

I have to go through every step with them, but even going through the script, they don't always grasp it, like when we go to reading a story. It's better for them if I

read the story and they listen to me read it, as opposed to reading as a group when I have eight kids sitting here and they're reading as a group and they all read at different levels. (Madison)

Madison admitted to making instructional modifications and deviating from the script when outside observers were not around. She said she had to follow the script when she was being watched and this confused her children a lot as they tried to follow her lead.

I don't always [follow the script] and then that's nerve-wracking too, when the [SRA] consultant comes in and she's watching me, because she is looking for me to be on the script, and if I haven't been on the script then, when she's in, and I am trying to do the script, then it throws the kids off. (Madison)

Like Madison, Abigail described how she also performed for outside observers and knew she had to stick to the script because she was being watched by the SRA consultant.

Well, I, well what we have to do is exactly what's in their book. We're not to vary from the script, word for word is what they want.

Do you do that? (Elizabeth)

When they're [outsiders] watching me. (laughs) When they're watching me (laughs again). (Abigail)

These teachers almost lead a double life as instructors because they knew what is expected of them, i.e., to follow the script, from their authorities, but they chose to do what they knew their students needed, i.e., deviate from the script and scaffold their children (mutual adaptation of curriculum). Only in the presence of outsiders did they adamantly follow the script (fidelity of use). All six teachers, the experienced and the inexperienced teachers, felt the need to leave the Reading Mastery Plus script in their

attempts to help their students learn. Ava apologized for doing what she knew was necessary because she had been told “not to deviate” and to not listen to her inner teacher voice that told her when students needed more scaffolding.

These six first-grade teachers described the restrictions they felt, as educators, as they delivered the reading lessons that were forced upon them by the guidelines of the Reading First Grant. All six first grade teachers described closing their classroom doors and doing what they knew they needed to do, i.e., leave the Reading Mastery Plus script in order to help their students.

Reading Mastery Plus Stories Don't Make Sense

Another theme that emerged regarding the perceptions of the six first-grade teachers and Reading Mastery Plus was how unauthentic and “lacking” the stories were that were used in the reading program. All six first-grade teachers discussed how contrived and synthetic these stories were and how it was difficult for their students to even understand them because the stories did not represent children’s literature and language. “There’s nothing to really think about, because the story, some of the [Reading Mastery Plus] stories don’t even make sense. Especially in the beginning, when you’re teaching at a low level, the stories just don’t make sense.” (Abigail) Abigail explained that her students were not able to make connections to the stories in the series because the students did not really understand the story elements (Abigail).

Emma relayed similar feelings about the stories in the reading program. She felt that when given the option of reading for pleasure, her students did not choose to go and read stories from their Reading Mastery Plus series.

There is no real text. I don't think they [students], they like the stories sometimes, but they're not just absolutely crazy about them. Like, they don't, when they have time to read, do they go and pull one of those [Reading Mastery Plus] books off the shelf? No! (Emma)

Sophia felt strongly that the stories were not authentic and noticed her students having difficulty transferring the skills they learned from the Reading Mastery Plus series to authentic children's literature.

I don't feel it meets all of their needs, because the [Reading Mastery Plus] text isn't authentic text. My students have a hard time going back and forth between books on my bookshelves with the [Reading Mastery Plus] series. Their [Reading Mastery Plus] stories just don't make sense. I think they [Reading Mastery Plus stories] confuse my kids. (Sophia)

These teachers were frustrated with how the stories they were using to instruct and guide their students were lacking in quality and authenticity. They recognized their students' inability to engage in the stories of the Reading Mastery Plus series.

I decided to include a complete story from the Reading Mastery Plus series so that you can experience what kinds of stories the six teachers use as they work with their developing readers. This is the entire story and is one similar to those I observed in the classrooms during my research study. Please note the special "punctuation" used in this short text. The punctuation is introduced later and in smaller increments. So this is how a child reading a Reading Mastery Plus story would see it written on the pages of their storybook.

A Story from the Reading Mastery Series

a girl in a cave.

a girl was in a cave. a wave came in the cave. the girl said, “save me, save me.”

a fish came in the cave, she said, “I will save that girl.” and she did.

the fish said, “now I will give that girl a seed and a ham to eat.” so she gave the

girl a seed and a ham (Engelmann & Bruner, 1995, p. 62-63).

As these six teachers used the Reading Mastery Plus series on a daily basis they found that the literature in the series seemed contrived and manufactured. These stories tended to not make sense to the students who read them. Teachers found that they had to intervene and explain the missing pieces to the stories to help their students get a better understanding, i.e., to comprehend. One teacher noted how the children did not choose to go and read these stories on their own during free time because she did not feel the stories were as engaging as real children’s literature. Another teacher commented on how not only did these Reading Mastery stories not make sense, but believed they confused her students because they had a hard time transferring skills they were learning from the series with authentic literature. These teachers all felt the Reading Mastery Plus series was lacking in providing quality stories for their students.

Lack of Student Engagement

Through my observations and conversations with the six first grade teachers I also recognized the lack of student engagement during the Reading Mastery Plus reading lessons. Teachers were constantly stopping, waiting, and calling on their students by

name for their attention (Abigail; Micah; Emma; Madison; Sophia). A few teachers used the word “robot” to describe their students’ responses to them using the Reading Mastery Plus program, and some teachers created and played games with their students to keep their students engaged throughout the reading lessons, while other teachers felt this reading program just did not challenge their students.

Students as Robots

While rereading the interview transcripts I noticed that three of the six teachers said their students acted or responded like “robots” during their Reading Mastery Plus lessons. [Ironically, while the teachers were following the RMP script I made notes of how hypnotic and robotic the teachers sounded.] The teachers based the lack of interest and disengagement with the monotone responses they received. Here are three different examples of teachers using the term “robot” to describe their students from the transcripts.

- I just wasn’t real crazy about it [Reading Mastery Plus], just for the fact that the way that it presents things and the responses that the kids give are so robotic to me. It’s like, they know how to do it, but they are really, you know, they know how to give the response, but I don’t know how much they’re internalizing (Sophia).
- I have to make it [Reading Mastery Plus] interesting for these kids. If they’re not interested, they’re not getting anything, they’re just sitting and it’s like being little robots. (Abigail)

- I think it gets, I think it [Reading Mastery Plus] gets so repetitive that they're almost like robots and then they just kind of zone out and not pay attention. (Micah)

These three teachers, Sophia, Abigail, and Micah described how “robotic” their students were, but were concerned that the kind of reading instruction they were delivering to their students was not engaging enough or making their students active learners in the reading process.

Two of the teachers described their students as “robots” in that they were not the ones inquiring or working for their learning, they were merely sitting and receiving their information. Sophia described the monotonous voices her students gave her in response to the scripted questions she asked. She knew her students were responding to her, but she felt as if they went into an autopilot mode, where they did not have to think much. The students knew the routine and gave the answers that were expected, but the teachers did not believe they were being challenged and internalizing active reading habits. This brings us to our next sub-theme where teachers felt Reading Mastery plus was not challenging enough for their students.

Reading Mastery Plus is Not Challenging

Another perception of the six first-grade teachers in my research study was one of Reading Mastery not being challenging for their students. Abigail stated, “There is no thinking!” (Abigail). They all spoke at different times about how they felt the program did not ask much of their students and how they believed their students were capable of a more demanding reading program. Ava, Micah, and Emma were concerned that the lack

of student engagement during the implementation of the Reading Mastery Program was caused by their students not being challenged. Ava described how quickly and effortlessly her students went through the Reading Mastery Plus program at first before she started making adaptations to the series.

Well... When I first started [Reading Mastery Plus] the kids were done with the work before I even. I said, "Okay, guys, let's get started on the work." And they were answering quicker than I could do anything. And the kids, "I'm done! I'm done! I'm done!" (Ava)

She believed that a reading program should be challenging and engaging for all students using the curriculum. Ava could not believe how quickly her students charged through their work and was concerned that they were not really internalizing what they were learning. She had to supplement her Reading Mastery Plus instruction with story maps, writing activities, graphic organizers, and smaller group instruction. She said using the Reading Mastery Plus program was more work for her because she had to make up for what it lacked. She admitted to spending many hours each week looking at the Reading mastery Plus curriculum and creating ways to meet the needs of her students (Ava).

Micah was concerned that some students were being held back with the Reading Mastery Plus program. He said, "So you're kind of stopping the kids that can go further, you know, and that's what I don't like about it [Reading Mastery Plus]" (Micah). Micah was inexperienced and did not know of ways to develop his beginning readers because of his lack of college coursework, but still recognized areas in which the Reading Mastery Plus program was insufficient.

Emma described her active readers as “bored” with the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum attributing their boredom to the repetitious nature of the program. She also worried that her students were not challenged enough with the kinds of stories that were written and the activities that went along with the program. She believed not much was required of her students with the Reading Mastery Plus program. Emma thought that the workbooks used in the Reading Mastery Plus series required only lower level thinking (Emma). Although she was not happy with the lower level expectations of Reading Mastery Plus, I never observed Emma supplementing the Reading Mastery Plus program with other literacy activities in her class (e.g., literacy centers, smaller reading groups, graphic organizers) as Ava did.

All six first-grade teachers believed that the Reading Mastery Plus program did not challenge their students and that the stories were inadequate. Some teachers were concerned that this reading program did not offer their students enough and decided to supplement the program, while other teachers agreed that the program was insufficient but did not add anything to the program to enhance their students’ learning.

Summary

After speaking with and watching these six first-grade teachers I came to understand more of what their lived experiences were with the Reading Mastery Plus scripted program they were forced to implement under their schools’ guidelines of the Reading First Grant. They were challenged with their own teacher stress, high student mobility rates, children with limited resources, and a constant influx of inexperienced teachers in their school buildings. They felt the lack of their professional autonomy and

the inability to do what they believed was best for the students they served. These six teachers were confused about the Reading First Grant and did not truly understand what the guidelines were. They merely did what they were told and “played the game” when they were observed. They watched as their own first-graders traveled among the many different teachers in their school buildings, knowing it was not them who got to teach their students and understand where all of their students’ needs were. They shared their true feelings about the Reading Mastery Plus series and how frustrated and unsatisfied they were with it.

These teachers often described leaving the word-for-word script of the program and talked about secretly deviating from the script to scaffold and develop their students’ reading abilities. They also described how silly and unauthentic the Reading Mastery Plus stories were and how using this series placed their students at a disadvantage for transferring skills the students were learning to real authentic children’s literature.

Finally these teachers discussed the lack of student engagement they found in their classrooms as they delivered the Reading Mastery Plus scripted lessons. As I listened and watched these teachers I began to have a better understanding of what it was they were living and experiencing at their schools with the Reading Mastery Plus program under the Reading First Grant.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Essence of Teaching Reading with a Scripted Program

Revisiting my original research questions, I asked myself if I had received enough data to help answer the questions. I believe I had. As I reread and thought more deeply about my interviews, observations, and fieldnotes I began to understand part of what it all meant. I believe even now and years from now I will be processing what I experienced with those six first-grade teachers at their schools. I realized, too, that this was my hermeneutical interpretation, my lens with which I saw the schools, teachers, and students.

My interpretation of the data is not the only possible understanding of these six teachers' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). I was the filter that listened as the teachers' described their own experiences. "The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language when the description reawakens or shows us the lived meaning or significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 38). These teachers spoke of the demands and constant stress of getting their students off the "At-Risk" list, they described their lack of professional autonomy

and their inability to give their students the kinds of instruction they believed their students needed, and they talked about the inequity of resources that affected their teaching and their students' lives and learning. As I pondered these main emerging themes I realized they described what it meant to live and teach in an era of "accountability," the disempowerment under the pedagogy of the oppressed. I realized those conversations and observations in their classrooms helped me focus on a deeper level of what it was like, i.e. the lived experiences, for the six first-grade teachers who participated in this research study.

Educators in the Era of Accountability: Mandates Matter!

As I listened and observed these six first-grade teachers I saw the overwhelming life they had to lead in order to teach the students in their classrooms. Many educational decisions (i.e., curriculum selection, grouping students, testing students, and teaching students) were made outside of their classrooms and were out of their hands. Their helpless feelings as they tried to teach their students are reflected in the data. Literacy Coaches and the Director of the Reading First Grant made decisions about how students were to be grouped, when and how students should be assessed, and what kinds of interventions could be made.

These six first-grade teachers I observed were not the ones in their classrooms making the ultimate decisions about reading instruction; political mandates were also determining the path in which they were to go. They, like their own students, were told what to do by people in charge of implementing the Reading First Grant. I noticed this early on in the study and asked Bree, the Reading First Director, why teachers had to

stick to the Reading Mastery Plus script, group their students based on ability, and have students travel from classroom to classroom within the buildings. She replied they were not ready to let the teachers make those kinds of instructional decisions. She said that they had to follow the guidelines of the Reading First Grant and there were representatives from the State making sure that they were adhering to the specified guidelines of the grant (Bree).

This means that mandates matter! Above all else mandates matter! Some teachers in this era of accountability are forced to stick to the grant guidelines, regardless of what their professional voices tell them about their students and the curricula they use. Mandates matter, not teachers' intuition or professional judgments and experiences, not students, but political mandates (Meier, et al., 2004). Today political mandates regarding reading instruction, like the No Child Left Behind Act and Reading First Grant, are based on the findings of the National Reading Panel. This panel committee was created in 1999 and was heavily composed of "scientific" researchers, not experienced classroom teachers, who used narrowed definitions of SBRR and few studies to base and create a national view of reading instruction for many years to follow (Garan, 2002). Many reading researchers (Allington, 2002; Goodman, et al., 2004; Meier, et al., 2004) disagree with the committee's findings and believe only specific scientific studies were used and other valuable research was dismissed and or never considered for the study based on the criterion established by the committee. Unfortunately, the findings from this committee still impact decisions about reading instruction in our schools today (Goodman et al., 2004).

Working with the six first-grade teachers helped me realize that they struggled daily with how to teach the students they served, and in many cases they went against their better judgment because of the mandates they had to follow. One teacher, Ava, stood out, as comfortable with going against the pressure to adhere to the scripted reading program. Ava admitted that she had been told by outsiders like the SRA consultant and the State representative that she “did her own thing” and she continued to be open about her modified reading instruction. She had the confidence and the perseverance to believe in the kind of instruction she was facilitating in her classroom. The other five first-grade teachers admitted to modifying the Reading Mastery Plus script often, but they also acknowledged that when the consultants, literacy coaches, and other outsiders were in their classrooms they stuck to the script to appease the observers. This indicated to me that there was a great pressure for the teachers to perform, i.e., to just deliver the script instead of being seen as active agents in their use of a reading program for the students they served.

During the interviews there was never any mention of instances where these six first-grade teachers met with fellow teachers in their buildings to develop their use and implementation of the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum. They seemed unfamiliar with the idea of working as a team in order to discuss their students and the curriculum they used. This surprised me since their own students moved in and out of other teachers’ classrooms on a daily basis for reading instruction. As a teacher, I would want to know how my students were progressing in other teachers’ classrooms. In one case Abigail admitted that she did not even know how many different classrooms her own students were going to during the Reading Mastery Plus reading block (Abigail), indicating there

was limited if any communication between the teachers who taught their students. To me this meant that above all else teachers were to strictly adhere to the guidelines of the Reading First Grant and to follow the rules set into motion at their schools. There was a definite lack of professional autonomy and the feeling that these teachers' voices were unimportant to their authorities.

Disempowered Teachers: Lack of Professional Autonomy

Although it took a short time for the six first-grade teachers to trust me enough to open up about how hard it was for them to teach in their schools, I was relieved that they finally shared these parts of themselves with me. Many times while observing them teach they would make a side comment to me and say, "Watch this with the Reading Mastery Plus program. This was what I was talking about." When I asked them if they spoke with colleagues or the literacy coaches about concerns they had with the Reading Mastery Plus program they would respond "Yes. Nothing was done" or "Who's going to listen?" Or "None of us [teachers] like the Reading Mastery Plus program." They felt that their lot as teachers had been set and they were there to play their role in some predetermined position. They were silent and their voices did not seem to matter to anyone, including themselves at times. They felt disempowered and worn down; their professional judgments were of no consequence.

Behind Closed Doors: Clandestine Teaching: Mutual

Adaptation and Fidelity of Use

Disempowerment continued as some of the teachers described the humiliation and frustration they felt about their experiences of being routinely observed and interrupted during their Reading Mastery Plus reading lessons by outsiders like the SRA consultant, the State representative, or the Director of the Reading First Grant in the district. These interruptions were severe acts from outsiders believing the importance of the fidelity of use of the Reading Mastery program. However, these teachers were resilient and fought the system quietly behind closed doors and knew when to “play the game” and when to follow the script (Abigail). They were not “free” to make the choices they felt they needed to make, they were not “free” to voice their opinions about the Reading Mastery Plus program, the program they were forced to use but had not chosen for their students; and their fidelity of use of the RMP was demanded by outsiders (Ava; Abigail). Why as professional teachers could they not voice their concerns about the Reading Mastery Plus program? This kind of mentality forces teachers to become reclusive and weakens their abilities to grow professionally and dissolves a community of learners.

Why did these teachers’ “own deviated teaching” have to become clandestine? It was obvious that mutual adaptation of the RMP curriculum was not allowed. It was not openly permitted. The teachers felt as if they had to look over their shoulders before they went ahead with the modifications and instructional changes (mutual adaptations) they needed to make for their students. This kind of concealed instruction hinted at these teachers’ courage to mutually adapt the Reading Mastery Plus program for their students. These teachers were criticized in front of their students and made to feel as if they did not

know how to properly teach their students; in essence these teachers were beaten down. The kind of pressure the six first-grade teachers lived through on a daily basis went against building a professional community.

Five of the six first-grade teachers learned to be quiet and submissive so as to not call attention to themselves in order to go ahead with their own modifications and deviations (i.e., their mutual adaptations of the RMP curriculum). They had to ask for permission to move their students around to different leveled ability reading groups that traveled throughout their schools, meaning they were not allowed to make daily and flexible decisions about the kinds of instruction they believed their students needed. These teachers were ultimately disempowered in that some of their students were physically taken away from them during reading instruction and they had no control over the kind of instruction they received.

I observed, in one case, it taking two months for the literacy coach to agree to allow Emma to move one of her students (not even her very own student) who was failing in her reading group. The literacy coach did not want to acknowledge regression of student ability for fear of the Reading First Grant funding ramifications. Above all these schools had to show progress, regardless of the actual needs of their students!

Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Banking Concept of Education

As I observed how the six first-grade teachers implemented the Reading Mastery Plus program, I was reminded of the works of Paulo Freire and his theory of the “Banking Concept of Education” in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2003, p. 73) this notion rang true for me as I watched the teachers use the scripted reading curriculum.

All six teachers at different times in their instruction followed the Reading Mastery Plus script word-for-word and their students responded in a timely “robotic” fashion to their questions. This kind of banking occurred throughout the Reading Mastery Plus lesson, in fact teachers were to repeat the scripted sentences to the students and wait for the correct response. If the teachers did not receive the proper “field-tested response” then they were to repeat the question and until they did. Freire described this kind of teaching as oppressive based on the following characteristics:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teachers chooses and enforces his choices, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content [sadly, not so], and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teachers confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (p. 33).

As I read and reread Freire's work I thought about how this was true for what I was observing in the three classrooms and what I was hearing from the six first-grade teachers. The students were not active agents in their learning, instead they were bombarded with unauthentic, contrived reading texts and were recipients of behavioral methods of teaching. I found that this was not only true for the students but for the teachers as well. I believe that if you were to read the ten characteristics of the Freire's theory and replace the words "teacher" with "Reading First Grant Authorities", and replace "student" with "teachers," meaning the six first-grade teachers from my study, you might see how uncanny this whole scenario is. It would read:

- (a) the RFG Authorities teach and the teachers are taught;
- (b) the RFG Authorities know everything and the teachers know nothing;
- (c) the RFG Authorities think and the teachers are thought about;
- (d) the RFG Authorities talk and the teachers listen-meekly;
- (e) the RFG Authorities discipline and the teachers are disciplined;
- (f) the RFG Authorities choose and enforce his choices, and the teachers comply;
- (g) the RFG Authorities act and the teachers have the illusion of acting through the action of the RFG Authorities;
- (h) the RFG Authorities choose the program content, and the teachers (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the RFG Authorities confuse the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the teachers;

(j) the RFG Authorities are the Subjects of the learning process, while the teachers are mere objects.

With this adaptation of Freire's work I came to see the six first-grade teachers as oppressed like their students. They, too, were recipients of knowledge, not active learners in the teaching process. The six teachers were constrained by the guidelines and the restrictions of the Reading First Grant; in my opinion they were both – the teachers and the students- being oppressed by the Reading First Grant Authorities.

It was not only the curriculum and the restrictions of the Reading First Grant that made me feel that these teachers and students were oppressed. It was also where they were taught, their homes, streets, neighborhoods, and lack of other resources I observed.

Observations of Inequity: What I Saw on the Westside

My research questions led me to a place I did not expect to go. I had never really spent much time on the Westside of town but I had good, professional friends who taught there. One friend referred to her students from the Westside as “The Forgotten.” She truly believed that people in our city forgot about these children. My teacher friends told me stories about life and teaching on the Westside, but I never paid close attention until I began my research. I heard that a current trend on the Westside was to use the scripted Reading Mastery Plus reading program and so I was intrigued. I wanted to know how the teachers felt about using this scripted program because I was a reading specialist and a former classroom teacher. I was curious, but I did not know what I would be encountering during the next five months of my study.

It did not take me long to discover how different the Westside of town was from the Eastside where I lived. I became keenly aware of what was around these schools and in those communities. I took photographs of homes, buildings, churches, and stores that I had seen so that I could remember where the students lived and where the teachers worked. I used those pictures as I interpreted my data to set myself back into that community as I tried to understand what I was hearing from the teachers and from what I remembered observing while I was there. I constantly envisioned my own children in those schools' surroundings, thinking about their lives on that side of town. I wanted to think about what life would be like for the children in the classrooms of the six first-grade teachers, with whom I worked closely.

Being a mom I looked for places where I might have taken my children had we lived in that area. There were rarely any children playing outside, families walking their dogs on leashes, or movie theaters, malls, and restaurants; things with which I was accustomed. The Westside had very limited and insufficient resources. The three school buildings mimicked the surrounding community; they were worn down, cold, and gray. I even went to the Westside on the weekends to get a feel for the life over there. As I became more familiar with the area I felt certain it was not a booming place where people chose to live or to move but was a place where people were left behind.

“Who’s Going to Know?”

The prelude to chapter one titled “Who’s going to know?” was an excerpt from a discussion I had with Micah during his first interview. Although he was a first year teacher, he had spent some time, in his home state, at different schools where he tutored

and coached. He had experiences of places other than the Westside. He knew that money was not equally distributed among the schools in the Grover Public School District and was unsettled about this. He did not find it fair or right that his students should have to play games, during their gym class, in the dark without proper lighting. He knew the parents of his students had “no voice.” He would not have mentioned this had it not been pressing or foremost on his mind while he described life at his school. He was not alone. Abigail, another teacher participant, also described the inequities found in her school.

Abigail Speaks About Inequity: “They Wouldn’t Do the Eastside that Way!”

During Abigail’s first and only interview she talked to me about how “They wouldn’t do the Eastside of town that way.” This twenty-some year veteran teacher was talking about the resources that her students had, and the lack thereof on the Westside. Abigail commented on how the schools on her side of town got all of the new and inexperienced teachers; the teachers “Who didn’t get [understand] the kinds of students there.” She discussed her frustrations and how she felt they always had to start over each year or sometimes during the school year with new teachers because of the high teacher attrition rates on the Westside. She believed that her students needed experienced and compassionate teachers who wanted to work with students who lived in poverty. She indicated that her school just got what was unwanted and leftover from the district in regards to teachers. She said teachers, “Were not banging on her school’s doors to teach” and that many of the teachers did not want to be there (Abigail).

What Does this Mean?

What Abigail described on the Westside I also observed during those five months. Just the idea of having a PE teacher, Micah, and an alternatively certified teacher, Madison, together in one class teaching first-grade students already labeled “at-risk” to read, boggled my mind. Abigail was right when she said that “They wouldn’t do the Eastside that way.” I believe the largely middle-class, mainly white population of parents on the Eastside would not stand for it or allow that kind of instruction for their children. The parents had a voice on the Eastside. I do not feel that Micah and Madison’s principal was purposefully placing inexperienced teachers in a first-grade classroom. I had met her outside of school, on several informal occasions, and knew she cared deeply about the children in her school. However, I do believe she did not have many resources, such as many experienced teachers to choose from or extra moneys to entice more experienced teachers to come to her school on the Westside. She, as a principal, was limited as well. I believe the three principals in the schools where I conducted research, and other principals on the Westside, or in schools of poverty, are forced to make administrative decisions, like those observed in my study, just to survive, just to have warm bodies teaching in classrooms where many teachers do not want to teach. I could see what Abigail meant about her experience with this inadequate distribution of resources on the Westside. Her students did not get the best educators, or curricula for that matter; it was/is a vicious cycle of not having enough for the children who needed the most.

Future Research

This study was only the beginning of my learning about the lived experiences of first-grade reading teachers being mandated to implement the Reading Mastery Plus program in their classrooms under the Reading First Grant. This study could be expanded upon in many ways. First of all, questions grew as I observed the teachers on the Westside. Questions arose through my interactions with the schools and the teachers, questions like, “Why was the Reading Mastery Plus really chosen for those kids?” “What kinds of curricula are used on the Eastside of town?” “How do the teachers on the Westside compare in experience and education with the teachers on the Westside?” I am also really curious about how the children responded to the RMP curriculum and the Reading First Grant that their schools participated in. Observing the students, for the five months, made me wonder what they thought as they traveled in and out of other teachers’ classrooms and daily read inauthentic literature. I wondered if these students would love reading and become life-long readers because of the kind of instruction they received.

Hopefully, there will be future research conducted on the affects of the Reading First Grant. Data is only now indicating that the Reading First Initiative was not very successful (Teale, et al., 2008). I believe we have just spent a lot of federal money spinning our wheels yet again in education, but I would have to do more research to find my answer.

Qualitative research gave me the opportunity to look at data that could not be quantified but that was still very important information to our profession of teaching. I do believe more research of this nature would help us rethink how we go about making changes in our schools, in our curricula, and in colleges of education.

Summary

I cannot say this research journey has been an easy one for me; in fact it has been more of a life changing experience. By choosing my research and dissertation topic I was forced to enter a part of town completely unknown to me, foreign in many senses. The Westside was a hard place for me to visit and visiting was all I did. While I was only in the area for five months to collect my data I think about the Westside teachers, students, and schools daily. I share what I saw, heard, and experienced with my pre-service teachers and talk about what I learned with my own family. I knew my children did not have to go to schools like those on the Westside, have to play in the streets where the town was crumbling down around them, or interact with children who knew what it meant to be hungry-really hungry. I began to see how I lived a life of privilege and others were not allowed that privilege. I was just a visitor on the Westside, not a permanent resident. I was able to leave and return to my own life of comfort and convenience. Honestly, I was relieved when I came home each night. I knew this relief was not possible for the people who lived on the Westside; they could not escape even if they wanted to. Their home was over there, a separate place where the city was falling down and not progressing. Forgotten about. Their children had to go to schools there; they did not have the privilege of choice. I wanted to close this chapter with a quote I personally have found to be true for our students and our teachers.

*In NCLB many children will not only be left behind, but will be
damaged as well-in ways we are just now beginning
to understand (Wood, 2004, p. vx).*

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

ADMINISTRATOR LETTER

(Date)

Dear Mr. Jones, Principal,

I would like to conduct a study in your first-grade classroom(s). This project is in conjunction with research that I will be doing for my doctoral dissertation at Oklahoma State University.

I want to look at first-grade teachers' perceptions and implementation of SRA's Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus programs. I want to study teachers who teach in schools participating in the Reading First grant. With your permission as administrator, this study would involve one or two first-grade classroom for four weeks in January-May.

I will be asking your teacher(s) to participate in an initial interview describing their perceptions of reading instruction and of Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus. Following that interview I would observe your teacher(s) in her implementation of the program. I would like to videotape your teacher as she uses the Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus program.

I appreciate your consideration in this study and hope that I may have the privilege of working with your teacher(s). If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (918) 258-9421 or my Committee Chair, Dr. David Yellin at (405) 744-8016.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Elias

Administrator's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

TEACHER LETTER AND
INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

(Date)

Dear First-Grade Teacher (name),

I am writing to you in regards to a literacy instruction project that I am working on for my dissertation. My project title is First-Grade Teachers' Responses to and Implementation of Reading mastery programs in Reading First Grant schools. I am a former Grover Public school classroom teacher and am currently pursuing my doctorate at Oklahoma State University. I am interested in learning more about first-grade teachers' responses to and implementation of the Reading Mastery programs in Reading First Grant schools.

I understand that you are teaching at a school that is currently receiving funding from the Reading First Grant and are using either Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus program in your classroom. I am enclosing a questionnaire that I hope you will complete and send back to me. It should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. I am enclosing a self-addressed and stamped envelope and would appreciate any time you could give my project in completing this form. Upon receiving your completed questionnaire I will send you a **\$10 gift certificate to the Apple Tree**. Again, being a former classroom teacher has taught me to understand how precious your time is and I truly value your efforts. **Your completion and return of the questionnaire to me indicates that you have given consent to be a part of this initial stage of my research study. Thank you for that time.**

Please understand that once you send your completed questionnaire back to me your personal information (name, name of school where you work, etc.) will be kept in a locked drawer in my home office. Any information that I use from your completed questionnaire for my research study will not be able to be connected to you. I will give you a pseudonym that will be used throughout the whole study. After five years of the completion of my study all records will be destroyed regarding this study. **Everything will remain confidential as to protect you. Your participation is completely voluntary.**

I will be conducting a smaller research study on this same topic in which I would observe willing first-grade teachers twice a week for four weeks during their normal reading instructional time. These observations will last the duration of your reading instructional time (maximum 1 ½ hours). I would not be interfering in anyway (I would not ask the teachers to deviate from their scripts) and would ask to observe these teachers with their students. I would also ask to conduct one initial interview (20-45minutes), four quick weekly interviews (20 minutes a week), and a final interview (20-45 minutes) in order to understand the reading instruction and the teachers' responses to the reading programs more thoroughly.

There may be some questions that the teachers find sensitive regarding their implementation of the Reading Mastery programs. Sensitive questions may include, "How do you feel about Reading mastery programs?" "How do you modify Reading Mastery programs in your classroom?" "If you could add or change anything about

Reading Mastery what would you change?” Teachers may not want to answer questions such as these and can remember that their participation is voluntary. However, answers to such questions will remain confidential and secured. These interviews could be conducted before school, during lunch, plan periods, or after school. I would not want to interfere with the teachers’ instructional time. I would be willing to meet the teachers where it is most convenient for them and when it is most convenient for them. **If you would be interested in being in this smaller study please fill out the information at the bottom of the last page of the questionnaire, so that I can contact you. Again, your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequences.**

I do hope to hear from you and if you happen to have any questions please feel free to call or email me. My phone number is 258-9421 and my email address is elizabeth.elias@okstate.edu. You may also contact my Committee Chair, Dr. David Yellin, at (405)744-8016. Questions concerning your rights as a participation volunteer may also be addressed to Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK. 74078, (405)744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Elias
former classroom teacher

Teacher Questionnaire

Year 2006-2007

Page 1

Initial Teacher Questionnaire

Teacher _____ School _____

Education: Teaching Degree _____ University _____

Graduate Degree _____

Other Training: _____

Number of Years you have been teaching: _____

Number of years teaching first grade: _____

- 1. What are you three most important instructional goals in reading for your students? (What do you want them to achieve by the end of the year?)**

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

- 2. Do you use a specific method of teaching reading? Yes _____ No _____**

If so, how would you describe the method and your training in that method?

- 3. Check the resources you use to teach reading:**

_____ basal/ reading textbook _____ trade books _____ magazines

_____ technology _____ workbooks _____ newsprint

_____ literacy centers _____ games _____ journaling

_____ other, please explain

- 4. Do you supplement the school's reading curriculum? _____ Yes _____ No**

If yes, with what resources? _____

- 5. How much time is spent in reading instruction? _____**

- 6. Do students spend time reading independently during the day like in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything And Read (DEAR), etc.?**

_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, approximately how many minutes a week? _____

Direct Instruction (DI): Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus

7. Describe your training in Reading Mastery or reading Mastery Plus:

Number of days trained _____

Did a Reading Mastery consultant train you? ____ Yes ____ No

If no, then who trained you? (e.g., fellow teacher, literacy coach,
principal, etc.) _____

On a scale of 1-5, circle the best answer to the following questions.

8. How well trained are you in Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus?

(1) no training (2) trained a little (3) moderately trained (4) well-trained (5) very well-trained

9. How confident are you in your ability to teach Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus?

(1) not at all (2) somewhat confident (3) confident (4) quite confident (5) very confident

10. How do you feel about the amount of training you have had?

(1) insufficient (2) somewhat less than adequate (3) adequate (4) more than adequate
(5) plenty

11. Have you ever been evaluated by a Reading Mastery trainer or consultant?

____ Yes ____ No

12. If so, how satisfactory was this experience?

(1) unsatisfactory (2) not very helpful (3) helpful (4) quite helpful (5) very helpful

13. Does teaching Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus require more planning effort than other reading instruction?

(1) much less (2) less (3) the same amount (4) more (5) much more

14. If you could would you modify Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus in your classroom?

(1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a bit (5) extensively

15. How much have you modified Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus in your classroom?

(1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a bit (5) extensively

16. How do you think your students' attitudes toward reading are influenced by direct instruction?

(1) very negatively (2) negatively (3) not influenced (4) somewhat positively (5) very positively

17. Do you feel Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus has improved your students' writing ability?

(1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a bit (5) extensively

18. How do you feel that your students like Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus?

(1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a bit (5) extensively

19. Does teaching Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus become easier for you each successive year?

(1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a bit (5) extensively

20. Who began implementation of Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus in your school? _____

21. Would you say, of all the methods of teaching reading, that Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus is your preferred method? _____ Yes _____ No

22. Is there anything else you would like to add about Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus? _____

23. Would you be willing to be interviewed and or observed at a later date?
If so, would you please write down your contact information.

(Questionnaire adapted from Ryder, et al., 2006)

APPENDIX C

TEACHER/LETTER OF CONSENT

(Date)

Dear Teacher,

You have completed and returned the initial teacher questionnaire and I truly appreciate your time. I am a doctoral student in the Literacy and Technology program at Oklahoma State University and I would like to conduct a study in your classroom. This project is in conjunction with research that I will be doing for my doctoral dissertation.

I want to learn more about teachers' perceptions and implementations of the Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus programs. With permission, this study will involve my observing your class two days a week for four weeks during your Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus instruction.

I will be asking that I videotape your instructional time and will be taking notes from interactions I observe. There would not be any changes made to your classroom schedule. Identifiers such as names will be removed from any transcripts or notes made to secure the confidentiality of you and the children in your classroom. Pseudonyms will represent both your name and your students' names. Scheduling for these observations will be arranged by you, so as not to disrupt any classroom routines.

In addition to these observations, I would ask that you have an initial interview with me, prior to any classroom observations. After each week of observations I would like to conduct an interview regarding your implementation of Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus. Then after the four weeks of observing, I would like to conduct a final interview when it is convenient for you.

I appreciate your consideration in this study and hope that I may have the privilege of working you. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (918) 258-9421 or my Committee Chair, Dr. David Yellin at (405) 744-8016.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Elias

Consent Form for Teacher Interview

I understand that there will be an initial interview and one interview each week after my Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus instruction. I will also have one final interview with the researcher approximately two weeks after her observations in my classroom. I understand that the interviews will be used to validate data.

I _____ agree do not agree _____ to participate in this study and in the interviewing sessions with the researcher regarding Reading Mastery or Reading Mastery Plus.

Signature of Teacher _____ Date _____

I may withdraw from this research at any time. Questions can be addressed to Elizabeth Elias at (918) 258-9421 or Dr. David Yellin at (405) 744-8016.

APPENDIX D

FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/TEACHER

Name of Teacher: _____

School: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself.
 - Years of experience
 - Accreditation
 - Where you taught
2. Please describe your school.
3. Please describe what effective reading instruction looks like.
4. Please describe your experience with Reading Mastery (RM) or Reading Plus (RMP).
5. How are your students affected by RM or RMP?

APPENDIX E

EMAIL TO THE ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Principal,

Last week I sent an email (or spoke with you in person) concerning my research project titled: First-grade Teachers' responses and Implementation of Reading Mastery Programs in Reading First Grant Schools. I would like to know if I have your permission for your school to participate in my research project.

If you are granting me permission to conduct research at your school I need for you to write a letter (on Tulsa Public schools letterhead) stating that you give me this permission. I am attaching an approval letter that you can use. Please feel free to make any adjustments that you deem necessary. That letter can be faxed to Beth Meterman at (405)744-4335 or can be mailed to Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North Stillwater, OK. 74078.

Once I receive my IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval from Oklahoma State University, I will contact you about sending your teachers the initial questionnaire.

I sincerely appreciate your time in letting me work with your teachers.

Thanks again,

Elizabeth Elias

elizabeth.elias@okstate.edu

(918)258-9421

Sample Letter of Acceptance from Administrator

(Please put this on letterhead and fax to (405) 744-4335 attention Beth McTernan.)

To: Oklahoma State University's IRB Committee

From: Principal's Name

School

School's Address

Re: IRB Proposal Number: ED-07-5

Date

Dear Dr. Jacobs, IRB Committee Chair,

Elizabeth Elias, a current doctoral student at your university, has contacted me regarding her study (IRB Number ED-07-5). I understand that Elizabeth Elias has received district level approval from Dr. Rectors for this project and I am granting her approval to conduct her research at my school. It is my understanding that she will use an initial questionnaire that my teachers may or may not agree to participate in. It is my understanding that if my teachers consent to become a part of the smaller study, Elizabeth Elias will be coming to my first-grade teachers' classrooms to observe twice a week during reading instruction and to interview them at later times once a week (not while students are present) for four weeks. It is my understanding that my teachers may withdraw from this research study at any time and without consequences.

It is my understanding that Elizabeth will not interfere with any reading instruction and will use measures of confidentiality to protect my teachers, school, and students.

Sincerely,

Your Name

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS' PARTICIPATION IN
THE SECOND STAGE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Project Title: First-Grade Teachers' Responses to Reading Mastery
Programs in Reading First Grant Schools

Investigator: Elizabeth Elias, doctoral student at Oklahoma
State University

Purpose: This project involves researching the first-grade teachers' responses to and implementation of Reading Mastery programs in schools receiving funding from the Reading First grant. The investigator is observing and interviewing first-grade teachers who use the Reading Mastery programs in their classrooms. It is her goal to gain information regarding the use of these reading programs in schools under the Reading First Grant.

Procedures:

The investigator will contact you for the initial interview at a time that is most convenient for you. Then the investigator will begin observing you twice a week for four weeks during your Reading Mastery instructional time. During each week the investigator will meet with you for a brief interview regarding the reading instruction that she observed. After the four weeks of observations are complete the investigator will meet with you for a final interview at which time you can review the data that was collected. Audio recordings of the interviews will be made, but will be kept in a locked bureau in the investigator's home and will be used for research purposes only. Transcripts and/or field notes will be made accessible for you, the teacher to read as to check the validity of the data collected.

Risks of Participation:

There may be some inconvenience in regards to time and conducting the interviews. Sensitive questions regarding the implementation of Reading mastery programs (e.g., "How do you feel about Reading Mastery as a reading program?" "If you could add or change anything in the Reading Mastery program what might

they be?") may be asked during the teacher interviews. Any information given to the researcher will be secured and kept confidential. A pseudonym will be given to you and your school for the purposes of the study. A list with your real name and pseudonym given to you will be kept in a locked, secured drawer in the bureau of the investigator's home office.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to the teachers. Some indirect benefits from this project will hopefully include teachers' voices in regarding their responses to and implementation of the Reading Mastery programs in schools funded by the Reading First Grant. Teachers' adaptations of scripted curriculum may also be described in further detail as a result of this research project. More research may also reveal teachers' reactions to mandates from the federal government following the No Child Left Behind Act.

Confidentiality:

Again, data collected during this research study will be kept in the strictest confidence. Fieldnotes and audio recordings will be kept in a locked bureau in the home of the investigator. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research. After five years from the completion of this project the fieldnotes and audio recordings will be destroyed.

Compensation:

There is no compensation in this stage of the study.

Contacts:

If you have any questions at any time regarding your participation in the study, you may contact me, Elizabeth Elias at (918) 258-9421 or email me at elizabeth.elias@okstate.edu.

If you have any questions regarding the research and your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, Ok. 74078, (405)744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights:

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time without reprisal or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of the Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of the Researcher

Date

APPENDIX G

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions will vary based on my initial interviews and observations of the teachers. Questions like the following may be added to my other questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to say about the Reading Mastery Plus program?
- Can you describe what it is like to teach in a school participating in the Reading First grant?

APPENDIX H

EXAMPLES OF READING MASTERY PLUS

SAMPLE READING LESSONS
 Teacher scripts for Reading Lessons 54 and 106 and the corresponding student materials (Worksheets 54 and 106, Storybook 54 and Textbook 106) are reproduced here in their entirety so that you can practice the skills discussed in this guide before presenting Reading Lessons to your students.

Lesson **54**

SOUNDS
EXERCISE 1
Teaching p as in pat

a. (Point to **p**.) My turn to say the sound for the letter **p**. It's a quick sound.
 b. My turn. (Pause. Touch **p** for an instant, saying) **p**. (Do not say **puuh**.)
 c. Again. (Touch **p** and say) **p**.
 d. (Point to **p**.) Your turn. When I touch the letter, you say the sound. (Pause.) Get ready. (Touch **p**.) **p**.
 e. Again. (Touch **p**.) **p**.
 f. (Repeat e until firm.)

EXERCISE 2
Individual test
 (Call on different children to identify **p**.)

EXERCISE 3
Sounds firm-up

a. Get ready to say the sounds when I touch them.
 b. (Alternate touching **p** and **d**. Point to the sound. Pause one second. Say.) Get ready. (Touch the sound.) The children respond.
 c. (When **p** and **d** are firm, alternate touching **p**, **g**, **d**, and **t** until all four sounds are firm.)

EXERCISE 4
Individual test
 (Call on different children to identify **p**, **g**, **d**, or **t**.)

22 Lesson 54

EXERCISE 5
Sounds firm-up

a. (Point to **p**.) When I touch the sound, you say it.
 b. (Pause.) Get ready. (Touch **p**.) **p**.
 c. Again. (Repeat b until firm.)
 d. Get ready to say all the sounds when I touch them.
 e. (Alternate touching **k**, **v**, **u**, **o**, **p**, **sh**, **h**, and **n** three or four times. Point to the sound.)
 f. (Pause one second. Say.)
 g. Get ready. (Touch the sound.)
 h. The children respond.

EXERCISE 6
Individual test
 (Call on different children to identify one or more sounds in exercise 5.)

Worksheet 54

SUMMARY OF INDEPENDENT WORK

EXERCISE 24

Introduction to independent activity

- a. (Hold up worksheet 54.)
- b. Everybody, you're going to do this worksheet on your own. (Tell the children when they will work the items.) Let's go over the things you're going to do.

Sentence copying

- a. (Hold up side 1 of your worksheet and point to the first line in the sentence-copying exercise.)
- b. Everybody, here's the sentence you're going to write on the lines below.
- c. Get ready to read the words in this sentence the fast way. First word. ✓
Get ready. (Tap.) *Thế.*
- d. Next word. ✓
Get ready. (Tap.) *Goat.*
- e. (Repeat *d* for the remaining words.)
- f. After you finish your worksheet, you get to draw a picture about the sentence, **thế goat àtê thế còat.**

Sound writing

- a. (Point to the sound-writing exercise.) Here are the sounds you're going to write today. I'll touch the sounds. You say them.
- b. (Touch each sound.) *The children respond.*
- c. (Repeat the series until firm.)

Matching

- a. (Point to the column of words in the Matching Game.)
- b. Everybody, you're going to follow the lines and write these words.
- c. Reading the fast way.
- d. (Point to the first word. Pause.) Get ready. (Signal.) *The children respond.*
- e. (Repeat *d* for the remaining words.)
- f. (Repeat *d* and *e* until firm.)

Cross-out game

(Point to the boxed word in the Cross-out Game.) Everybody, here's the word you're going to cross out today. What word? (Signal.) *Not. Yes, not.*

Pair relations

- a. (Point to the pair-relations exercise on side 2.) You're going to circle the picture in each box that shows what the words say.
- b. (Point to the space at the top of the page.) After you finish, remember to draw a picture that shows **thế goat àtê thế còat.**

Reading Checkout

(Make a permanent chart for recording results of individual checkouts. See Teacher's Guide for sample chart.)

EXERCISE 25

2½-minute individual checkout: rate and accuracy

- a. As you are doing your worksheet, I'll call on children one at a time to read the **whole story**. If you can read the whole story the fast way in less than two and a half minutes and if you make no more than three errors, I'll put two stars after your name on the chart for lesson 54.
- b. If you make too many errors or don't read the story in less than two and a half minutes, you'll have to practice it and do it again. When you do read it in under two and a half minutes with no more than three errors, you'll get one star. Remember, two stars if you can do it the first time, one star if you do it the second or third time you try.
- c. (Call on a child. Tell the child:) Read the whole story very carefully the fast way. Go. (Time the child. If the child makes a mistake, quickly tell the child the correct word and permit the child to continue reading. As soon as the child makes more than three errors or exceeds the time limit, tell the child to stop.) You'll have to read the story to yourself and try again later. (Plan to monitor the child's practice.)
- d. (Record two stars for each child who reads appropriately. Congratulate those children.)
- e. (Give children who do not earn two stars a chance to read the story again before the next lesson is presented. Award one star to each of those children who meet the rate and accuracy criterion.)

END OF LESSON 54

Present Language lesson 54 and Spelling lesson 54 before presenting lesson 55.

54

the old goat had an old coat.
 the old goat said, "I will eat this
 old coat," so she did.
 "that was fun," she said. "I ate
 the old coat, and now I am cold."
 now the old goat is sad.

54



Name _____

54

the goat ate the coat.
 the goat ate the coat.

g	hit	
c	old	
k	save	
d	how	
t	I	

not nōs. not not
 not now not fish not hē
 not hāt. not that not is not
 got not

54



the sacs 	a rug 	tail
lie 	shac 	hē
a rsk. 	nōs. 	shē
feet 	hut 	māi

EXERCISE 13

Children identify, then sound out an irregular word (of)

- (Touch the ball for **of**.) Everybody, you're going to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Move your finger quickly along the arrow.) **Of**. Yes, **of**.
- Now you're going to sound out the word. Get ready. (Quickly touch **o**, **f** as the children say **oofff**.)
- Again. (Repeat b.)
- How do we say the word? (Signal.) **Of**. Yes, **of**.
- (Repeat b and d until firm.)
- (Call on different children to do b and d.)

EXERCISE 14

Children identify, then sound out an irregular word (to)

(Repeat the procedures in exercise 13 for **to**.)

EXERCISE 15

Children read the fast way

(Touch the ball for **that**.) Get ready to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Signal.) **That**.

EXERCISE 16

Children sound out the word and tell what word

- (Touch the ball for **cōat**.) Sound it out.
- Get ready. (Touch **c**, **ō**, **t** as the children say **cōōōt**.)
 - (If sounding out is not firm, repeat b.)
- What word? (Signal.) **Coat**. Yes, **coat**.

EXERCISE 17

Children sound out the word and tell what word

- (Touch the ball for **gōat**.) Sound it out.
- Get ready. (Touch **g**, **ō**, **t** as the children say **gōōōt**.)
 - (If sounding out is not firm, repeat b.)
- What word? (Signal.) **Goat**. Yes, **goat**.

EXERCISE 18

Children read the words the fast way

(Have the children read the words on this page the fast way.)

EXERCISE 19

Individual test

(Call on different children to read one word the fast way.)

Do not touch any small letters.

• **of** →

• **to** →

• **that** →

• **cōat** →

• **gōat** →

READING VOCABULARY

EXERCISE 7

Children rhyme with mop

- a. (Touch the ball for **mop**.) You're going to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Move your finger quickly along the arrow.) *Mop.*
- b. (Touch the ball for **cop**.) This word rhymes with (pause) **mop**. (Move to **c**, then quickly along the arrow.) *Cop.* Yes, What word? (Signal.) *Cop.*
- c. (Touch the ball for **top**.) This word rhymes with (pause) **mop**. (Move to **t**, then quickly along the arrow.) *Top.* Yes, What word? (Signal.) *Top.*

EXERCISE 8

Children identify, then sound out an irregular word (was)

- a. (Touch the ball for **was**.) Everybody, you're going to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Move your finger quickly along the arrow.) *Was.* Yes, **was**.
- b. Now you're going to sound out the word. Get ready. (Quickly touch **w**, **a**, **s** as the children say *wwaaasss*.)
- c. Again. (Repeat b.)
- d. How do we say the word? (Signal.) *Was.* Yes, **was**.
- e. (Repeat b and d until firm.)

EXERCISE 9

Individual test

(Call on different children to do b and d in exercise 8.)

EXERCISE 10

Children read the fast way

(Touch the ball for **old**.) Get ready to read this word the fast way. (Pause three seconds.) Get ready. (Signal.) *Old.*

EXERCISE 11

Children read the words the fast way

(Have the children read the words on this page the fast way.)

EXERCISE 12

Individual test

(Call on different children to read one word the fast way.)

mop →

cop →

top →

was →

old →

VITA

Elizabeth I. Elias

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SIX FIRST-GRADE TEACHERS
USING READING MASTERY PLUS CURRICULUM IN HIGH POVERTY
SCHOOLS

Major Field: Professional Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, OK, July 19, 1973, daughter of Herbert E. Elias and Mary Susanna Walker Elias, mother of Rachel Elizabeth Lewallen, Ryan Michael Lewallen, and Noah Walker Bogatko, wife of John David Bogatko, without whom I could not have done this.

Education: Graduated from Cascia Hall Preparatory School in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1992; received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education Degree and Anthropology Degree from the University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1999; completed requirements for the Master of Science in Education degree from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2003; completed requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Professional Education degree in May, 2009.

Professional Experience: Elementary school teacher for three years, reading resource teacher/specialist for three years; adjunct professor for Oklahoma State University and Northeastern University for three years; assistant professor of reading for Northeastern State University for one year.

Name: Elizabeth I. Elias

Date of Degree: May, 2009

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Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

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USING READING MASTERY PLUS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

Pages in Study: 168

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Purpose and Method of Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of six first-grade teachers using Reading Mastery Plus in schools participating in the Reading First Grant. This study will also describe the teachers' experiences of working in a school participating in the Reading First Grant. First-grade teachers were chosen for this study, because for the past century reading instruction has generally begun in the first-grade (DeVries, 2008). The method of interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990) guided me in my attempts to understand and describe the lived experiences of the first-grade teachers teaching with Reading Mastery Plus. Data was obtained through questionnaires, observations, interviews, and fieldnotes.

Findings: Themes that emerged from the data collection were challenges of teaching in high poverty schools, namely-teacher stress, high student mobility rates, students with limited resources, and inexperienced teachers. These teachers also described constraints of life in schools with the Reading First Grant, specifically-their lack of professional autonomy, confusion about the Reading First Grant, and their students' constant traveling to other classrooms and teachers during their daily reading block. They also discussed their perceptions of the Reading Mastery Plus curriculum, that is-leaving the script of the program, how the stories in the program did not make sense, and the lack of student engagement. These emerging themes brought to light the lived experiences of six first-grade teachers, in schools participating in the Reading First Grant, and the professional obstacles they faced as they taught each day using the Reading Mastery Plus program.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: _____

Dr. Pamela Brown

