

IMPLEMENTATION OF A BASIC SKILLS READING PROGRAM:

A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

BY

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# Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program

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# Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program

## Abstract

Reading achievement at the third grade is predictive of ongoing academic success (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Hernandez, 2011; Torgeson, 2002). While most students will respond well to effective classroom instruction, 20-30% of students will require additional reading supports (Vaughn & Denton (2008). Therefore, literacy achievement in the elementary school is a primary concern for educators (Pressley & Allington, 2014) and elementary schools need to be equipped to provide supplemental reading instruction to students who are not meeting grade level expectations. The purpose of this utilization focused evaluation study was to examine what happened when a Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) was implemented in an elementary school and to understand what factors shaped program implementation. This study also aimed to understand the perceived impacts of the supplemental reading program on students' reading achievement.

Data was gathered from a researcher journal, which documented my daily experiences as the BSRP instructor throughout the first six months of program implementation. To gain a broader perspective of the implementation of the BSRP, nine classroom teachers were interviewed, and twelve classroom teachers participated in an anonymous, online survey. Data from the interviews and survey as well as scores from students' reading benchmark assessments were used to obtain a preliminary understanding of how the program might have impacted student participants. Data analysis involved coding data sources in alignment with research questions. Looking across the codes, bigger themes within the data were identified to create a rich description of the implementation of the BSRP, to identify strengths and challenges to implementing the program, and to describe the perceived impact of the BRSP on student achievement.

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Findings from this study suggest that the BSRP increased reading achievement among most of its student participants. Classroom teachers reported increased reading self-efficacy as well as improvements in students' ability to decode words, reading fluency, and comprehension of texts. Additionally, this study found that several contextual factors influenced program implementation. While the compatibility and adaptability of the BSRP seemed to facilitate the successful adoption and implementation of the program, time and resources posed challenges. These findings have been used to inform the revision of the program in the 2017-2018 academic year.

## Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

To my parents, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleaders and constant support system. Throughout my life you have both believed that I was capable of anything I put my mind to. You taught me the value of hard work and instilled in me the importance of finishing what you start.

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## CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the onset of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 40% of fourth grade students were reading below a basic level as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading comprehension test (Aud et al., 2013). More recent results from the NAEP in 2011 show that only 34% of fourth grade students have reading comprehension scores at, or above proficient. In 2013 this percentage rose to 36% indicating that 65% of fourth grade students are reading below proficiency or at a basic level (Aud et al., 2013). Clearly, too many of our nation's young children are lacking the reading skills necessary for success in later academic years.

Being able to read proficiently by the end of third grade is predictive of students' ongoing academic success (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Hernandez, 2011; Torgeson, 2002). A longitudinal study (Hernandez, 2011) of 3,975 students showed that three-fifths of the students who struggled to read at third grade either dropped out of school or did not graduate high school on time. When students enter fourth grade, the focus shifts from learning to read to reading to learn (Allington & Johnston, 2002). This means that once students reach fourth grade they are not only expected to have mastery of reading, they must be able to comprehend, interpret, and analyze a variety of different text types in a range of subject matters.

To address reading under-achievement in the first years of school, two regularly cited reviews of the literature, *Preventing Reading Difficulties* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000), have recognized the effectiveness of explicit and systematic early reading interventions. Six key recommendations in the *Preventing Reading Difficulties* report (Snow et al., 1998) are: programs should promote language and literacy growth, explicit word reading instruction and practice, effective vocabulary instruction, a focus

on building conceptual and content knowledge, direct instruction of comprehension strategies, and the promotion of outside of school reading. The findings and recommendations of these two reports outline guidelines known collectively as scientifically based reading research (SBRR) (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2006). SBRR ensures that students in preschool through grade three are given the supports that they need for reading success later in school (Snow et al., 1998). Duke and Block (2012) examined the extent to which these recommendations were being actualized in classrooms across the United States. They found that access to high quality kindergarten programs has increased since the publication of the NRC report as well as the adoption of explicit word reading instruction and practice. However, many of the more difficult to master skills in reading, mainly vocabulary knowledge, comprehension strategy use, and conceptual and content knowledge, have continued to be neglected. Therefore, children continue to enter the upper elementary grades lacking the basic skills necessary to be successful readers.

Given the need to improve the reading skills of students in the early elementary grades, educators, researchers, and policy makers have developed a number of initiatives and approaches to school-wide reading improvement intervention. In a review of the achievement outcomes of practical approaches for struggling readers, Slavin, Lake, Davis, and Madden (2011) identified the most common interventions as: one-to-one tutoring, small-group tutoring, improving classroom instructional approaches with and without a tutoring element, as well as computer-assisted programs.

One-to-one (1:1) tutoring from teachers or certified reading specialists is the gold standard in reading intervention according to Slavin et al. (2011). Recent experimental studies of two common literacy intervention programs that provide 1:1 instruction, Reading Recovery and Targeted Reading Intervention, have supported this assertion (Schwartz, Schmitt, & Lose, 2012;

Vernon-Feagons et al., 2012). Schwartz et al. (2012) found that students receiving 1:1 instruction had significantly higher gains in literacy performance as measured on two assessments: An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement and the Slosson Oral Reading Test- Revised (SORT-R). A decrease in performance was seen as the group ratios increased to 1:3 and this decrease continued when the student ratio was 1:10. Another benefit to 1:1 instruction is that many students were able to maintain grade level expectations through third and fourth grade (Askew et al., 2002; Schmitt & Gregory, 2005). Askew et al. (2002) as well as Schmitt and Gregory (2005) conducted longitudinal studies of students that successfully completed the 1:1 intervention program Reading Recovery in first grade. In a sample of 116 students across 45 schools (Askew et al., 2002) and 548 students across 253 schools in Indiana (Schmitt & Gregory, 2005), it was found that at the end of third and fourth grades students who received the 1:1 intervention were performing as well as, or better, than their peers. Both studies used standardized and criterion measures such as running records to assess accuracy and fluency in oral text reading and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test to show achievement in reading comprehension. Askew et al. (2002) also found that the classroom teachers perceived their students who received the 1:1 intervention as in the average range of reading proficiency for their grade level.

Although research supports 1:1 instruction to prevent reading difficulties, there is also a growing body of research in support of small group instruction (Begeny, Yeager, & Martinez, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2003). Vaughn et al. (2003) examined how 77 struggling second-grade readers who were provided the same supplemental reading intervention compared when assigned to one of three grouping conditions: 1:1, 1:3, or 1:10. When analyzing gains in comprehension, phoneme segmentation, and fluency, researchers found that 1:1 was not superior to 1 teacher to 3

students. However, 1 teacher to 1 student was found to yield higher effect sizes than a 1:10 format, indicating that the size of the small group may impact its effectiveness. While research is mixed on whether 1:1 or small group instruction is the most effective way to provide reading intervention, many schools approach reading intervention using a small-group instructional model as it provides a more cost-effective way to reach more students. In this model, struggling students are provided 30-40 minutes of supplemental reading instruction in addition to what they get in their general education classroom (Slavin et al., 2011). According to Slavin et al. (2011), the small-group models with promising effects include Corrective Reading, QuickReads, Targeted Intervention, Proactive Reading, Responsive Reading, Read Naturally, Voyager Passport, Empower Reading, SHIP, Early Intervention in Reading, Read, Write, and Type, and LiPS.

Some districts can afford the implementation and training costs of these commercial programs, while other districts have chosen to take a more homegrown approach often called basic skills instruction (BSI) programs. While BSI programs are less often cited in research, these types of programs are most closely aligned with supplemental reading interventions. Supplemental reading interventions are typically nested within a three-tiered prevention model (Askew et al., 2002; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012) commonly known as Response to Intervention (RTI) (Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). In this model, the primary level of intervention is the classroom instruction all students receive, the secondary level is the supplemental intervention given to students that require additional instruction, and the tertiary level is provided when students continue to struggle. Supplemental reading interventions are geared towards students in general education settings who need additional support to achieve grade level expectations.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the What Works Clearinghouse released a practice guide with research-based guidelines for secondary intervention (Gersten et al., 2009). Two recommendations for supplemental reading programs at this level are that schools provide struggling students with intensive small group instruction and provide monthly progress monitoring. To implement these recommendations, schools must begin with a student identification process to ensure that students with the lowest reading proficiency receive supplemental reading instruction. Students are typically identified using multiple measures including benchmark assessments, state test scores, teacher recommendation, and classroom performance. Specific screening measures for basic skills reading support may include evaluation of sight word vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonetic ability, oral reading fluency, and comprehension of texts.

Once students have been identified, supplemental reading interventions look different across schools, often due to district values and resources. Currently, there is a lack of research on the implementation conditions under which these interventions are most effective. Therefore, differences can be seen in the programmatic elements such as group size, the trigger for starting supplemental intervention, the duration and frequency of the intervention (Denton, 2012; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012), as well as the qualifications and expertise of the teacher-leader implementing the BSI.

Supplemental reading interventions also differ programmatically on a continuum between pull-out and push-in models. Some districts opt for a pull-out method where students are taken out of the classroom to participate in small-group instruction. In contrast, other districts implement a push-in model in which the support teacher delivers small group instruction to the students within their own general education classroom. In a survey study, Bean et al. (2002)

found that reading specialists report the use of both models of instruction and, although there are drawbacks to both models, the specialists believe the needs of the individual student as well as the classroom needs should be the determinant in whether a push-in or pull-out model is implemented. The International Literacy Association's (ILA) (2000) position statement asserts that a quality program can be achieved through a push-in or pull-out model if it is well-coordinated and congruent with the general education curriculum.

Early reading intervention programs also differ in terms of who leads them. Professional associations such as the ILA and researchers believe that it is of the utmost importance that all students who are struggling in reading should receive instruction from a trained literacy professional or reading specialist (ILA, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). The ILA (2000) defines a reading specialist as a professional with advanced preparation and training in reading who is responsible for the reading achievement of all students but specifically for the students who are struggling. Typically, a reading specialist's main responsibility is to work with students one-on-one or in small groups. More recently, reading specialists have started to also work with teachers to improve their expertise in effective instructional practices in literacy (Bean et al., 2002; Dole, Liang, Watkins, & Wiggins, 2006; ILA, 2000). However, not all districts have this model and instead rely on teachers within the school to provide targeted reading intervention (Denton, 2012; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012).

As a teacher at Riverside Elementary School, located in a small, suburban district in central New Jersey, I was asked to design and implement a BSI program focused on reading. Advanced preparation and training in reading instruction, as recommended by the ILA, was not a requirement for this position, however, I am a certified reading specialist.



This program was initiated in response to ongoing reading underachievement in my elementary school. In the 2014-2015 school year it was mandated that all students be assessed for their reading level using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P BAS) in the beginning and end of the school year. Teachers were then supposed to use the results from the benchmark assessments, which included an oral reading and comprehension check, to form temporary, flexible groups of students and deliver specific reading instruction at an appropriate instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Although the implementation of the F&P BAS was intended to help teachers better address the needs of the below grade level readers, at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, there were 54 out of a little more than 400 students across second through fifth grades identified as not meeting grade level expectations and in need of intensive intervention as indicated by the *Instructional Level Expectations for Reading* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2015). In addition, 23 students were identified as approaching grade level expectations and in need of short-term intervention. Given that our school has not had a dedicated reading specialist or any other support staff available to meet with individual or small groups of students to provide high-quality, focused reading instruction, this data might not be surprising.

In response to this problem, I was reassigned from my classroom position as a third-grade teacher to be the Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) teacher for the 2015-2016 academic year. Along with the principal, I designed and implemented the BSRP. As this was a new program it was important to evaluate and document each step of its implementation. Program evaluations attend to the development of the program, the experiences of the participants, what happens in the program, and how it is organized with the goal of revealing the extent that the program matches the original intent (Patton, 2002). In addition, program evaluations aim to

“make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Patton, 2002, p. 10) and to help leaders decide which elements of the program need to be replaced, changed, or improved. To ensure that the study yielded results that could be used in future decision making for the program, a utilization-focused evaluation was developed (Patton, 2008). Furthermore, it was also important to get a better understanding of who the participants in the program were. More specifically, I wanted to describe the students in the BSRP in terms of how and if their instructional reading level changed throughout their participation in the program.

The purpose of this utilization-focused evaluation study was to understand what happened when I implemented a basic skills literacy program (BSRP) and to inform programmatic improvement. Using a researcher journal, I captured my daily experiences as I developed a research-based plan for the BSRP. I continued to record detailed notes regarding the successes and challenges I faced throughout the first six months of implementation. Then, to gain a broader view of the implementation of the program and to further inform programmatic improvement, I gathered data from one-on-one interviews with classroom teachers as well as a survey. The purpose of the interviews and survey was to understand how teachers described the strengths and weaknesses of the BSRP throughout the implementation. The interview and surveys also aimed to examine the perceived changes the classroom teachers saw in their students’ reading ability during their participation in the BSRP. Reading scores from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and the San Diego Quick Assessment were also used to document student learning.

Utilizing my researcher journal, I detailed the initiation plan and how the program evolved throughout the implementation. Additionally, using the researcher journal, teacher

interviews, teacher survey, and assessment scores, I described the perceived improvements to student learning and the design elements that seemed to contribute to these improvements.

Finally, these data sources were also used to understand the contextual factors that affected program implementation and to develop implications for programmatic improvement.

The following research questions guided this evaluation study:

1. How was the Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) implemented?
  - a. What shaped the implementation of the BSRP?
  - b. How did the program change from its original design over time?
2. What were teachers' evaluations of the BSRP?
  - a. How did teachers describe the strengths and challenges of the BSRP?
  - b. In what ways did teachers say the program can be improved?
3. What are the students' experiences in the BSRP?
  - a. Who are the students in the BSRP?
  - b. What are their instructional reading levels before and after participation in the BSRP?
  - c. How do teachers describe the impact of their students' participation in the BSRP?

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Student achievement in the elementary school is a primary concern for educators. At the heart of this concern often lies literacy achievement because of the increasing importance of being a literate citizen, as well as the desire to ensure that American students can compete globally (Pressley & Allington, 2014). Literacy is defined by the ILA (2015) as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context. The ability to communicate, read, and write are essential to enable people to interact with the world around them and are involves a set of skills that begin to develop at an early age. For over forty years, educators have debated the most effective ways to provide instruction in reading and writing (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2010; Pressley & Allington, 2014). Some educators lean towards an explicit skill-based approach while others believe in a more holistic approach where children construct understanding of text by engaging in literate behaviors.

A third approach to reading instruction takes a more balanced stance. The balanced comprehensive approach (BCA) allows teachers to incorporate their knowledge of learning theories, learning strategies, and the individual needs of their students when planning reading instruction (Morrow, 2012). The National Reading Panel's (2000) review of the literature supports the need for balanced literacy instruction. They assert that a combination of five components should be present to deliver effective instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. A balanced approach to reading instruction combines skills-based and meaning-based instruction through the use of different instructional formats such as small-group, whole-class, and one-on-one instruction. In addition, activities such as

shared reading, interactive writing, and literacy centers are employed to combine skills based and meaning based instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Morrow, 2012; Pressley & Allington, 2014).

However, even with implementing what is known in the literature about effective reading instruction (NRP, 2000), students continue to struggle. This is alarming because low achievement in reading correlates to high rates of dropout, poverty, and underemployment (Snow et al., 1998; Wagner, 2000). Therefore, many school districts provide students who struggle with supplemental reading intervention programs like the one that is the focus of this study.

This review of the literature will begin with what the research has to say about effective reading instruction. Three best practices; small group instruction, assessment to inform instruction, and direct instruction of comprehension strategies, will be explored as they specifically relate to the program being studied. In addition, I will review the research surrounding reading intervention programs, both commercially produced and those that are homegrown. I conclude this literature review by discussing the gaps in the research base and how the literature reviewed informs the current study.

### **Best Practices**

Snow et al. (1998) asserts that quality reading instruction in the primary grades is the “single best weapon against reading failure” (p. 343). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that instructional practices based in research are made available to teachers. Evidence-based reading instruction, synonymous with research-based instruction and scientifically based research, is typically known as a program or collection of instructional practices that have a record of success (ILA, 2002). That means that there is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence to suggest that when a particular approach is used with a particular group of students, adequate gains in reading achievement can be expected (ILA, 2002). Teachers then have the task of

determining whether those findings are generalizable to their population. Recent studies on reading programs and methods found that there isn't a program that works best in every case and every situation (National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, 2001).

Furthermore, differences in student need, classroom conditions, and teaching styles complicate the goal of finding a program that is right for large scale implementation (ILA, 2002).

Gambrell & Mazzoni (1999) outline ten research-based best practices in reading instruction, based on current and comprehensive research reviews, in which effective teachers routinely engage in. These best practices can be separated into two categories. First are a set of practices that involve a combination of teaching specific reading skills: the direct instruction of decoding and direct instruction of comprehension strategies. The second set of practices are more general pedagogies for effective reading instruction: authentic meaning making experiences, use of high quality literature, integration of word study/phonics with a reading/writing program, balance of teacher- and student-led discussions, small group instruction, and the use of assessment to inform instruction. Three of these best practices as they relate to the intervention program in this study will be discussed in further detail below. The first two are pedagogical approaches: small-group instruction and using assessment to inform instruction. The third approach is the use of direct instruction to teach comprehension.

### **Small Group Instruction**

Teachers in public elementary schools have the important and challenging job of teaching self-contained, heterogeneous classes of children. With this heterogeneity, students in a classroom often have a wide range of reading proficiency levels, making it difficult for teachers to simultaneously promote the development of reading in all students (Poole, 2008). One way teachers try to address this diversity of reading abilities is to incorporate a variety of different

organizational practices during reading instruction. These organizational structures most commonly include whole group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction (Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, & Pressley, 1999). While the use of whole class instruction is often cited as most prevalent in elementary literacy instruction (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000; Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1996; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002), teachers often use small groups as a means to differentiate for a range of reading levels. While the form of small group instruction varies (i.e. flexible, ability, skill based, and mixed ability groupings), it is assumed that this type of organization will help all students to learn because teachers can use materials at an appropriate level, teach at a pace that matches the group members, and coach students at their instructional level (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condron, 2008; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). The literature shows that small group instruction is commonly seen in classrooms of teachers that have been identified by administrators as exemplary literacy instructors and in schools deemed effective (Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000).

Four studies, one quantitative, one mixed-methods, and two qualitative, take a closer look at the grouping practices of effective, elementary literacy instructors and effective schools (Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996, Taylor et al., 2000; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). Pressley et al. (1996) conducted a quantitative study in which two surveys were used to first identify best practices in literacy instruction for three sets of students (good, average, and weak) and second to further describe the strategy (i.e. frequency in use, minutes dedicated to the strategy, written explanations of the strategy). Eighty-three teachers in grades K-2 were identified highly effective by reading supervisors across the country using criteria including, but

not limited to, student achievement records, direct observation of teaching, and interactions and conversations that indicate that the teacher can integrate and apply sound principles of reading instruction. Although this study is limited to self-reports, results showed that kindergarten and first grade teachers reported dedicating one-third of their instructional time to teaching in small groups, however that number reduced to one-sixth with second grade teachers.

Taylor et al. (2000) found similar results in their mixed methods study of fourteen schools, four that were rated as most effective, six moderately effective, and four least effective. During the data collection period, 92 teachers identified by their principals as good or excellent teachers who demonstrate exemplary reading instructional practices, were given questionnaires regarding instructional practices, asked to keep two weekly instructional time logs, and were interviewed and observed. A univariate ANOVA revealed a statistically significant effect for school effectiveness and the amount of time spent using small group instruction. Teachers in the most effective schools spent an average of 59 minutes a day in small group instruction whereas in moderately and least effective schools, teachers spent an average of twenty-six and thirty-seven minutes respectively.

A small group of qualitative studies have examined the grouping practices of teachers seen as effective by their supervisors and administrators (Morrow et al., 1999; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). Morrow et al. (1999) for example, investigated the grouping practices of six teachers in three New Jersey school districts. Through interviews and 25 hours of observation in each classroom it was found that teachers commonly had four to six reading groups in which they planned explicit instruction based on student need. Monthly evaluations of students occurred so that teachers could make notes about student progress and adjust their grouping.



In a slightly smaller qualitative study that combined interviews and observations of four exemplary teachers from different schools in New Zealand, Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) found that although these teachers tended to have groups that remained unchanged, there were three fundamental reasons that small groups provided effective contexts for learning. The first was that teachers believed that all students can attain independence and they held their students to that expectation. Second, teachers made efforts to ensure a close fit between the text and the reader. Lastly, small group instruction was just one way in which teachers organized their literacy instructional time but that, like the teachers in the aforementioned studies, a combination of whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction was found to be beneficial for literacy instruction.

While small group instruction is often used as a way for teachers to differentiate instruction for all learners, small group instruction is also more commonly seen in classrooms in which students have low instructional reading levels (Amendum et al., 2009). Teachers use different types of grouping such as mixed-ability and same-ability to address their struggling readers. However, there is criticism of both of these small group formats (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008; Poole, 2008; Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000). Two survey studies focused on the differences in instructional practices amongst elementary teachers using same-ability leveled reading groups (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008). Using data from first- and third-grade waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, Condrón (2008) used propensity score matching techniques to approximate the impact of low, middle, and high group placement on reading gains as compared to non-grouped instruction. Condrón (2008) found accelerated learning amongst high groups but decelerated learning in low groups as compared to what would have occurred if they were not placed in these ability groups.

In addition, students in lower ability groups spent less time reading silently, answering critical comprehension questions, reading expository trade books, and selecting their own reading materials as well as more time doing worksheets than students in above-average groups.

The use of mixed ability groups with low achieving students shows a similar pattern of findings (Poole, 2008; Schumm et al., 2000). In a qualitative study of two struggling fifth grade readers in mixed-ability groups in a poor achieving, urban school district, Poole (2008) observed four reading group sessions and identified similar stigmatizing effects on low-achieving students as same-ability groupings did. Two of those effects were that struggling readers experienced higher occurrences of interruptions as well as less time spent on the actual reading of text. Schumm et al. (2000) conducted two side-by-side studies (one qualitative and one quantitative) that sampled 29 third grade teachers' reading practices. Through observation and interviews it was found that while teachers mainly used whole-group undifferentiated instruction, they also incorporated mixed-ability groups within their instruction. The second part of this study used quantitative data to assess student achievement, self-concept, and attitudes about reading. Findings indicated that while there were moderate gains in achievement, self-concept, and attitudes about reading in high achievers, there were however, minimal gains made in these areas by students with reading and learning disabilities. This literature seems to imply that while small group instruction is often used as an intervention within classrooms to address the needs of struggling readers, this structure often falls short of its intended goal.

While small group instruction within classes can sometimes have negative consequences, small group instruction aimed at specific skills development (i.e. vocabulary and dialogue) has shown some positive impacts on at-risk populations (Fien et al., 2011; McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). McIntyre et al. (2006) conducted a grounded theory study in which one teacher

promoted small group discussions in her second-grade classroom. The teacher in this study used five standards proposed by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence in the small group discussions. Researchers used theoretical coding to analyze data collected from video-taped classroom observations, interviews, student assessments, and family interviews and found that the structure of the lesson led to dialogue and the construction of new understandings amongst the students in the small group. Fien et al. (2011) investigated the impact of skill based small group instruction within first graders at elementary Title 1 schools in the Pacific Northwest. This experimental study examined the impacts on vocabulary knowledge in students that received additional small group instruction that was intended to increase the comprehension of, and vocabulary related to, the expository text in the whole-class lesson. Pre- and post-tests indicate that the additional small group instruction enhanced the vocabulary knowledge and expository retellings of the text of students in the control group. However, it is important to note that in contrast to the previous studies, small group instruction in this case was provided by interventionists and not the regular education teacher.

In summary, the research is mixed about the effects of small group instruction. On the one hand, studies have warned against the negative consequences of small group instruction such as decelerated learning and stigmatizing effects. On the other hand, research on small group instruction indicates that effective teachers employ the use of small groups during reading instruction. The use of small group instruction is common in classrooms with struggling or low performing readers. Teachers cite differentiation as the main reason they use small groups because it gives them the ability to match readers to text, teach at an appropriate pace, and focus instruction on the needs of the students.

### **Direct Instruction of Comprehension Strategies**

Early reading instruction focuses on phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). However, many experts argue that before becoming a competent reader, one must be able to comprehend the text (Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003). The definition of reading comprehension has evolved over the last three decades (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2005). It has shifted from a literal understanding of the text to one that involves enhancing understanding and thinking more critically and deeply about the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Harvey and Goudvis (2000) assert that students need to learn to interact with the text by questioning, interpreting, and evaluating what they read.

Reading comprehension is a critical skill in today's society (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2004; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; NRP, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). Most day-to-day activities, such as reading signs, menus, and instructions, require that a person be able to read and comprehend text. However, many students struggle to meet grade level expectations for comprehension (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Many qualitative observation studies have demonstrated that effective classroom instruction incorporates both word level and meaning-based instruction such as teaching comprehension and vocabulary strategies (Connor, Morrison, & Katch, 2004; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). However, many experimental studies about improving reading skills in the early grades have a greater focus on word level or basic reading skills (Gersten et al., 2009), rather than reading comprehension skills. Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013) assert that making meaning of text, or comprehension, can be effectively taught to young students. To do this, researchers have recommended that struggling readers receive direct and explicit instruction on how to select and deploy reading comprehension strategies (Gambrell & Mazzoni 1999; NRP, 2000; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009; Snow et al., 1998).

Directly or explicitly teaching reading comprehension skills involves “imparting new information to students through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance of student learning” (Rupley et al., 2009, p. 126). In this way the teacher provides an explicit explanation of a comprehension strategy, models or demonstrates its use for the student, and then engages the student in guided practice where the student, with help from the teacher tries out the strategy on their own. Explicit reading comprehension activities focus the child’s attention explicitly on the extraction and construction of meaning from text. Students need to practice both cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies (Van Den Broek & Kremer, 2000) to improve comprehension. Cognitive strategies consist of activities that increase the likelihood of comprehension (i.e. rereading and activating prior knowledge) whereas metacognitive strategies are comprised of a variety of self-monitoring actions aimed at helping readers become more aware of their understanding of the text (i.e. predicting, summarizing, questioning). In what follows, I will review the research on the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies followed by what is known regarding the effectiveness of instruction on metacognitive strategies.

Three recent experimental studies and one quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of explicit reading strategies instruction on students’ reading comprehension (Connor et al., 2004; Prado & Plourde, 2011; Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2005; Wijekumar, Meyer, & Lei, 2012). These studies, spanning grades 2-5, each employed pre- and post-test designs and found that the treatment groups saw larger gains in reading comprehension post-test scores than the control groups. Wijekumar et al. (2012), examined the effects of explicit instruction of comprehension strategies using a web-based intelligent tutoring system (ITSS), rather than a teacher as in the other studies. One hundred thirty-one classrooms were randomly assigned to use the ITSS system to explicitly instruct students on how to use text features to retrieve

information from expository text. Results from a researcher designed post-test indicated statistically better performance in reading comprehension of expository text than the control group that did not use the ITSS. The researchers also looked at the ITSS on two other variables: gender and initial pretest scores (low, mid, and high). The ITSS appeared to make a larger difference on male students than female, but no differences were found between students who had low, average, or high pre-test scores. This finding is in contrast to Connor et al. (2004) in that the researchers found that students who had low/average pre-test scores on the Peabody Individual Achievement Test – Revised (PIAT-R) made more gains after receiving explicit instruction of reading comprehension skills.

Connor et al. (2004) study, used a sample of 73 third graders across 43 different schools in a large Midwestern city, who were observed three times throughout the year (fall, winter, and spring) to gauge the amount of time throughout a school day that was spent on different reading instruction activities. Researchers grouped the observed instructional activities based on two dimensions: explicit vs. implicit and teacher vs. child managed. Explicit strategies comprised of summarizing, predicting, vocabulary, questioning, and discussion. Implicit reading strategies were strategies that did not explicitly focus on reading comprehension (i.e. decoding, fluency, and sustained reading) however, they were seen to indirectly support reading comprehension (Connor et al., 2004). Teacher and student managed activities were determined by who was in charge of directing a child's attention. Therefore, discussion and modeling were teacher directed and activities such as silent reading or completing worksheets were student managed. They found that children with low/average fall pre-test scores demonstrated more reading growth when not only explicit reading activities took place, but when those activities were managed by the teacher as opposed to student managed. Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) also explored the

impact of explicit strategy instruction followed by three different ways of practicing: teacher-led, reciprocal same-age peer-tutoring, and cross-age peer-tutoring throughout 25 different schools in Belgium. Similar to Connor et al. (2004) they found that teacher-led practice of reading strategies had greater effect sizes on reading comprehension as shown on Dutch reading comprehension achievement tests. In addition, they also found that cross-age, peer-tutoring had greater effects as well. These studies seem to indicate that the way in which the students practice the reading strategies, after direct instruction, has an impact on reading comprehension.

The research base indicates that explicit reading comprehension instruction can be beneficial to struggling readers (Connor et al., 2004; NRP, 2000; Snow et al., 1998; Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2005). I will now turn to another body of research that focuses on the strategies that teachers explicitly teach to strengthen comprehension. In their article, *Comprehension at the Core*, Harvey and Goudvis (2013) explain their comprehension continuum and the different strategies that students use as they move through the continuum. Students begin to show their comprehension of the text by answering literal questions to acquiring and actively using knowledge as they apply what they have learned through reading in their everyday lives. In the middle of this continuum, students are taught to “merge thinking with content” through the use of metacognitive strategies such as making connections, predictions, and inferences. In addition, students are taught to ask questions, determine importance, and react to information. The National Reading Panel (2000) cited eight effective or promising comprehension strategies: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers (visual charts used to represent and organize a child’s understanding of the text), story structure, question answering, question generation, summarization, and multiple-strategy use.

In line with NRP's (2000) recommendation of multiple-strategy use, Harvey and Goudvis (2013) caution against teaching comprehension strategies in isolation or in inauthentic ways. Rather, they suggest teaching children a variety of strategies within a short period of time so that students can move onto the next step in comprehension. Several recent studies (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007; Eilers & Pinkley, 2006; Scharlach, 2008) investigated the use of multiple metacognitive strategies to increase reading comprehension scores. Each study was unique in its design however overlapped in choice of metacognitive strategies as the focus of the investigation. In addition, each study indicated gains in reading comprehension scores when metacognitive strategies were explicitly taught and students were given guided practice (practice with teacher support) and scaffolding (release of teacher support) to begin to use the strategies independently. In a comparison study, Boulware-Gooden et al., (2007) found twenty percent greater gains in comprehension scores as shown on the Gray Silent Reading Test in the first-grade classrooms from a school that employed think-alouds and summaries. Think-alouds are when teachers describe what they are thinking as they monitor for comprehension of the text. Summarizing is when the most important parts of a text are extracted. In an experimental study, Scharlach (2008) randomly assigned 5, third grade classrooms to one of three groups: a control group that had no change in instruction, a group in which teachers explicitly taught and explained a variety of metacognitive strategies (i.e. predicting, visualizing, connecting, questioning, and summarizing), and a group that followed the START (Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text) lesson plan which incorporated explicit metacognitive strategy instruction as the second group, but also taught the students how to use the Art of Comprehension recording sheet. On this sheet, students wrote down their thinking while reading to ensure active engagement with the text. Students in the START group made



significantly greater gains than the other groups indicating that the ART of Comprehension sheet may have helped in boosting reading comprehension scores. Finally, in a small mixed methods study of 24, first graders Eilers and Pinkley (2006), found that when students were taught to make connections, predictions, and sequence the text, gains were made in their level of cognitive thinking about reading as measured by the Index of Reading Awareness (IRA) and overall reading levels increased as shown on the Beaver Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

The findings from these studies also suggest that teachers will have more impact if they are taught to help students incorporate strategies before, during, and after reading (Boulware et al., 2007; Scarlach, 2008). Before reading, students should be guided to use their background knowledge to make predictions about the text and key vocabulary should be reviewed. While reading, teachers should explicitly teach and explain the comprehension strategies by modeling visualizing, connecting, and questioning while reading. Instruction should be scaffolded so that students have time to actively practice authentic strategy use first with the teacher and eventually use the strategy independently. After reading students should be taught to determine the main idea, summarize, check predictions, and make judgements about the text. Finally, in each of these studies, the students that had larger gains in reading comprehension used graphic organizers to record their strategies and “thinking” before, during, or after reading. This is supported in other experimental design studies (Ermis, 2008; Liang, Peterson, & Graves, 2005). Ermis (2008) found greater gains in comprehension of information text when students used concept maps. Similarly, the use of story maps made positive impacts to student’s reading comprehension scores of fiction texts (Liang et al., 2005).

In order to be an effective reader, students must be able to comprehend the text. The effects of explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is well documented within the literature

and shown to be effective in raising reading comprehension scores. This is particularly important for teachers who are designing lessons for struggling readers to know. Successful readers often instinctively use metacognitive strategies, however struggling readers need to be taught how to use them to make meaning of text (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006). The research also suggests that readers need to be given time to practice these strategies independently and that the use of scaffolds like graphic organizers can help students be accountable for actively engaging with the text. I will now turn my focus to the last of the three best practices, using assessment to inform instruction.

### **Assessments to Inform Instruction**

Progress monitoring, especially of struggling readers, is an important part of reading instruction as it gives the teacher information to be able to hone in on the exact reading skills and strategies that a student needs to work on (Denton, 2012; Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Gersten et al., 2009; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). In addition, progress monitoring also allows teachers to track progress of students over a period of time. However, Gersten asserts that there is a lack of evidence supporting the use of progress monitoring within supplemental reading intervention programs (Gersten et al., 2009). However, the intervention program in this study will incorporate the use of assessment to inform instruction. More specifically, running records will be used frequently to assess oral reading fluency and reading benchmark assessments (Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System) will be administered three times a year. These assessments will be used to gauge the students' instructional reading level, so that students are being taught with texts that are not too easy and not too challenging for them. These reading levels are part of the reading level framework, which will be discussed in more detail at the end

of this section. Therefore, the following will review what is known in the research regarding benchmark assessments, running records, and the reading level framework.

**Benchmark assessments.** In our current era of high stakes accountability, the use of benchmark assessments has increased (Lesisko & Staiheen, 2012). A benchmark is defined by Fountas & Pinnell (2011) as a standard against which to measure something (p. 2). A benchmark assessment sits in the middle of a balanced assessment system as it is not an example of ongoing formative classroom instruction nor is it an annual state or summative assessment (Herman, Osmundson, & Dietel, 2010). Benchmark assessments are administered a few times during a school year (typically at the beginning, middle, and end) and are used to evaluate students on a particular long-term goal as set by the district. This data enables districts to evaluate progress over an extended time frame (Steele & King, 2008). The results are then used to inform policy, instructional planning, and decision making at the classroom, school, and at the district level (Halladay, 2012; Herman et al., 2010).

Reading benchmark assessments are designed specifically to obtain a reading level and to analyze the reading behaviors of a student (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Two benchmark reading assessments commonly used in schools across the country are the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P BAS). Each assessment uses a benchmark book that is specifically designed to exemplify the type of reading a student will be presented with at that particular level. Although the benchmark levels are not nationally normed they have been tested in a large field study (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). The DRA assessment uses a numerical leveling system while the F&P BAS uses an alphabetical text leveling system. Both assessments combine the use of oral reading and silent reading with a comprehension check. The DRA and the F&P BAS provide a tool for teachers to assess a

student's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of a particular leveled text. Teachers use this information to establish a functional reading level for each leveled text read, most commonly described as independent, instructional, and hard (Fawson, Ludlow, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Smith, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2011; Halladay, 2012).

There are several benefits to the use of reading benchmarks. On a classroom level, teachers can use the results of these tests to form initial reading groups, to select texts that are best suited to guide a student's instruction, and to plan effective instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Teachers can also use them to identify students who would benefit from intervention services and determine particular areas of reading difficulty. Benchmark assessments are not only helpful to classroom teachers but make positive impacts at a school-wide or district level as well. These assessments, implemented two to three times over the course of an entire school year and in subsequent school years, provide longitudinal data about individual student progress (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Schools that are rated most effective in literacy instruction were those that had a system for collecting, recording, and sharing benchmark data multiple times in a year (Taylor, et al., 2005 as cited by Ross, 2004). Benchmark assessments combined with frequent formative classroom assessments, such as running records, are a key feature of effective literacy instruction within a school (Herman et al., 2010; Ross, 2004).

**Running records.** At the core of both the DRA and the F&P BAS is a running record, a commonly used reading assessment developed by Marie Clay for children's Reading Recovery programs (Fawson, et al., 2006). A running record is a "literacy assessment technique that is formative; that is, it provides information that can be used to improve students' reading" (Ross, 2004, p. 187). The teacher makes a running record by asking the student to read a text, or portion of text, aloud while they record all reading behaviors such as substitutions, omissions,

and insertions of words. In addition, a teacher records instances when students reread, or repeat, text as well any self-corrections. These are all considered miscues. From there, teachers engage in a miscue analysis, by identifying the strategies a student uses while reading. Running records are widely used by teachers to monitor reading progress and inform instructional practices (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Recording running records are important because a correlation has been identified between teachers' frequent use of running records and their students' reading achievement (Fawson, et al., 2006; Pressley, et al., 2001; Ross, 2004). The reliability of the evidence presented in this research is mixed, however. Variability between teachers' levels of sophistication and experience with accurately recording reading behaviors impacts the reliability of running record assessments. Another factor that impacts the reliability of a running record is the differences in text levels. Although researchers like Fountas and Pinnell (2011) have spent years perfecting their text level gradient and benchmark books, there still remains some differing internal linguistic structures and cognitive concepts that would cause students' running record scores to vary from one passage to the next (Fawson, et al., 2006, p. 113). Student schema and prior knowledge can also pose a threat to reliability because one student may perform poorly on a level because they are unfamiliar with the content.

Research that measures the extent to which the running record contributes to higher achievement is limited because of the embedded instructional treatments (Ross, 2004). For example, students who are given running record assessments are also involved in an instructional program such as Reading Recovery or a balanced literacy program and therefore it is difficult to decipher what is contributing to their achievement: the instruction or the running record.

According to Ross, more systematic experimental research is needed in this field (Ross, 2004).

Taking the research on benchmark assessments and running records into consideration, it seems that a combination of the two is what gives a classroom teacher a rich reading picture of a student. While benchmark assessments give a detailed image about the student on one given day with one text which is unfamiliar to the student, running records give frequent snapshots of the student based on a book which is familiar to the student. These assessments are tied to a larger framework of reading instruction, which I will explain in the next section of this literature review.

**Reading level framework.** Use of the term reading levels has become common among educators, parents, and publishing companies. Schools are equipped with leveled bookrooms and publishing companies have joined in by providing thousands of new fiction and non-fiction leveled texts per year (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Leveled bookrooms give teachers the ability to match readers to texts according to interest and reading levels. Teachers use benchmark reading assessments in conjunction with running records to find the instructional level, and through this process they also look to find a child's independent, or easy level as well as the hard, or frustration level, which is when a child read a book with low accuracy and/or low comprehension. This reading level framework dates back to the 1940's when Emmett Betts described four levels of texts, the fourth level being the probable capacity level which is the highest level a child can comprehend when text is read aloud to them (Halladay, 2012). While there are different percentages for accuracy and comprehension that identify what quantifies a text to be easy, instructional, or hard across different assessment systems, the overall framework has remained relatively stable (McKenna & Stahl, 2009).

Halladay (2012) identifies some key limitations to the use of the leveling framework and provides some cautions for teachers. The first of these cautions is the link between decoding

ability and overall comprehension. Since most benchmark reading assessments use a combination of both accuracy and comprehension scores, teachers should be aware that there is a strong relationship between the two. However, there are some instances where decoding and comprehension do not occur together and as the student progresses through the grade levels, this relationship weakens. The second caution is the assumption that independent reading requires near perfect decoding accuracy. Independent reading isn't always used for developing fluency; it can also foster a love for reading, build vocabulary, and build content knowledge (Halladay, 2012, p. 58). Third, it is commonly assumed that oral reading skill predicts a child's silent reading ability (Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009). However, research is mixed about this assumption and therefore teachers should use caution in making instructional decisions that are based on oral reading alone. To address this caution, the F&P BAS has a silent reading component that allows teachers to begin to ascertain whether a child is able to comprehend while silently reading (Halladay, 2012).

In summary, the research on using assessment to inform instruction indicates that reading benchmarks are a key feature in effective literacy instruction. Running records, when used regularly, have been tied to higher levels of reading achievement. Finally, teachers use the reading level framework to help them to find the instructional reading level of students in an effort to select appropriate texts for instruction and independent reading.

### **Reading Interventions**

The NCLB Act of 2000 set annual targets for school and district performance that require all students to reach proficiency in reading as determined by state assessments beginning in grade three. To address this mandate schools must employ reading interventions. Some schools choose to approach reading intervention programs by purchasing commercial reading

intervention programs or adopting school wide reading reform initiatives, while others go for a more homegrown approach. Research available on both program types will be reviewed below.

### **Commercial Reading Interventions**

Given the link between students' abilities in reading by the end of third grade and their later success in school (Hernandez, 2011), it is important that schools are using scientifically proven reading interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). However, "the nation's 16,000 school districts are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on often untested educational products and services developed by textbook publishers, commercial providers, and nonprofit organizations. Little is known about the effectiveness of these interventions" (Torgesen et al., 2006, pg.vii).

To address this gap, Torgesen et al. (2006) conducted an evaluation study of four widely used remedial reading programs designed to incorporate explicit and systematic instruction of basic reading skills. These programs; Corrective Reading, Failure Free Reading, Spell Read Phonological Auditory Training (PAT), and Wilson Reading all focus on word level skills with the exception of Failure Free Reading, which had an additional reading comprehension instructional component. Torgesen et al. (2006) used an experimental design to understand the extent to which the instruction using these programs closed the reading gap and brought struggling readers within the normal range relative to the instruction provided by their schools (p. 8). The sample consisted of 772 struggling third and fifth grade readers as identified by a score of at or below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile on a word reading test. Groups of three students were assigned to either a treatment or control group and randomly assigned to one of the four interventions. Students received the intervention in addition to their regular reading instruction, in 55-minute sessions, five days a week. Results for third grade students across all reading



interventions showed positive impacts on word attack and identification skills as measured by the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT-R) as well as positive impacts to decoding and sight word efficiency as measured by the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE). In fifth grade students the only significant impact across all interventions was in word attack skills. In addition to these findings, Failure Free Reading was the only program that had an impact on reading comprehension as measured on the WRMT-R passage comprehension subset. The findings of this study suggest that reading interventions are more effective in younger grades.

Another common intervention program is Reading Recovery, in which highly trained Reading Recovery teachers provide short-term one-to-one tutoring for low achieving first graders. Slavin et al. (2011) looked across eight studies and found that the outcomes for Reading Recovery were positive (+0.23 weighted mean effect size), and as high as other one-to-one programs such as Auditory Discrimination in Depth, Early Steps/Howard Street Tutoring, Reading Rescue, and Targeted Reading Interventions which had a weighted mean effect size of +0.56 across 12 studies. The sustainability of the effects of the Reading Recovery intervention have also been studied. One set of quantitative studies indicate higher percentages of discontinued Reading Recovery students that are able to maintain grade level expectations through third and fourth grade (Askew et al., 2002; Escamilla et al., 1998; Schmitt & Gregory, 2005).

While research indicates that commercial reading programs can increase reading achievement gains in students, often times the costs to buy the programs and train teachers detracts districts from adopting the programs. Therefore, a more homegrown approach is taken.

### **Homegrown Approaches to Intervention**

Another way that some districts have intervened for students already exhibiting reading failure or those who are at-risk for reading failure is to follow a tiered model of intervention, commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI) process (Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). In some states RTI has now been mandated. When districts engage in RTI, they begin to create homegrown intervention models in which individual schools make decisions about entry/exit criteria, instructors, materials, size of instructional groups, number of minutes per day and days per week, as well as the duration of the initial intervention prior to determining the need for more intensive intervention (Gersten et al., 2009; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012).

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the What Works Clearinghouse released a practice guide with five research-based recommendations regarding reading intervention in RTI for the primary (K–2) grades (Gersten et al., 2009). The first two recommendations are for tier one interventions which are targeted at all general education students. These recommendations assert that all students should be provided with high quality, research-based instruction in their classroom along with differentiated instruction to meet individual student needs. It is also recommended that student progress in reading be monitored by screening assessments three times a year to identify students with potential reading difficulties. The third and fourth recommendations apply to the second tier of intervention. In this tier, students who do not respond to the regular education program receive small-group instruction typically in addition to their regular classroom instruction. The recommended frequency and duration of this intervention is three to five times a week, in 20-40-minute instructional periods. In addition, student progress is to be monitored more regularly (weekly, biweekly). The final recommendations for tier 3 intervention in which students receive the highest level of

individualized support which may include more intensive, one-on-one intervention and in some cases, special education.

Gersten et al. (2009) rated each recommendation in terms of the strength of the research within each category. Three areas: differentiated instruction in tier one, additional progress monitoring in tier two, and intensive instruction in tier three were all rated as having a low level of evidence that is consistent and generalizable. Universal screening three times a year of all students received a moderate rating in that the studies reviewed had strong causal conclusions but cannot be generalized. Tier two, intense systematic instruction was the only recommendation that received a rating of strong in that the studies reviewed yielded consistent and generalizable evidence that this causes better outcomes. Therefore, the research on tier two interventions will be discussed in more detail.

Eleven studies of tier two intervention programs were reported in Gersten et al.'s (2009) review of the research. These studies varied in the reading skill focused on in the intervention, as well as the frequency (10-50-minute sessions), duration (8 to 56 weeks), and group size (1:1-1:6). One commonality was that all intervention programs systematically taught reading skills. The majority of these studies were in first grade classrooms with one in kindergarten and one spanning kindergarten through third grade.

Wanzek and Cavanaugh (2012) conducted a survey study in 413 schools in Florida that used an RTI model. Over 1,000 teachers in grades K-3 responded to the survey, that asked questions regarding the time, group size, location, implementer, materials, and decision-making processes of their tier two, supplemental reading interventions. It was found that although the schools were all reporting programs that fell within the IES guidelines, that there were differences in implementation amongst grade levels. For example, third grade teachers reported

the most instructional time in the interventions (31-40 minutes and 51 or more minutes) and had the most reports of an additional certified teacher implementing the intervention. In contrast, kindergarten teachers reported the least time allotted and the most reports of paraprofessionals delivering the instruction within the classroom setting.

### **Conclusion**

The research base on reading interventions for struggling readers is mixed. On the one hand, it is clear that systematic, explicit instruction of reading skills in homogenous, small-groups in addition to the regular education reading program is effective in improving reading skills of students at-risk for reading failure (Gersten et al., 2009; Torgesen et al., 2006; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012).

However, there are a number of limitations to the research base. First, there is very little research that measures the effects of progress monitoring within supplemental reading interventions. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how progress monitoring can be used to inform how student progress can effectively be measured. Secondly, the research base on intervention programs is more substantial in studying interventions for younger students than for children in grades 3-5 and for prevention of reading difficulties. More research is needed therefore to measure the impacts of reading intervention programs for students who are already identified as struggling readers. Lastly, most of the reading intervention research is about commercial programs and not on the implementation of locally developed interventions and how they are implemented. Therefore, there is little information about practical and contextual factors that may mediate the effects of reading intervention program.

In his description of the research of supplemental reading interventions, Denton (2012) points out a gap in the literature surrounding the implementation conditions for supplemental

reading interventions to take place, an area this study aims to address. More studies are needed to understand how school factors such as scheduling, staffing, timing, and duration impact the implementation. This evaluation study seeks to understand the implementation factors of the BSRP and to describe the reading levels of participants. Therefore, the theory surrounding both aspects of the research will be discussed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As this was a new program, it is important to understand the theory underpinning the model of intervention and the assumed changes that will take place. Therefore, I will begin with the theory on the implementation of change. I will then explain the components of the basic skills reading program. Given the research base on reading intervention programs and the best practices in effective reading instruction, the program in this study will employ the use of small-group instruction and assessment to inform instruction, while focusing on the direct instruction of comprehension strategies.

### **Implementation of Change**

Change is the single greatest challenge for organizations around the world (Reeves, 2009). In schools, change occurs mainly in an effort to increase achievement amongst different populations of students by shrinking the achievement gap. Fullan (2007) outlines the crucial steps in which school leaders follow must engage in order for a successful change initiative to occur. These are initiation, implementation, and continuation.

The first phase, initiation, refers to the process leading up to the adoption of a change. Initiation decisions can be influenced by a variety of factors (Fullan, 2007). In the case of this study, the initiation of the BSRP was driven by the underperformance in reading coupled with a lack of additional reading support in the school. Advocates for the initiation of the BSRP

included teachers, parents, and administration. Teacher buy-in is particularly important during this phase as they are typically at the heart of any implementation of new initiatives, which is the next, and most important, step in the change process of change.

Implementation “consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change” (Fullan, 2007, p. 84). The implementation phase is the most critical because it is the means of accomplishing the desired objective. The success of any initiative, such as the BSRP, is dependent upon the quality of the program in actual practice (Fullan, 2007). There are many factors that influence and affect the implementation of a program (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon, Nicotera, Veeh, 2016; Century & Cassata, 2016; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Durlak & DuPre; Forman et al., 2009). One factor is the clarity of the new initiative’s goals. When teachers are not sure about what the changes mean in practice it often results in anxiety and frustration. The implementer of the program must develop a high-quality working relationship amongst the stakeholders. This will help to build the trust and open communication that is necessary in developing a culture of commitment (Anyon et al., 2006; Domitorovich et al., 2008; Reeves, 2009).

Another factor influencing implementation is the match between the new program and school needs (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon et al., 2006; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). While needs are identified at the initiation phase, they often cannot be fully realized until the change is underway. As I implemented the BSRP it began to become clearer as to whether or not the BSRP was addressing the needs of the school and making progress toward positively impacting reading achievement.

In addition to clarity and needs, the quality and practicality of the program is another factor that affects implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fullan, 2007). Fullan (2007) cautions

that when the timeline between initiation decisions and implementation is too short, there isn't enough time to follow up on decisions made and to generate adequate materials. Some of the factors impacting the quality and practicality of the BSRP are time and resources. Disruptions to the school day (i.e. assemblies and fire drills) and student absences are factors that can decrease the instructional time students have. These factors may dilute the intensity of instruction and impact the effectiveness of the BSRP. Resources such as curriculum materials, staffing, and access to training are important to ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the instruction. Therefore, I collected information/data on implementation issues that arose while I enacted the program.

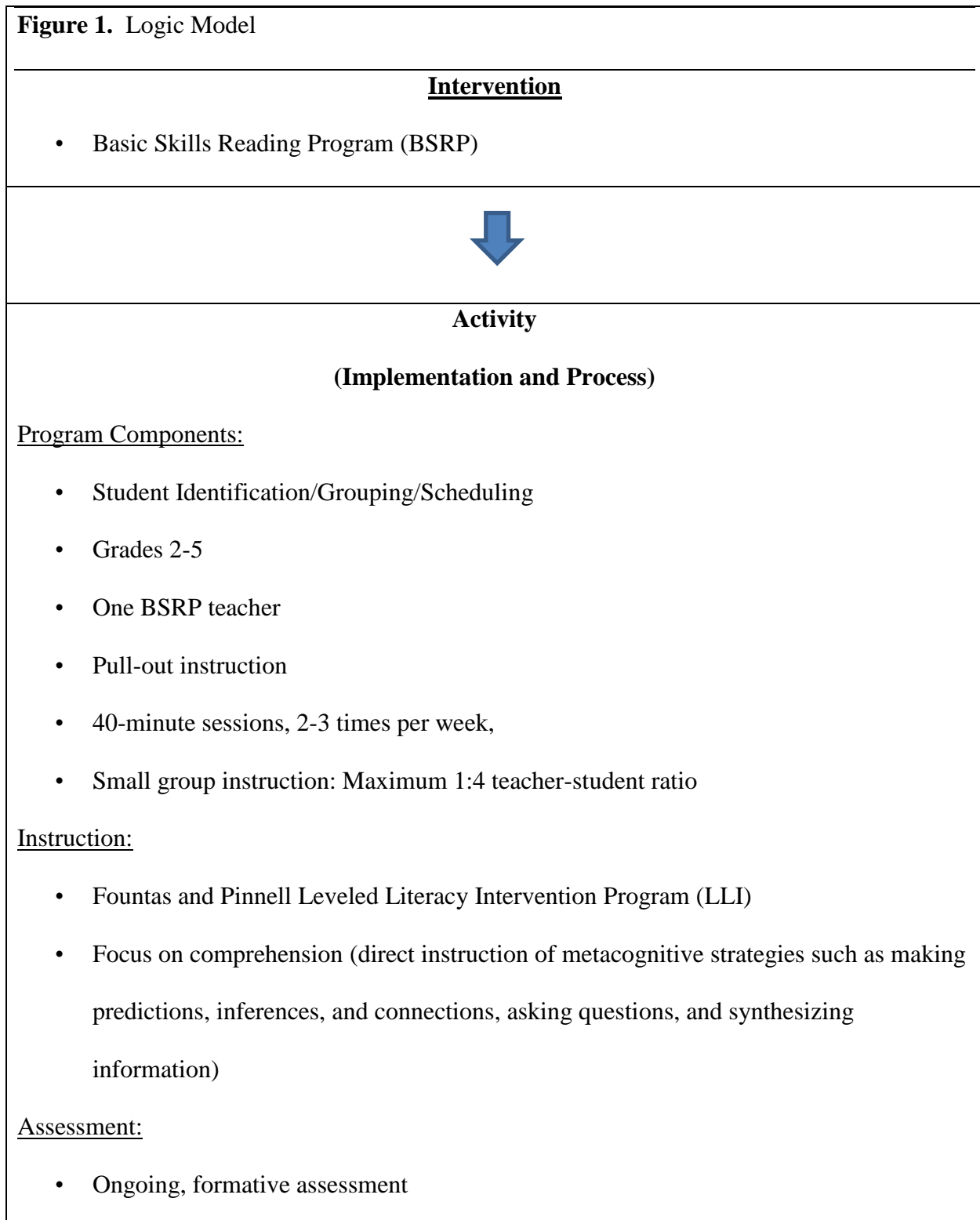
In the final phase of a successful change initiative, there must be a plan for continuing or sustaining the change (Fullan, 2007; Reeves, 2009). Teachers are more likely to continue to support a change effort if they feel it will improve achievement or if they see that progress toward the goal is being made (Coburn, 2005; Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Fullan, 2007). The BSRP at Riverside Elementary is not yet at the sustaining change phase, but over the course of the 2015-2016 school year this study documented how the BSRP is initiated and implemented. Drawing on this theory of change I collected data on the different aspects of the implementation of the program such as materials, instructional time, scheduling, and communication with stakeholders.

### **The BSRP**


The logic model for the BSRP, as outlined in Figure 1, was informed by the literature about effective reading interventions, and hypothesized that small-group instruction for 30-40 minutes, 2-3 times per week with a focus on explicit instruction of comprehension and word-

attack strategies, will lead to improvements in reading outcomes amongst the participants. The logic model is described in more detail below.

**Figure 1.** Logic Model





|   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (F&amp;P BAS)</li><li>• San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA)</li></ul>  |
|    |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Outcomes</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improvement in reading level (as shown by F&amp;P BAS and SDQA)</li><li>• Teacher reports of improved reading ability</li></ul> |

The components of the BSRP drew upon what was described in the research base regarding effective intervention program design and followed many of the research-based guidelines from the IES & What Works Clearinghouse's practice guide for reading intervention (Gersten et al., 2009). The identification process, model of the program, as well as the intensity and duration will be discussed in more detail below.

Identification for the BSRP began with universal screening of all students in grades 2-5 using the F&P BAS (Gersten et al., 2009). General education teachers were responsible for assessing each of their students. However, the BSRP teacher assessed all students identified as possible BSRP candidates. Possible candidates included students that scored below grade level expectations on multiple assessments at the end of previous school year (F&P BAS, Study Island benchmark, and Dolch word list), were new to the school, or had been recommended by the teacher. From there, final decisions were made as to who qualified for the BSRP.

Small group instruction was utilized in the BSRP as it is commonly seen in classrooms of teachers that have been identified by administrators as exemplary literacy instructors and in schools deemed effective (Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor

et al., 2002; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). The use of small groups helped allow for differentiated instruction because I could use materials at an appropriate level, teach at a pace that matched the group members, and coach students at their instructional level (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). Size of the small group has an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention (Vaughn et al., 2003). Therefore, a 1:4 teacher-student ratio was not exceeded (Gersten et al., 2009).

In an effort to support as many students as possible with one BSRP support teacher across four grade levels, a pull-out model was employed. Pull-out, or separated instruction, in which students are removed from the general education classroom for a short period of time to receive one-on-one or small-group reading instruction, is a commonly used model in reading interventions (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). In a survey study of both reading specialists and classroom teachers, Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009) investigated the perceptions of the pull-out intervention model. One positive aspect of the pull-out model, as indicated by reading specialists and teachers, was that it provides struggling students the opportunity to participate more fully in a small group with peers at similar literacy levels. In addition, there are less distractions in an individual or small-group setting and students receive a double dose of instruction both from their general education teacher as well as from the intervention teacher.

The duration and intensity of the intervention was also determined using the research base (Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Gersten et al., 2009). Although the number of times per week supplemental instruction takes place as well as variations in the length of each session is seen in the literature, (Gersten et al., 2009; Torgesen, 2007; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012), the BSRP attempted to follow the guidelines set by the IES and What Works' Clearinghouse (Gersten et

al., 2009). Therefore, each small group of students met 2-3 times per week. Each instructional session lasted 40 minutes.

The Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program was adopted by the district to be used in the BSRP. This program is relatively new and therefore the research is limited as to its effectiveness. However, Ransford-Kaldon et al. (2010) conducted a study in two districts in Georgia and New York that looked at reading achievement in students that received the LLI program in comparison to students that did not. Four hundred twenty-seven students, across grades K-2, were matched demographically and assigned to a treatment or control group. Reading achievement gains were seen in students given the LLI program in all three grade levels as measured by the DIBELS reading assessment as well as the LLI benchmark assessments.

A typical instructional session for a student in the BSRP was broken into three parts. The first five minutes was dedicated to word work. During word work, I gave a short mini-lesson on a specific skill. For example, I might teach the students the vowel team 'ai,' or that the /ed/ ending has three different sounds at the end of a word, or we might have worked on identifying synonyms. Then, the students applied those skills in a variety of different ways. Following word work, I introduced a new book or a part of a text to the group. This is when I delivered direct instruction of decoding, word-attack, and comprehension strategies. Then the students spent 10-15 minutes reading the text and practicing the new and previously taught strategies. While students were reading, I conducted one-on-one conferences. During the conferences, I was able to give instruction to each student that targets their individual needs. The session ended with a group discussion about the text. During this time, I asked students to share their thinking about the text and to describe the strategies they used to help them to understand the text more deeply.

Finally, frequent and ongoing formative assessments were used to inform instruction. Informal assessments of students took place during each instructional session and care was taken to notice and note down reading behaviors. Formal running records were taken on each student every four sessions, on average. In addition, students were given the F&P Benchmark assessment approximately every ten weeks. These formative assessments were used to drive instruction as well as to ensure that instructional levels were similar in each group.

Drawing on Fullan's theory of change coupled with what is known about effective program design, this study evaluated the implementation of the BSRP as well as described the reading ability of the student participants. In what follows I outline the methodology of my study.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As the purpose of this study was to inform programmatic improvement, I conducted a mixed methods utilization-focused evaluation study (Patton, 2008). A utilization-focused evaluation is defined as an “evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses” (Patton, 2008, p. 37). As a teacher researcher, I collected data as I implemented this new program in my school with the aim of helping me adapt the design as I implemented it as well as inform the improvement of the BSRP. Three main research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How was the Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) implemented?
  - a. What shaped the implementation of the BSRP?
  - b. How did the program change from its original design over time?
2. What were teachers’ evaluations of the BSRP?
  - a. How did teachers describe the strengths and challenges of the BSRP?
  - b. In what ways did teachers say the program can be improved?
3. What are the students’ experiences in the BSRP?
  - a. Who are the students in the BSRP?
  - b. What are their instructional reading levels before and after participation in the BSRP?
  - c. How do teachers describe the impact of their students’ participation in the BSRP?

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously over the course of six months (October-March). Qualitative methods were used to describe the processes, people, and events of program implementation because data collected was open-ended, discovery oriented, and used to describe the development of, and changes to, the program (Patton, 2002). To do this, a researcher journal was kept throughout the data collection period. Teacher interviews occurred

at the end of the data collection period. In addition, all program documents such as identification lists, grouping lists, schedules, and any communication or meetings regarding the program were collected. To supplement these qualitative methods, quantitative methods were used to describe student learning. Instructional reading level, as shown by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P BAS) and the San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA), were recorded in two separate Excel spreadsheets at the beginning and end of data collection. After the data collection period, a mixed-methods survey was used to further describe the implementation of the program from the viewpoint of the teachers in grades two through five.

### **Research Site**

The research site for this study was an elementary school comprised of a little over 400 students in grades two through five. The school is nested in the center of a small borough in central New Jersey that prides itself on its diversity in ethnic backgrounds and cultures and reports nearly 43 languages spoken. Specifically, the student population is comprised of 39% White, 10% Black, 19% Hispanic, 26% Asian, and 5% two or more mixed races (State of New Jersey, Department of Education, 2014). In addition, 38% of students receive free and reduced lunch.

There were five or six sections of each grade level in which the rosters ranged from 18 to 24 students per class. The literacy block in each grade level consisted of reading and writing instruction for a combined total of 90 minutes per day. Teachers in grades two and three used the Scott Foresman Reading Street program to frame their whole class reading instruction. A commercial reading program was not used in grades four and five. In all grades, teachers were expected to provide individualized reading instruction through guided reading, small-group reading instruction designed to provide differentiated teaching supports to students (Fountas &

Pinnell, 1996). It was also the expectation that teachers would develop a schedule in which they allotted more time within the 90-minute block for small group and one-on-one instruction for students already behind in reading or at-risk for falling behind. For the last three school years, reading intervention had been limited to the guided reading time and delivered by the regular classroom teacher. A new principal took over in the 2014-2015 school year reassigned me from a third-grade teacher to a basic skills reading teacher. Together we designed the program that I implemented throughout the 2015-2016 school year.

### **Sampling**

Nineteen general education teachers in grades 2-5 were recruited to participate in the study because they had students who were in the BSRP. Of these, 12 general education teachers, participated in the survey and 9 teachers participated in one-on-one interviews. Due to the anonymity of the survey, it cannot be determined if the same teachers participated in the survey and the interview.

Of the 12 teachers who participated in the survey, only eleven teachers, (6 from grades two and three and 5 from grades four and five) chose to answer demographic questions. Figure 2 below describes teacher demographics. All eleven teachers were female and ranged in experience from one year of teaching to more than eleven years. Additionally, 45% reported having a Masters degree in education.

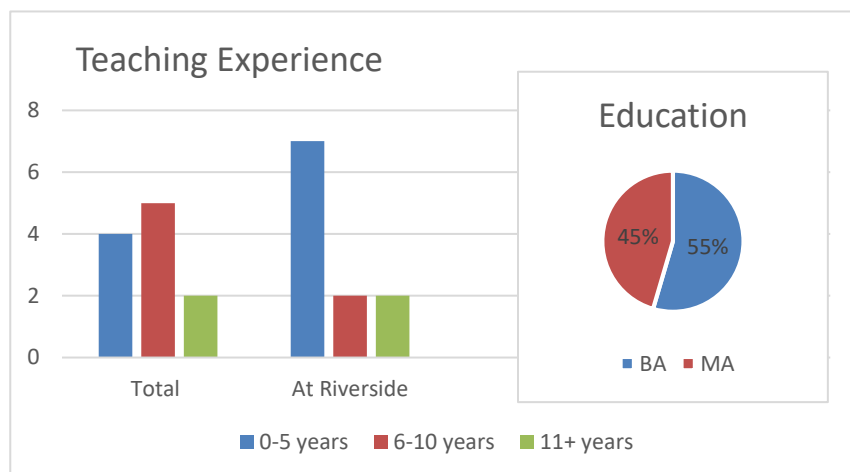


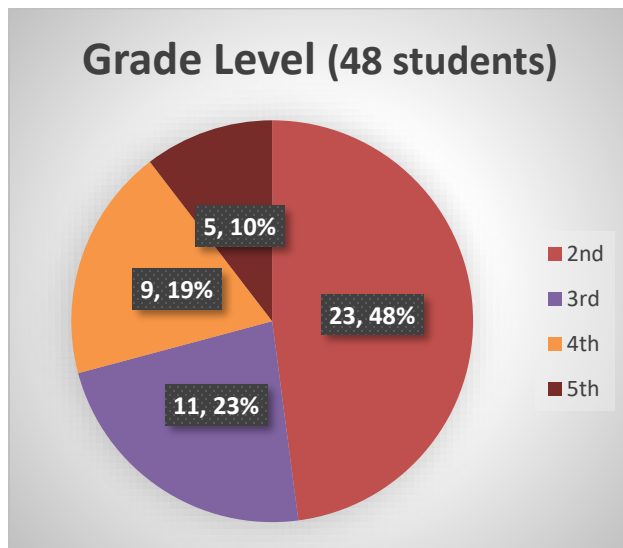
Figure 2. Teaching Experience and Education Level

Twelve classroom teachers, three from each grade level, were purposefully selected to participate in one-on-one interviews to gain in-depth insights about their perspectives on the BSRP (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). From grades two, three, and four, I sought out teachers who I felt would be information rich informants. It was my hope that these teachers would be able to give their perspectives on their students' experiences in the BSRP as well as critical evaluations of the program. The 3, fifth-grade teachers were also asked to participate because they were the only fifth-grade teachers who had students in the BSRP. However, the fifth-grade teachers selected declined to participate, leaving the total interview sample at nine teachers across grades two through four. While I do not know why the fifth-grade teachers declined to participate, one reason might be that these teachers had the least number of students in the BSRP and therefore may have felt less invested in talking about the program.

All nine interview participants were female and their teaching experience ranged from one year to fifteen. Additionally, all teacher participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix A).



In addition to talking with teachers, a convenience sample of the 42 students (24 female and 24 male) who were enrolled in the BSRP were recruited for the study. These students represented a range of grade levels and ethnicities. Of the 48 students, in the sample, there were 23 second-graders, 11 third-graders, 9 fourth-graders, and 5 fifth-graders (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Grade Level of BSRP Students

As can be seen in Figure 4, little over 75% of the student sample was comprised of Hispanic, and Caucasian students with, four Asian, four Black, and two students identifying as mixed-race (see Figure 4).

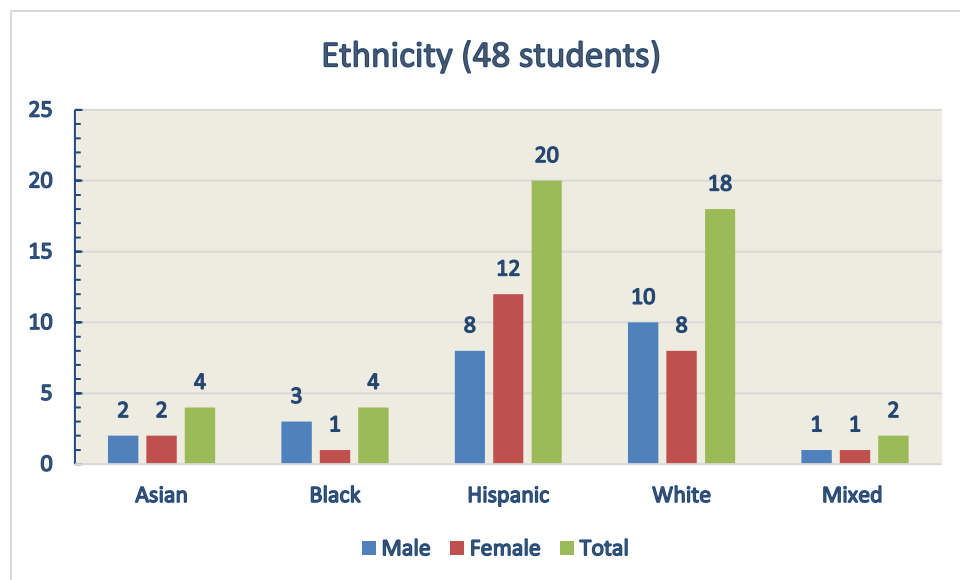


Figure 4. Ethnicity of BSRP Students

All parents signed an informed consent form to allow their child to participate in the study (Appendix B) and student assent was also obtained (Appendix C).

### Data Collection Procedures

A total of four sources, primarily qualitative, were used to collect data on program implementation; researcher journal, teacher survey, one-to-one interviews with the classroom teachers, and implementation documents. The qualitative data was used to attain a rich, thick description of the program which included the characteristics, contextual factors, and critical features of the program as it was implemented (King, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987). Qualitative data was also used to track the changes to the program, to keep a developmental history of the program, and discover the successes of the program as well as the areas for improvement. The logic model, purpose of the study, and the sample as described previously guided data collection techniques (Merriam, 2009).

In addition to understanding the program implementation process it was also important to understand and describe the program participants. More specifically, I wanted to know what the instructional reading levels and word recognition skills of students in the BRSP were before and

after participation in the program. Three data sources, both qualitative (perceived changes) and quantitative (measured changes), were used: teacher survey, one-to-one interviews, and reading assessment scores. Below is a description of the data collection procedures for each research purpose.

### **Implementation Data**

Data on the implementation of the BSRP was collected in two ways which will be explained in more detail below.

**Researcher journal.** A researcher journal was kept throughout the implementation process to answer research questions one and two that asked how the BSRP was implemented and what were the teachers' evaluations of the program. As I participated in, and observed the program, I made field notes. The field notes contained a description of what was observed and helped to capture information that helped to understand the context, the setting, and what went on (Patton, 2002). Drawing on the theoretical framework and logic model, program implementation involved looking at the components of the BSRP (i.e. identification procedures, grouping, scheduling, pull-out model) as well as factors that affected implementation (i.e. resources, communication, clarity of goals). I recorded the steps I took to identify students as well as what was said during both formal and informal meetings with principal and teachers. In addition, descriptive notes were recorded regarding successes, challenges, and changes during the implementation of the program as well as initial ideas for improvement. Field notes also contained my own reactions and feelings regarding implementation (Patton, 2002). These notes were recorded in a separate column next to field notes and contained comments regarding my feelings, reactions, hunches, and wonderings (Patton, 2002). It was important to record

reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what was observed at the time of the experience because as time passed my recall of the experiences became poor.

All journal entries were typed into an online researcher journal which was saved in a Google document titled “Research Journal.” The use of Google Documents allowed for access to the journal through any Internet enabled device (computer, tablet, or cell phone). Field notes were recorded each day in two columns: observations and reflections. At the end of each day, the field notes were reviewed, and any additional thoughts or observations were added. After the data collection period, the Google document was downloaded into a Word document and saved under the same name. All entries were dated and saved in chronological order on a password protected computer.

**Documents.** In addition to the researcher journal, documents were collected as they provide an evaluator with information about the program that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). I began by collecting documents regarding the components of the BSRP as outlined in the logic model. These documents included student identification procedures, materials, grouping sheets, student profile sheets containing information regarding demographics, and schedules which help answer research question one: How was the BSRP implemented? In addition, email exchanges between the researcher and the teachers as well as the principal were collected. These exchanges provided insight into not only the implementation of the program, but the teachers’ evaluations and what the teachers said about their students’ experiences in the BSRP (research questions two and three).

Throughout the data collection period all documents were saved or scanned into a Word document and saved in a folder titled “Implementation Documents.” Documents can often be lengthy and often need to be clarified and summarized (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, a

document summary form was created for each document collected which included the document name, date the document was collected, a short description, and an explanation of the significance of the document as it related to the operationalization and implementation of the BSRP (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All implementation documents were dated and stored by category on a password protected computer.

### **Implementation and Student Description Data**

A survey and one-on-one teacher interviews were employed to answer research questions two and three; what were the teachers' evaluations of the BSRP? and what were the students' experiences in the BSRP?

**Survey.** A mixed-methods survey was developed by the researcher to elicit teachers' perceptions of the pull-out model of instruction. This survey drew on parts of Woodward and Talbert-Johnson's (2009) Reading Intervention Survey. In their study, Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009) designed a survey to provide feedback from classroom teachers and reading specialists (47 in total) in a large, suburban district as to the advantages and disadvantages of separated instruction (pull-out) versus classroom support modes (push-in). Woodward and Talbert-Johnson's survey was comprised of close-ended questions that asked to teachers to identify their preferred method of instructional support for their below level readers (separated, inclusion, or a combination) as well as what method is currently used in their school. Two open-ended questions asked teachers and specialists to indicate two positives and two negatives to separated (pull-out) and inclusion (push-in) instruction. In addition, a 5-point Likert scale asked teachers to rate their feelings, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on key issues regarding separated versus inclusion models.

The survey for this study was designed to answer both research questions regarding the teachers' evaluations of the BSRP and to describe the students' experiences in the BSRP. The survey is comprised of nineteen questions, a number of which were taken or adapted from the survey designed by Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009). The full survey can be found in Appendix D and is described in detail below.

To answer research questions one and two (How is the BSRP implemented? What are the teachers' evaluations of the BSRP?), three questions (1 close-ended and 2 open-ended) were aimed at understanding teachers' perceptions regarding the BSRP's pull-out model of instruction. Teachers indicated their preferred model and described two benefits and two drawbacks specific to the current pull-out model. Next, a series of Likert-type questions were asked to gain information about teachers' perceptions of factors that mediated the implementation of the program. Teachers were asked to rate five statements on a scale of 1-5 with 1 representing strongly agree and five representing strongly disagree regarding the identification process, instructional time, schedule, and communication from the BSRP teacher. Further insight into research question two was gained from three open-ended questions which asked teachers to describe what aspects of the program are working, what changes could be made to improve the program, and a final question which gave teachers the opportunity to tell about something that the survey did not ask or to further describe an answer.

The survey also sought to answer research question 3 (What are the students' experiences in the BSRP?). Two Likert-type questions asked teachers to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding increased confidence in literacy among their BSRP participants and increased ability to comprehend texts.

Before administration, the survey was piloted with two teachers from the primary school in the same district to provide feedback on the questions and overall survey design. The teachers answered the following questions: is the survey easy to use, do the questions make sense, how long did the survey take, and what could be added to enhance the survey? Face validity helped me to understand if the responses were believable and reasonable (Patton, 2002). The responses did not indicate that any changes to the survey were necessary.

The mixed-methods survey was distributed to 19 teachers in grades two through five at the end of the data collection period using Qualtrics, an online survey development and distribution program. The survey was delivered to each teacher using their school district assigned email address. Participants had ten days to complete the survey. A reminder was sent three days prior to the close date to remind teachers of the deadline. An extension of one week was given due to low response rate (6 responses). Twelve classroom teachers (63%) completed the survey at the end of this timeframe. Results were downloaded from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet named “Survey Data” and saved on a password protected computer.

**One-to-one interviews.** One-to-one interviews were employed to capture the feelings and perceptions (Merriam, 2009) of the classroom teachers who had students who participated in the BSRP. Two members of my dissertation study group, conducted the interviews. The audio-recorded interviews took place in the participant’s classroom at a time convenient to them.

These interviews were designed to elicit teachers’ views on the implementation of the BSRP. Teachers were asked to reflect upon the identification process and the pull-out model as they experienced it as well as how they perceived their students to have experienced it. Additionally, they were asked to describe their BSRP students as readers and what changes, if any, they had observed in their students’ reading ability.

The interviews were semi-structured in that a guided list of questions was used, however, there was flexibility in the order and wording of the questions (Merriam, 2009). All interviews started by informing the participants about the purpose of the study. The protocol was comprised of thirteen questions which were open-ended and stated in a clear manner (Ryan, 2006) to elicit rich responses. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix E and is described in more detail below.

The interview questions were grouped into three major categories: program implementation, student descriptions, and recommendations. The first part of the interview was focused around program implementation. Teachers were asked questions regarding how their students were identified, their opinions about the identification process as well as the pull-out model of instruction. The second part of the interview focused on eliciting teachers' descriptions of their students who attended the BSRP. Teachers were asked to describe the perceived changes in the reading ability of each of their students in the program. The third part of the interview asked teachers to make recommendations for program improvement and gave them the opportunity to add any additional thoughts regarding the BSRP.

All interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audiotaped using the Rev.com application. Once the interview ended, the external interviewer saved the recording (labeling each with a pseudonym), and sent the file to Rev.com to be transcribed. All transcriptions were sent to the researcher. All teacher interview transcriptions were saved in individual Word documents named "Pseudonym of Teacher- Interview." A folder for each grade level was created so that the individual interviews could be stored by grade level on a password protected laptop.

### **Student Assessment Data**



Improved reading levels of the BSRP students was the intended goal of the program. Therefore, two measures were used to evaluate student reading proficiency prior to the intervention and at differing points throughout the implementation. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P BAS) was used to obtain the instructional reading levels of the students. In addition, scores from the San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA) were also collected to assess the BSRP students' word recognition ability.

**Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment system.** The F&P BAS was used to examine changes in the instructional reading levels of student participants. This assessment measures decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills to determine the students' developmental reading level to inform instruction and document progress.

The F&P BAS has been validated in a formative evaluation study conducted in classrooms through all regions of the United States. A strong correlation (.94 in fiction and .93 in nonfiction) was found between the F&P BAS and the Reading Recovery Text Level assessment. Both tests assess decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This correlation is important because Reading Recovery is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an effective, scientifically based reading program (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007). See Appendix F for a sample of the F&P BAS.

Administration of the assessment to all students in the program was done at the beginning and end of the data collection period. The F&P Benchmark Assessment is conducted in a one-on-one setting. The test administrator selects a text along the *F&P Text Level Gradient* (see Figure 5), typically the last instructional level from the previous benchmark. For example, if the student's scored an instructional level H on the fiction text from the BAS from the last assessment, the test administrator would start with the level H nonfiction text.

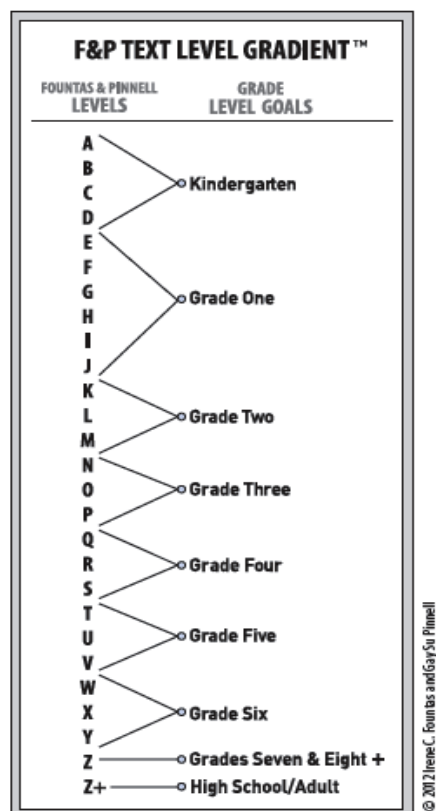


Figure 5. F&P Text Level Gradient. Copyright 2012 by Irene C. Fountas and GaySu Pinnell

The assessment begins by reading the text introduction. The student then reads aloud while the teacher observes and notes the reading behaviors on the recording form provided. After the oral reading, for levels I and above, students read the rest of the text silently. The administrator then scores the student's fluency from 0 to 3 using a rubric. In the second part of the assessment, the teacher conducts a comprehension conversation in which he/she asks the student to tell about the important parts of the story or the facts they learned. The administrator uses the recommended prompts to probe the students for more information when necessary and uses the rubric on the form to give the students an overall comprehension score. Finally, using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Criteria rubric (see Figure 6), which takes into consideration the student's oral reading accuracy score and their comprehension score, the text is deemed

either independent, instructional, or hard. The assessment is complete when the administrator has found both an instructional and a hard level for the student.

**Figure 4-5 Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Criteria**

| <b>Fountas &amp; Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Criteria for Levels A-K</b> |                          |                           |                      |                               |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Accuracy</b>   | <b>Comprehension</b>     |                           |                      |                               |
|   | <b>Excellent<br/>6-7</b> | <b>Satisfactory<br/>5</b> | <b>Limited<br/>4</b> | <b>Unsatisfactory<br/>0-3</b> |
| 95 – 100%   | Independent              | Independent               | Instructional        | Hard                          |
| 90 – 94%  | Instructional            | Instructional             | Hard                 | Hard                          |
| Below 90%   | Hard                     | Hard                      | Hard                 | Hard                          |

| <b>Fountas &amp; Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Criteria for Levels L-Z</b> |                           |                             |                        |                               |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Accuracy</b>   | <b>Comprehension</b>      |                             |                        |                               |
|   | <b>Excellent<br/>9-10</b> | <b>Satisfactory<br/>7-8</b> | <b>Limited<br/>5-6</b> | <b>Unsatisfactory<br/>0-4</b> |
| 98 – 100%   | Independent               | Independent                 | Instructional          | Hard                          |
| 95 – 97%  | Instructional             | Instructional               | Hard                   | Hard                          |
| Below 95%   | Hard                      | Hard                        | Hard                   | Hard                          |

*Figure 6.* Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Criteria Rubric. Copyright 2012 by Irene C. Fountas and GaySu Pinnell

The instructional reading level of the students was documented on an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was organized by grade level. Within each grade level sheet, the students were listed by their instructional level/group. For example, all students in second grade who were at instructional level “H” were grouped together. Once all assessment data was collected, a number was assigned to each student and all identifying information was deleted from the Excel spreadsheet and Word documents to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All documents were stored on a password protected computer.

**San Diego quick assessment.** Word recognition is a strong correlate of reading performance (Juel & Roper-Schneider, 1985). LaBerge & Samuel’s (1974) Theory of Automaticity states that when more time is spent on decoding print, the reader has less attention available for comprehension of text. There have been consistent findings which show that the development of efficient word recognition skills is associated with improved comprehension

(Calfree & Piontkowski, 1981; Herman, 1985; Stanovich, 1985 as cited in NRP, 2000). The San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA) was chosen for this study because it is a widely used graded word list and provided information regarding students' word recognition ability.

The San Diego Quick Assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the data collection period (see Appendix G). Similar to the F&P BAS, the SDQA places students at an independent, instructional, and hard reading level. However, instead of using an alphabetic text gradient, the SDQA uses a grade-level gradient (ie. pre-primer, primer, grade one, grade two, etc.). To administer the assessment, the teacher begins with a word list two or three sets below the student's grade level. The student reads the word in each list while the administrator records errors on the record form provided. Any mispronunciations are written down next to the word, and counted as incorrect. If a student makes one or no errors on a list, that level is considered an independent reading level. If a student makes two errors it is considered an instructional reading level, and three errors indicates a frustration level. The test administrator stops the assessment when the students has reached a frustration level.

All instructional reading level scores from the SDQA were documented on an Excel spreadsheet which was organized by grade level. Within each grade level the students were listed by their instructional level. Once all assessment data was collected, the same number as for the F&P BAS was assigned to each student and all identifying information was deleted from the Excel spreadsheet to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All documents were stored on a password protected computer.

In summary, collecting data via a researcher journal, one-to-one interviews, teacher survey, document collection, and the assessment scores ensured that my research questions could

be answered. Table 1 summarizes the data collection methods as they related to the research questions.

Table 1

*Summary of Data Collection Methods Aligned with Research Questions*

| Research Questions   | Sources               |                          |                   |           |                 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|  | Researcher<br>Journal | One-to-One<br>Interviews | Teacher<br>Survey | Documents | F&P BAS<br>SDQA |
| 1. How was the Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) implemented?        | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| a. What shaped the implementation of the BSRP?                         | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| b. How did the program change from its original design over time?      | X                     | X                        |                   | X         |                 |
| 2. What were teachers' evaluations of the BSRP?                        | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| a. How did teachers describe the strengths and challenges of the BSRP? | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| b. In what ways did teachers say the program can be improved?          | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| 3. What were the students' experiences in the BSRP?                    | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| a. Who were the students in the BSRP?                                  | X                     | X                        | X                 | X         |                 |
| b. What were their instructional reading                               |                       |                          |                   |           | X               |

|    | levels before and after<br>participation in the BSRP?                                      |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|
| c. | How do teachers describe<br>the impact of their<br>students' participation in<br>the BSRP? | X | X | X |

### Data Analysis

As this was a utilization-focused program evaluation study, data analysis aimed to describe the program and comment about how well it matched its intended plan, examine the relationship between outcomes among different aspects of the program's implementation, with the aim of helping program staff improve the program's functioning (King et al., 1987; Patton, 2008). Although this was not a study to measure the impact of the BSRP, I wanted a preliminary glimpse into whether the program seemed to be helping students improve in reading (Patton, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study was two-fold: to evaluate the implementation as well to describe the changes in the reading ability of the BSRP students. To answer the three main research questions, formal data analysis occurred in three steps; preparing, exploring, and analyzing the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). However, the emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry created a blurred line between data collection and data analysis (Patton, 2002). Therefore, data analysis began with the recording and tracking of all analytic insights that occurred during the beginning stages of data collection (Patton, 2002). As an inside evaluator I used the field notes and reflections in the researcher journal to create a rich description of the program as I developed it. I used basic descriptive questions as outlined by Patton (2002) such as:

“What are the stated goals of the program? What are the primary activities of the program? How do people get into the program? What is the setting like? What happens to people in the program? What are the effects of the program on participants?” (p. 438).

This analysis continued throughout the data collection period to help me develop a rich description of the program in action that was organized, chronologically to describe the development of the program over time.

### **Preparing the Data**

After the data collection period, I began preparing and organizing all data. All interview transcriptions were saved in individual Word documents and stored in a folder called “Teacher Interviews.” The researcher journal was downloaded from the Google Document and saved in a Word Document named “Researcher Journal.” All survey data was downloaded from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet and named “BSRP Survey.” The F&P BAS scores were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet named “Student Instructional Reading Levels.” I also entered the San Diego Quick Assessment Scores into an Excel spreadsheet named “Student Word List Scores.” Lastly, all teacher and student demographics were recorded in separate Excel spreadsheets named “Teacher Demographics” and “Student Demographics.”

From this point, I sorted the data into two groups: implementation and student learning. Then, I went through each data set (teacher interviews, survey, researcher journal, and documents) and took the data that contained information regarding implementation of the program and saved it into a new file named “Implementation Data.” I did the same for all data containing information regarding the reading ability of the students (from teacher interviews, documents, and the F&P BAS scores). That meant that some data was coded twice. I named

this new file “Student Description Data.” Lastly, I uploaded the implementation data and the descriptive data separately into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis program (Creswell, 2009).

### **Exploring and Analyzing the Data**

Once the data was organized into two data sets, I explored and analyzed the data in two phases in alignment with the research questions. I began with the implementation data and then moved to student data.

**Implementation Data.** To analyze the implementation data, I began by looking at the data collected from the documents, the observations and reflections in the researcher journal, the open-ended responses in the survey, and the teacher interviews.

I read and reread the qualitative data and began to develop a general understanding of the database. I then recorded initial thoughts by creating short memos in the margins to help form broader categories of information. Dedoose was used to code all of the implementation data, which was done both deductively and inductively. The theory of change described the factors which shape implementation (i.e. time, communication, resources, training) and I drew on these factors as initial codes as I looked to try and answer research questions one and two. Some examples of the deductive codes were “program components,” “scheduling,” “pull-out,” “resources,” and “communication with stakeholders.” As I coded I was also mindful of data that did not fit any predetermined categories and therefore that data was coded inductively (Creswell, 2009). Two examples of these inductive codes were, “*impacts to instructional time*” and “*changes to improve efficiency.*”

After initial coding was complete, I aggregated data by code and reviewed the data within each code. At this stage, I had a list of seven codes. Then, I refined my coding scheme and resorted the data where necessary. I also determined which codes which codes might be



integrated with each other. In a final step, I renamed the codes to capture the two main implementation issues. First, I grouped “*identification*,” “*grouping*,” and “*scheduling*” into one larger theme, “*remaining flexible*.” Next, “*impacts to instructional time*,” “*time to communicate*,” and “*changes to improve efficiency*” were grouped into the theme “*never enough time*.”

Quantitative data from the teacher survey were explored by computing basic descriptive statistics of survey responses. These descriptives were run to show general trends in the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). I calculated the means and percentages of each variable. This analysis provided a general idea of the number of participants who had answered particular questions and the averages of all responses. More specifically, I was able to understand the participants feelings about overall preferred method (pull-out, push-in, or a combination), beliefs about the identification process, amount of BSRP instructional time, and communication. Finally, I looked across both quantitative and qualitative data to identify any overlap in themes as well as how the themes aligned to my theory of change. I also looked to see if any of the findings contrast with each other.

**Student Description Data.** I then moved to the data sorted as description of students. First, I read and reread the interview transcripts, recorded initial thoughts through memos, and got a general understanding of the data. Dedoose was used to code the student learning data. Some examples of those codes were “*increased confidence*,” and “*improved comprehension*.” I then sorted the data by code, reviewed the list, and looked to identify patterns in the data and make inferences in terms of how teachers described changes, if any, in their BSRP students. This step took me from nine codes to two bigger themes, “*perceived impact to students*” and “*why it worked for students*.”

For the quantitative data, I ran basic descriptives of the instructional reading levels of the students from the beginning to the end of the program from both the F&P BAS and the SDQA. I calculated the increases to the instructional reading level for each student on both assessments. I separated this data into grade levels as well. Finally, looking across both quantitative and qualitative data I tried to identify any overlap in themes and identify any contrasting findings. Lastly, I looked for relationships between program implementation to determine if any assertions about student learning could be made.

### **Validity**

Validity must be addressed in all studies to ensure that the information presented is accurate and dependable. Validity considers how well the methods or measures can investigate the broader constructs under investigation (*Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 125*). Internal validity is important in qualitative research because it establishes how well the findings of the study match reality (*Merriam, 2009*). In maximizing validity, I employed five strategies: triangulation, member checks, peer review, clarifying my bias, and audit trail.

I began by triangulating across my data sources. I examined the evidence from one-to-one interviews, the researcher journal, and the open-ended responses on the survey to build a consistent justification for themes (*Creswell, 2009*). Self-report measures such as the researcher journal can pose issues of credibility with the stakeholders (*King et al., 1987, p. 44*) and therefore triangulating the data from the surveys and interviews of the general education teachers was crucial to ensure that patterns and themes were cross-checked and provided a deep understanding.

To rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of the responses of the teachers interviewed (*Merriam, 2009*), I engaged in member checking in December of 2016. In member

checking a researcher takes the preliminary analysis back to some of the participants to ask whether the interpretation “rings true” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). This involved asking participating teachers to review the themes and transcriptions of interviews and direct them to comment on the findings. To confirm the credibility of the information, it was important to make sure that participants made suggestions to ensure that they could recognize their experience in the interpretation (Merriam, 2009). This study was a utilization-focused evaluation and was intended to help the decision makers (in this case principal, superintendent, and board of education) make informed decisions about program improvement. Therefore, member checking helped to strengthen the buy-in of the stakeholders and decision makers of the BSRP.

Peer review was used to increase the validity of the research. Members of my dissertation group who were familiar with my research reviewed my data to challenge and support my assumptions. Although peer review helped to reduce the bias in my study, it was still important for me to report and clarify my bias. To demonstrate researcher reflexivity, I openly shared my professional and personal background, values, and assumptions as well as explicitly explained my role as both a researcher in this study and an instructor in the program (Merriam, 2009). Clarifying my assumptions and experiences to the study allows the reader to better understand how I might have arrived at particular interpretations of the data (Merriam, 2009). To show this reflexivity in my findings, I included data and themes that countered my own assumptions (Creswell, 2009).

Lastly, during the entire research process I kept copious notes of each methodological step and the decisions made in my researcher journal. Through this audit trail, I challenged my own assumptions to ensure a deep and credible portrayal of my observations and experiences throughout implementation of the program.

In what follows, the findings of this study are reported. I begin by describing the initiation plan and the first six months of the implementation of the program through my own perspective as the BSRP teacher. I describe the successes and challenges as well as how the program evolved during implementation. Then, the data from the classroom teachers is used to describe the perceived changes in the students' reading ability as well as what programmatic elements the teachers believed were strengths of the BSRP.

## CHAPTER 4: FROM DESIGN TO IMPLEMENTATION

At twenty-two years old, I stepped in front of my very first class of 23 third-graders. Like other first year teachers, I faced many trials (Liston, Whitcomb, Borko, 2006; Roehrig, Pressley, Talotta, 2002). Perhaps one of the greatest challenges was teaching my students to read, particularly the students who struggled to read at grade level. I often asked my mentor teacher and colleagues for advice: How do I help my students to decode words? How do I get them to comprehend text? How can my strugglers get any better if they don't read at home? How do I spend enough time with my below grade level readers without ignoring the rest of my class?

It has been over a decade since my first-year teaching and since then I have earned a Masters degree in literacy and a reading specialist certification. The combination of becoming more educated in teaching literacy as well as experience in the field increased my confidence and ability as a reading teacher. Instead of feeling challenged by the students who were struggling to read at grade level, I reveled in designing and delivering lessons specific to their needs. I felt proud of the progress that my students made throughout the year. However, as each school year came to a close, the reading benchmarks and state testing scores were a sobering reminder that as hard as I worked- as hard as the students worked- there were still a few children who would leave my classroom reading below grade level.

Through many conversations I knew that my colleagues were frustrated as well. One fourth-grade teacher described the challenge of providing reading instruction within an elementary classroom:

*“Well there’s only so much I can do with her [referring to a struggling reader]. I’m struggling with the timing of the mini-lesson, teaching the skill or strategy that I need the*

*kids to know and then pulling for guided reading. Kind of having all those balls in the air has been a bit of a struggle. It is hard to really make sure I'm getting to all of my students, especially those that are reading below grade level."*

This teacher's struggle is not uncommon because, as the literature has documented, delivering effective reading instruction is particularly hard given the vast differences in reading abilities within a classroom (Poole, 2008; Taylor, 2008). Over the years, I became an informal teacher leader to advocate for improvements to be made in literacy instruction in our district. I led workshops for staff, joined literacy committees, participated in reviews of reading programs, taught in our afterschool and summer reading programs, facilitated teacher book clubs, and continued to keep abreast of current effective practices in the field. When my colleagues wanted help to reach particularly challenging students, they often approached me for advice.

However, reducing the reading achievement gap within a school cannot be the responsibility of classroom teachers alone (Allington, 2009; Vaughn & Denton, 2008; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Such reform requires that key stakeholders such as principals, district leaders as well as teachers come together to create interventions for students at-risk of reading failure (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). I therefore advocated for the creation of a reading intervention program by speaking to any administrator or board member who would listen. Not only did I want our school to hire reading support teachers, I wanted to assume the role.

At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, I got my wish. The principal informed me that he had secured the funding to initiate a Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) and I would be reassigned from my classroom teaching position to be the BSRP instructor. As the only certified reading specialist in my school, I had established myself as a teacher leader in the area of reading

instruction. I frequently provided professional development within my school and the primary school to train teachers in assessments and to share research-based instructional approaches. Teachers within my school often approached me for help when they were struggling to meet the needs of their struggling readers. Teacher leaders are often called upon to lead improvement efforts within schools (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008) and leading the design and implementation of this new initiative was my chance. I was ecstatic at the opportunity; however, it was a bit daunting. As the sole teacher, I would be given the autonomy to make key decisions as to the development and implementation of the program.

My journey to create change began in August of 2015 and continued throughout the 2015-2016 school year. This chapter documents my experiences moving from teacher to teacher leader as I attempted to address one of my school's greatest challenges: shrinking the achievement gap in reading. I begin with a description of the implementation plan before describing what the BSRP looked like in action. Throughout implementation, I learned that the implementation of a new initiative is a complex process shaped by the context in which one tries to implement change.

### **A Promising Program: A Research-Based Plan**

Fullan (2007) asserts that the goal of any change process is institutionalization and that this will only occur if the innovation has been successfully initiated and fully implemented. My first task was to develop an initiation plan for the BSRP. I spent the summer of 2015 immersed in the literature about supplemental reading intervention programs (Allington, 2009; Bean, 2004; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Sailor, 2009). In 2009, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) released a practice guide with specific recommendations to help educators develop and implement evidence-based tiered intervention programs (Gersten et al., 2009). I referred to the

research base and this guide frequently throughout the development of the initiation plan for the BSRP. I also turned to implementation research, which asserts that developing a quality program that is practical for the context of the school can greatly impact implementation success (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman, et al., 2009; Fullan, 2007). Organizational factors such as integrating the intervention into existing practices, routines, and curriculum as well as the engagement of the school in planning for the intervention have been shown to facilitate implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Forman, et al., 2009). As a veteran teacher in the school, I had inside knowledge of the school's staff, schedule, and benchmark assessments. I used this knowledge to create a program that I hoped would fit nicely within the school context.

The initiation plan consisted of the program goals, program design, a three-phase identification process, and a yearlong calendar that outlined instructional timeframes and assessment periods. As a teacher leader, I was given the autonomy to make most decisions concerning the program (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). However, implementation and school change literature cite the principal as a crucial part of any change in that s/he sets up the conditions for implementation by setting priorities and allocating time and resources to the intervention (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, Forman, et al., 2009; Fullan, 2007). The principal and I had a strong relationship having worked together for several years. While he had given me autonomy to make many decisions regarding the development and implementation of the program, he made it clear that certain aspects of the program needed his consent first. Specifically, I needed approval if any changes were made to the initiation plan in terms of the criteria for identification, the frequency of the intervention, or scheduling. Therefore, I engaged the principal at key points throughout the design and implementation process to keep him informed and to receive his help and support when important decisions needed to be made.



Below, Figure F shows the initiation plan. The following narrative explains in more depth how I came up with this plan.

### **Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) 2015-2016 School Year**

#### **Initiation Plan**

#### ***Goals and Objectives:***

- To provide students that are not meeting grade level benchmarks in reading with small-group support in addition to their general education program
- To reduce the gap between students' reading benchmark scores and grade level standards.
- To reduce over-classification into special education

#### ***Identification***

There will be three rounds in the identification process for students to qualify for and enter the BSRP.

Round 1: End-of-year benchmark information will be used to create an initial list of possible BSRP participants.

Round 2: From the initial list, students will be assessed using the beginning-of-year benchmarks. The initial list will be adjusted, creating a final list of participants. All new students to Bartle School will also be considered at this time. (see chart below)

| <b>Grade</b>  | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</b>   | <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</b>  | <b>4<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>   | <b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Round 1<br/>Identifiers<br/><br/>June<br/>2015</b> | - F&P<br>- I&RS referral<br>- Dolch List<br>- In 1 <sup>st</sup> grade BSRP | - F&P<br>- Dolch List, 3 <sup>rd</sup><br>quarter<br>- I&RS referral | -F&P<br>-SI, 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter<br>benchmark<br>-I&RS referral | -F&P<br>-Study Island - SI,<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter<br>benchmark<br>-I&RS referral |
| <b>Round 2<br/>Identifiers<br/>September<br/>2015</b> | - F&P<br>- F&P 200 word<br>list   | -F&P<br>-SI 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter<br>benchmark                     | -F&P<br>-SI 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter<br>benchmark                    | -F&P<br>-SI 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter<br>benchmark                                      |

F&P= Fountas and Pinnell SI= Study Island I&RS= Intervention & Referral Services

**Round 3:** From the final list of BSP participants, benchmark scores will be used to create a 3-level priority list (see chart below)

| Priority Level  | Reading   | Sessions Per Week* | Instructional Minutes Per Week |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Low</b>      | Instructional reading level is 0-1 F&P levels below grade level | 1                  | 40                             |
| <b>Moderate</b> | Instructional reading level is 2-3 F&P levels below grade level | 2                  | 80                             |
| <b>High</b>     | Instructional reading level is 4+ F&P levels below grade level  | 3                  | 120                            |

\*all instructional sessions will be 40 minutes

### ***Program Design***

Small-group, pull-out model

### ***Timeline (2015-2016 School Year)***

|   |   |
|---|---|
| September 1 <sup>st</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup>         | Round 1 list creation   |
| September 7 <sup>th</sup> - October 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Testing, Round 2 list creation, Priority List creation, Schedule creation, Parent Consent Letter  |
| October 5 <sup>th</sup>                             | Anticipated Start Date  |
| October 5 <sup>th</sup> – December 11 <sup>th</sup> | <u>Cycle One 46 Day Instructional Period</u> (4 early release days)   |
| December 14 <sup>th</sup> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>        | Progress Monitoring: BSRP teacher will re-assess, adjust priority lists, adjust scheduling, exit students (if necessary), enter students (if necessary), attend any applicable professional development |
| January 4 <sup>th</sup> – March 9 <sup>th</sup>     | <u>Cycle Two 46 Day Instructional Period</u> (2 early release days)   |
| March 9 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup>            | Progress Monitoring: BSRP teacher will re-assess, adjust priority lists, adjust scheduling, exit students (if necessary), enter students (if necessary), attend any applicable professional development |
| March 21 <sup>st</sup> – June 2 <sup>nd</sup>       | <u>Cycle Three 46 Day Instructional Period</u> (3 early release days)   |
| June 3 <sup>rd</sup> – June 17 <sup>th</sup>        | End of Year Assessment period   |

*Figure 7. Basic Skills Reading Program Initiation Plan*

**Program Goals**

The success of a program can be influenced by the specificity (or clarity) of its goals and how well the program matches the needs of the school (Fullan, 2007). Therefore, during a meeting with the principal, the goals of the program were discussed and determined. Since an intervention program for struggling readers had been absent from the school in recent years, it was agreed that the first goal of the BSRP was to provide underachieving students small group instruction in addition to their regular classroom reading instruction. The second goal stemmed from the first, in that, by providing a supplemental reading intervention, the gap between the students' reading levels and the grade-level reading expectation would be reduced. A tiered approach to intervention is often implemented in schools in an effort to help reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to special education especially in minority subgroups, low-income students, and students who received weak reading instruction (Allington, 2009; Fuchs, et al., 2008; Gersten et al., 2009; Knotek, 2003; Sailor, 2009). Therefore, reducing over-classification in special education became the third goal. Together, these goals if achieved would boost reading achievement and hopefully ensure more efficient use of limited special education resources.

**Screening**

The Institute of Educational Science's practice guide for reading intervention (Gersten et al., 2009) recommends universal screening as a critical first step in identifying students who need additional reading instruction. In universal screening, all students are tested in a subject area at the beginning of the school year to ensure that at-risk students are identified (Gersten et al., 2009; Raines, Dever, Kamphaus, & Roach, 2012; Sailor, 2009). A three-phase process using multiple assessments to screen all students was developed to identify the BSRP students. In the

first round, I planned to use benchmark scores from the previous year to create an initial list of potential BSRP candidates. The primary assessment was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P BAS), a district wide assessment used to find the instructional reading level of all students at the conclusion of the previous year. The F&P BAS was chosen by the district as a benchmark because of its strong correlation to the Reading Recovery Text Level assessment used in the Reading Recovery program which is recognized as an effective, scientifically based reading program (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007). The Dolch Word List was used as a secondary assessment in grades two and three because word recognition has been shown in the literature to be a strong correlate to reading performance and improved comprehension (Calfree & Piontkowski, 1981; Herman, 1985; Juel & Roper-Schneider, 1985; Stanovich, 1985 as cited in NRP, 2000). In fourth and fifth grades, the Study Island reading benchmark assessment was used as the secondary assessment. Study Island is an online test preparatory program used by the district. The program comes with three benchmark assessments that are aligned to state standards and are supposed to be predictive of how a child will perform on state testing.

In round two, it was planned that the BSRP teacher would administer the F&P BAS to all potential BSRP candidates. To distinguish between students who are meeting expectations and those at risk of not meeting them, universal screening recommends establishing cutoff points. The *Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Ladder of Progress* was chosen to determine cutoffs because it gives recommended reading levels for each grade level over the course of a school year (Figure 8). The cutoff scores we planned to use were: second grade students reading H or below, third grade students reading L or below, fourth grade students O or below, and fifth grade students R

or below. The cutoffs meant that these students left the previous school year reading one or more levels below grade level expectation and would be invited to attend the BSRP.

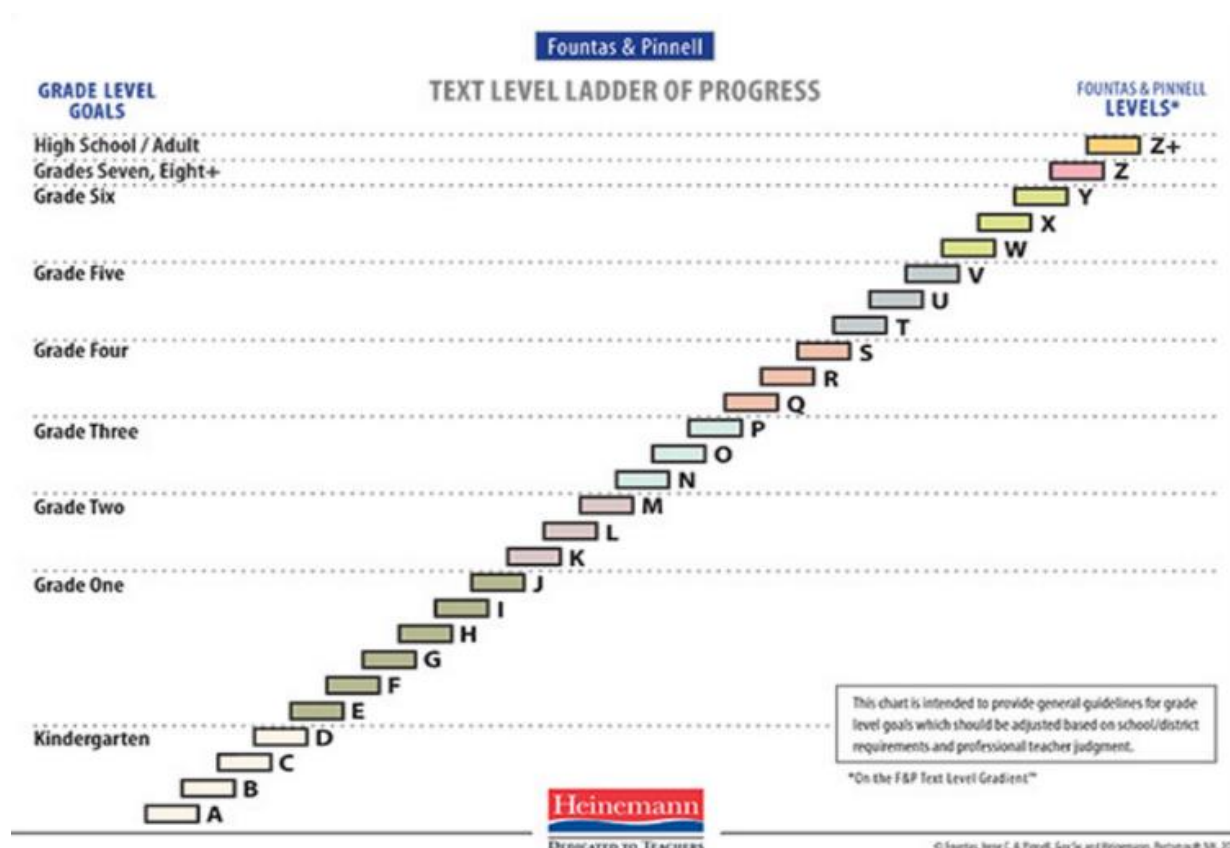


Figure 8. Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Ladder of Progress

In the final phase of identification, it was decided that benchmark scores would be used to place the students into low, moderate, or high needs categories. Those groupings would then determine how many 40-minute instructional sessions the student would receive per week as per the recommendation of the IES practice guide (Gersten et al., 2009).

### Program Design: Small group, pull-out

With the goals set and a plan for how to identify students for the BSRP, I turned my attention to the design of the program. The literature is clear regarding the benefits of small group instruction both within a regular education classroom and in intervention programs

(Gersten et al., 2009; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000) and research has shown positive impacts of small group instruction on at-risk populations (Fien et al., 2011; McIntyre, et al., 2006). Additionally, the size of the small group has an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention and therefore, I wanted to try not to exceed four students in a group (Gersten et al., 2009; Vaughn et al., 2003). Keeping the teacher-student ratio low was important so that I could provide a high level of instruction focused on individual student need (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008; Denton, 2012; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000).

The next step was to determine which model, pull-out or push-in, the BSRP would utilize. There is a lack of experimental research that directly contrasts the two models, therefore, the intervention research does not make specific recommendations as to which model is more effective (Denton, 2012; Gersten et al., 2009; Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). The ILA (2000) asserts that "a well-coordinated, congruent, and quality program can occur whether the reading specialist functions in the classroom or in a pullout setting" (p.3). Because the literature is not clear on the most effective model, contextual factors drove the decision to make the BSRP a pull-out program in which small groups of students would meet outside of their classroom for additional reading instruction. The first reason a pull-out model was more suited for the context was that because I was the only BSRP teacher, serving students across four grade levels in potentially 23 different classrooms, I could see more students if I took them out of the classroom. The second reason was that since the program was new, and we had not had any additional support for struggling readers in quite some time, the principal and I felt that the classroom teachers might not yet be ready to welcome someone into their classroom.

While I believed that the pull-out model would work well contextually, I was aware that the pull-out model is often criticized for its potential to make students feel singled out and damage their self-esteem (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Therefore, the physical space of BSRP was designed with this caution in mind, and I planned to make the basic skills reading classroom space as inviting as possible, where even the most reluctant or insecure reader could enjoy reading. The intent was to make the space look more like a place to kick back, relax, and read rather than a traditional classroom. The walls were lined with books and cozy carpets covered the cold, tiled floor. During group instruction students were asked to sit in a circle on the rug or on padded milk crates. There were no desks or tables and students were given a choice in where they would like to read; some stayed on their milkcrate, some sprawled out on the carpet on their back or belly, while others used a cushion and propped themselves up against the wall.

Aside from the physical space, creating a name for the program so that kids wouldn't have to say they are going to "basic skills reading" was also important. The acronym "The R.A.M.P." which stood for The Reading and Math Place was created. This name replaced the idea that the kids were in a "program" but rather were coming to a "place" where they would be able to work on extra math and reading. A logo with a child skate boarding up a ramp was created and placed outside the door. During their first meeting, BSRP students were told about the symbolic meaning of the ramp. Ramps can help them get somewhere they might not have been able to get before. In this case, when students came to the R.A.M.P. they got the unique opportunity to work on becoming stronger readers. When students asked why they were coming to the R.A.M.P., rather than telling them it was because they needed help with reading, they were told that they were selected to have a special extra reading group.

## **Calendar**

Lastly, a yearlong calendar was developed. I outlined the number of instructional days in each trimester to be sure that there was enough instructional time for the students to show improvement prior to the administration of the benchmark assessments (progress monitoring). It was important to set aside time for progress monitoring so that student progress could be documented, tracked, and evaluated over an extended time frame (Gersten et al., 2009; Steele & King, 2008). In addition, administering benchmark assessments helps teachers and schools to inform instruction, which is particularly important when working with at-risk readers (Denton, 2012; Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Gersten et al., 2009; Halladay, 2012; Herman et al., 2010; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012).

With a plan in place, I was ready to begin perhaps the most crucial stage of change, the implementation phase. This initiation plan was a starting point, although throughout the implementation period it changed and evolved. The next section describes that journey.

### **Program Implementation: Challenges, Creativity, and Adjustments**

In September of 2015, I was ready to move from the conceptual BSRP and answer the question that much of the current implementation research asks: what happened next? As the literature has documented (Century & Cassata, 2016; Durlak & DrPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009), I found the implementation of the BSRP to be a complex process. I encountered two main challenges throughout the first four months of the implementation. First, I discuss the difficulties I had as the only BSRP teacher throughout the identification process and the creation of the instructional groups and schedule. Second, I recount the pressure of time I faced throughout the first trimester of instruction by describing the many impacts to instructional time as well as the difficulty I had to find the time to communicate with my colleagues. Furthermore,



I discuss the tough decisions and creative adjustments I made to the program to make it more manageable for one instructor and to better meet the needs of the students and teachers.

### **Getting Started: Remaining Flexible**

While I had worked hard to create an implementation plan for the BSRP based in the research literature, I had no idea what it would look like in practice. This was the first time I had ever had access to schoolwide reading benchmark scores and I didn't know how many students would be identified. I also had no experience in creating a schedule for a pull-out program that would span four grade levels. I had entered uncharted territory, but I was eager, determined, and ready to begin. In this section, I describe the initial challenges I encountered throughout the identification, grouping, and scheduling process.

**Identification.** My first task was to identify the students who would be invited to attend the BSRP. As reflected in the implementation plan, I had high ambitions to provide every child reading below grade level expectations with reading intervention, even if it was only one time per week. To get an idea of how many students this might be, I created a spreadsheet for each grade level titled "*Grade \_\_ Initial ID List,*" which listed the names of all the students in each grade level and two benchmark scores; F&P BAS (all grades), Dolch Word List (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> grades), and Study Island Assessment (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades).

In order to gain a clearer picture of student performance not only on assessments but also each child's ability to function within the classroom (Sailor, 2009), teachers in grades two through four, were asked to identify their four lowest achieving readers from the previous school year. Figure 9 below is a copy of the email sent on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, to eighteen classroom teachers.

*Dear Teachers,*

*I am in the first stage of identifying possible BS candidates. I want to use as many items as possible for identification. I have your benchmark scores from last year, but I would like your input as well.*

*I know you are all busy, but when you get a chance would you please send me a list of your four lowest students (in reading). Try and put them in rank order. For example:*

- 1. Most in need of support*
- 2. Second*
- 3. Third*
- 4. Fourth*

*You don't have to go by their F&P score, this is more of a judgement call based on what you observed in the classroom, however they should be students who were reading below grade level. If you didn't have four students you can do less.*

*\*\*Please do not include any students that were special education for reading or those that went to ESL.*

*Thank you so much!*

Figure 9. Email to Teachers

I recorded the rankings in the spreadsheet. With the data entered I began to clean the spreadsheets. First, I highlighted the students who did not meet grade level expectation for either benchmark and who were ranked by their teachers. Next, I removed any students who were not highlighted or had moved over the summer. Finally, as per the directive from the principal, any English as a Second Language (ESL) or special education students were also removed. Ultimately this screening/identification process identified eighty-seven students; 25 second graders, 15 third graders, 26 fourth graders, and 21 fifth graders as possibly eligible for the reading intervention program. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, I reflected on this first phase of identification in my researcher journal.

*Wow- 87 students did not meet grade level benchmark expectations last school year. I had no idea the number would be this large. If all of these students end up qualifying*

*there is no way I will be able to accept them all. I am also concerned that testing this many students will take a very long time. I really want to start instruction as close to the October 5<sup>th</sup> start date as possible.*

I knew that taking on this role as the BSRP teacher for four grade levels was going to be a big job. However, as can be gleaned from this journal entry, I began to realize just what an enormous undertaking this would be for one person. Therefore, before I moved onto the second round of identification, I shared the initial testing list spreadsheet with the principal who agreed that testing would take too much time if done by one person. He suggested that the basic skills math teacher help me throughout the second round of identification. Together, we administered the F&P benchmark assessment to the identified students.

The following journal entry captured what a typical day of testing looked like.

*Today is my first day of testing. I'm not really sure how today will go so I am going to record the day in detail.*

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 8:00        | <i>While students are in their classrooms having their morning meeting, I made sure I had multiple copies of the assessments made and organized.</i>             |
| 8:30-9:15   | <i>Assessed a second grader. I wasn't done testing but the student seemed to need a break, so I let her go back to her classroom and pulled another student.</i> |
| 9:15-10:00  | <i>Completed one assessment for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader, and used the last 20 minutes to finish the first student.</i>   |
| 10:00-10:45 | <i>Completed an analysis of the students' assessments and recorded the results in the spreadsheet</i>  |
| 10:45-11:45 | <i>Assessed a 4th grader</i>   |
| 11:45-12:00 | <i>Analyzed the student's assessment, recorded results</i>   |
| 12:00-12:30 | <i>Lunch</i>   |
| 12:30-1:30  | <i>Assessed a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader, analyzed assessment, recorded results</i>   |

*1:30-2:15      Assessed a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader, analyzed assessment, recorded results*

*2:15-2:30      Discussed the two students that the math basic skills teacher assessed.*

*Today felt like a successful, but very tiring day! I assessed four students, the basic skills math teacher assessed two students however, I did not have a chance to analyze and record those results. I will either take that work home with me or do it in the morning before I see my first student. I feel like I was going 100 miles an hour the entire day, I hope I can keep up this pace. (September 11, 2015)*

For the remainder of September, with the basic skills math teacher, I worked feverishly to assess the identified students. However, even with the help of the basic skills math teacher, administering the benchmark assessment to each of the potential BSRP students seemed like a never-ending process. The F&P benchmark was a lengthy assessment which took anywhere from 30 minutes up to 2 hours or more for each student.

Despite the time it took to complete these benchmark assessments, there were several reasons why it was important for me to make sure all students were assessed in the beginning of the year. The first of these was that the last time students were assessed using the F&P BAS had been at the end of the previous school year. Some students attended the summer reading program offered by the district and therefore, may have made progress over the summer months. Conversely, other students may have regressed in their reading level over the summer break. By assessing at the beginning of the year I had the most current information about each child's reading level level to inform the creation of the instructional groups. The second reason for retesting was to ensure consistency of the results. Several of the teachers who had assessed the children at the end of the previous school year were new to the assessment and had no formal training. Therefore, there was no way for me to know if the assessments were administered in a

standardized way which could impact the reliability of the assessment. The final reason for taking the extra time to complete the assessments was that they were not only valuable for identification of students but provided me the opportunity to analyze the specific reading behaviors of each child prior to instruction. With this assessment information, I was able to create instructional goals for each child and share those goals with their classroom teachers so that instruction could be focused and individualized from the start of the program.

Not surprisingly, on October 5<sup>th</sup>, I was not ready to start instruction. Below is a journal entry from that day.

*Today was supposed to be the first day of instruction however it was just not possible. I still have to finish up three F&P assessments for the identified at-risk students. Also, the principal has asked that I help any classroom teachers finish up their F&Ps so this has delayed the program start date just a bit. I still need to make final decisions on who will be considered for the program. Then I still need a day or two to create groups and develop a schedule. (October 5, 2016)*

It was important to me to try and start instruction on the intended date as to ensure that the first trimester of instruction had about the same amount of instructional days as the second and third trimesters. However, as the journal entry described, there was still a lot to do prior to beginning instruction.

Once the assessment process was complete, I moved onto the final phase, which was to decide who would be invited to attend the BSRP. As recommended in the literature, I attempted to place students into three groups: low, moderate, and high risk for developing reading difficulties (Gersten et al., 2009). However, as an inexperienced designer of an intervention program, determining appropriate cut-off scores for these groups was hard. Therefore, the

“*Instructional Level Expectations for Reading*” (Appendix H) chart became my guide for creating my priority groups. In my researcher journal, I wrote about two benefits to using this document.

*I really like the “Instructional Level Expectations for Reading” chart in the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention program guide. I like it because it has the school year broken down into intervals so that you can clearly see the expected progression throughout the year. I also like that the levels are color-coded to indicate “exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” “approaches expectations: needs short-term intervention,” “does not meet expectations: needs intensive intervention.” I want to use this to determine my cutoff points for acceptance into the program as well as cutoffs to determine the frequency and duration of the intervention. (October 1, 2016).*

After checking in with the principal for permission to use the “*Instructional Level Expectations for Reading*” chart as a guide, a final document called “*Grouping Spreadsheet 2015-2016*” was created. This document listed the students by their F&P level from greatest to least in each grade level and grouped like levels together. The students were color-coded to match the “*Instructional Level Expectations for Reading*” document. From there, instead of having three priority groups (low, moderate, high), two groups of below level readers were created: the first group “approaching expectations” and the second, “does not meet expectations,” for a total of 74 students. While this was a decrease from the 87 students identified in round one, I knew that this number was still too high as a caseload for one person. I reflected in my researcher journal:

*I feel overwhelmed by the number of students that are in need of reading support. I would love to accept all of the students. However, I know if I do I would either have to*

*increase group size or decrease the amount of weekly instruction, both options diluting the intensity of instruction I would be able to give to each student. I am going to have to make additional cuts to my list, but I'm just not sure which is the best way to go about that. I am worried that teachers will be annoyed many of their students will not receive support. (October 8, 2016)*

At the creation of the implementation plan, I had high hopes of being able to give reading support to all of the students who were not reading at grade-level expectations. However, the reality was that as the only BSRP teacher, there simply wasn't enough time for me to be able to see all of these students and provide the type of individualized instruction that is necessary in an intervention program.

During a meeting with the principal, a few different options to reduce the number of students were discussed. Given the link between students' reading ability by the end of third grade and their later success in school (Hernandez, 2011) and what is known about the importance of reading intervention in the early grades (Snow et al., 1998; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012), the first option was to only offer the BSRP to the students in second and third grades. The second option was to meet with the students who were very close to reaching grade level. The reasoning behind this was that I might only have to meet with this group of students for a short period of time to give them a quick boost to get them to read at grade level. Once they reached grade level I could then focus my attention on the students with the highest needs. The final option discussed, and the one that was decided upon, was to invite the students from the "does not meet expectations" group. The principal felt that this was the fairest option because it meant that the BSRP would serve students in all grade levels. By selecting the students with the lowest instructional reading levels, the number of students decreased from 74 to 51. In a final

step, parent permission forms composed by the principal as well as a Frequently Asked Questions flyer for parents to understand a bit more about the program were sent home. Within 3 days all 51 parent permission letters were returned, with one parent declining services for his/her child, which left the BSRP with a total of 50 students. Within one week of identification, two students moved out of district, bringing my final caseload to 48 students.

With the identification process complete and parent permission obtained, the reality set in that I was just a few days away from beginning instruction. The task of taking the 48 BSRP students, placing them into small groups and creating a pull-out schedule felt giant.

**Grouping.** As an intervention teacher, my job was to provide intensive and highly individualized instruction to each student (Gersten et al., 2009; Sailor, 2009; Vaughn & Denton, 2008). I turned to the literature to help me create groups of students that would allow me to provide efficient and effective instruction (Gersten et al., 2009; Vaughn & Denton, 2008). I had two goals for the groupings.

The first of these goals was to create small, homogeneous groups. The benefits of providing instruction in small groups has been well documented in the literature (Fien et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2006; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). While small groups can be formed in different ways such as, same-ability, mixed-ability, or skill-based (Poole, 2008; Schumm et al., 2000), the IES Practice Guide and other intervention literature (Gersten et al., 2009; Vaughn & Denton, 2008) recommend that intervention groups be homogenous in ability because with this type of grouping, the teacher is able to differentiate instruction more effectively and target specific skills, which is particularly important when working with at-risk readers (Amendum et al., 2009). The literature also suggests that the size of the small group has an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention and that a teacher-student ratio of 1:4 not be



exceeded (Gersten et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2003). The F&P LLI program recommends no more than three students per group to be able to provide “highly effective” instruction. Therefore, I strove to create groups of no more than four students who were not only on the same instructional reading level but who also had similar reading skill needs such as fluency, comprehension, or decoding. It was assumed that grouping in this way would ensure that instruction was efficient and effective.

In addition to creating small, homogeneous groups, my second goal was to, whenever possible, group students from the same classroom together. The purpose of any supplemental intervention program is to provide targeted reading instruction *in addition to* the instruction students receive as part of the core curriculum (Allington, 2009; Gersten et al., 2009; Proctor, Graves Jr., & Esch, 2012; Vaughn & Denton, 2008). To ensure an increase in instructional time, classroom teachers would, as suggested by the IES Practice Guide (Gersten et al., 2009), be responsible for ensuring that their BSRP students did not miss any instructional or small group reading time. In grade-level team meetings, the principal set the expectation for classroom teachers. He directed them to create a schedule so that his/her mini-lessons and small group instruction would be done when the BSRP children are in the room. By structuring their guided reading time in that way, it would ensure that the BSRP remained a supplement to instruction and not a replacement. I believed that if I put students from the same classroom in a group together to minimize the amount of times students would leave a particular classroom, it would help teachers to make sure that the BSRP instruction truly was in addition to their instruction.

With these two goals in mind, I began to create the instructional groups documenting my thoughts in my researcher journal:

*I put each child's name on an index card with their instructional reading level, major instructional needs (i.e. fluency, decoding, comprehension) and classroom teacher. My plan was to start by placing all of the students into larger groups based on their instructional reading level. From there, I planned to make the groups smaller by looking more closely at their instructional needs and placing students together who were not only on the same instructional level, but also had similar reading needs. Whenever possible, I would try and keep students from the same classroom in the same group.*

The plan sounded simple, however, it was a complex process with many choices to make.

*I spent hours placing students together and then shuffling them around. It was challenging because I didn't really know these students all that well. I had only spent a short amount of time reading with them and that made it hard to make a decision when I was deciding which group might be more beneficial. In many cases, the BSRP students in each classroom were at very different levels. For example, in Ms. Leaper's class, there were seven BSRP students. It was only possible to put four of these students into a group together. The other students were on different levels and therefore needed to be placed with students from different classrooms. This caused her to have four different times where a BSRP student or students would leave her room. (October 8, 2016)*

It was incredibly difficult to try and create groups of students who were not only the same instructional level, but had similar reading skill needs. It was also nearly impossible to keep students from the same classroom together. I decided that I would focus on making groups on similar instructional levels a priority. I spent the entire day grouping and regrouping the students. Ultimately, sixteen instructional groups with 2-4 members were developed: seven 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, three 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, one combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, five 4<sup>th</sup> grade and two 5<sup>th</sup> grade groups.

There were two outlier students that did not fit into any of my groups, so I decided to meet with them one-on-one. I didn't know if realistically I would be able to fit this many groups into my schedule, however, I moved forward.

**Scheduling.** The IES Practice Guide recommends that small groups be met with 3-5 times per week for approximately 20-40 minutes per instructional session. My personal goal was to be able to see each group three times per week for 40-minute instructional periods. As a former classroom teacher, I knew first hand just how difficult it was to have students taken out of the classroom at different times during the day. As previously discussed, the BSRP was intended to provide students with supplemental reading instruction and was not intended as a replacement for classroom instruction. In keeping with the recommendation from the IES Practice Guide (Gersten et al., 2009) it was important that BSRP students left the room during time periods when they would be engaged in independent learning centers so as not to miss any new lessons or small-group time with their classroom teacher. To do this, I began with the intention of creating a schedule which would meet my two main goals: to meet with each group three times per week for 40 minute sessions and to create a manageable schedule for classroom teachers. However, I quickly realized that this was not achievable for two reasons.

The first of those reasons was that the master schedule created some challenges. While pulling my BSRP groups during the literacy period was ideal for teachers, I reflected in my researcher journal as to why it was not possible.

*Although the literacy period was ideal for teachers these blocks of time overlap all grade levels. There was no way I was going to be able to please all of the teachers.*

*Additionally, I began to realize that I needed to be very careful because there is one class*

*in each grade level that doesn't follow the same schedule- this sixth section could make things very challenging. (October 9, 2016)*

Merenbloom & Kalina (2017) offer several organizational frameworks and strategies to help schools create schedules that maximize meaningful instructional time. They recommend that time for intervention should be included in the blueprint of the school's master schedule.

However, this was not the case for the BSRP. The master schedule had been made during the summer with no consideration for the BSRP, and I had no power to change it.

Second, given the number of groups and lack of instructional staff, it became evident that the number of times per week and session duration in the implementation plan was an unrealistic goal. Therefore, another tough decision had to be made. I needed to determine which students would be given priority in terms of the most amount of weekly instructional time and preference in the schedule. This would be the second time I would reach out to the principal for guidance. I reflected in my researcher journal prior to meeting with the principal:

*I need to ask him (the principal) where he wants my focus to be. I have thought about this in a few ways. I can make 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade a priority to see three times a week and leave my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders at two times per week. Research has shown that intervention to help students to master reading skills is critical in the early grades (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Proctor et al., 2012; Torgeson, 2002). This feels like I'm tossing 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> to the side and I'm worried that their teachers will feel upset by this. Another option I want to discuss with the principal is whether or not I should make my groups larger so that I can see them more frequently, or if I should cut back my class session to 30 minutes and keep my groups smaller. I think if I cut back to 30 minutes I would be able to see an additional 2 or 3 groups in a day. (October 8, 2016)*

At the conclusion of a meeting with the principal, it was decided that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade groups would be given priority in the schedule because, as research has shown, intervention to help students to master reading skills is critical in the early grades (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Proctor et al., 2012; Torgeson, 2002). Consequently, it was decided that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade groups would meet three times a week and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade groups would meet twice a week. Whenever possible, I would schedule the second and third grade groups during the morning literacy blocks.

In addition, all instructional sessions would be cut back to 30 minutes. A reduction in the time period from 40 to 30 minutes allowed for more groups to be seen in a day and for student-teacher ratios within each group to remain low. We both felt that this was the best compromise that still allowed us to stay within the guidelines set forth by the IES Practice Guide (Gersten et al., 2009). Although 30 minutes, two or three times per week was supported in the literature (Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Gersten et al., 2009; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012), reflecting on this meeting I felt both good about this decision and a bit disappointed.

*This feels like such a relief but I also feel incredibly guilty. I'd love to meet with all of my groups at least three times a week no matter the grade level. I'm worried I won't make as much progress with my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. I am happy that the principal is supportive of not wanting me to push the limits by making my groups too large. I want quality over quantity. However, what I **want** to do and what I **can** do is very different because of schedule limitations and the fact that I am only one person. (October 9, 2015)*

With a solid plan in place as to how many days a week I would see each group for their 30-minute sessions, I spent the rest of the day developing the schedule. It was a tedious process. I constantly referred to the master schedule to make sure the students in each group were

available to pull out during the times. In some cases, I needed to make small adjustments to the groupings to accommodate the different student schedules. Figure 10 below shows the completed schedule. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade groups are shown in shades of green, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade groups in shades of blue, 4<sup>th</sup> grade groups in shades of yellow, and finally the two 5<sup>th</sup> grade groups in shades of purple.

| TIME        | Monday                                       | Tuesday                                      | Wednesday                                    | Thursday                                     | Friday                                       |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 8:00-8:15   | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  |
| 8:15-8:30   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 8:30-8:45   | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students  | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>1 student  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students  |
| 8:45-9:00   |  |  | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>1 student  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students  | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>1 student  |
| 9:00-9:15   | Third Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>4 students  | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>4 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>4 students |
| 9:15-9:30   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9:30-9:45   | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 6</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 6</b><br>3 students |
| 9:45-10:00  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10:00-10:15 | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>4 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 7</b><br>4 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 7</b><br>4 students |
| 10:15-10:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10:30-10:45 | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Orton (1 student)</b>      |
| 10:45-11:00 | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  |  |  |  |
| 11:00-11:15 | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students | <b>Prep</b>                                  |
| 11:15-11:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12:00-12:15 | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students  | Prep/Testing/<br>Data<br>Collection          |
| 12:15-12:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12:30-12:45 | Second/Third<br>Grade<br>4 students          | Second/Third<br>Grade<br>4 students          | Second/Third<br>Grade<br>4 students          | Prep/Testing/<br>Data<br>Collection          | Fourth Grade<br><b>Orton (1 student)</b>     |
| 12:45-01:00 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:00-1:15   | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>2 students | Third Grade<br><b>Orton (1 student)</b>      |
| 1:15-1:30   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:30-1:45   | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>1 student  | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>1 student  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>4 students  | Prep/Testing/<br>Data<br>Collection          |
| 1:45-2:00   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2:00-2:15   | Second Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>2 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>2 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>2 students | Prep/Testing/<br>Data<br>Collection          | Prep/Testing/<br>Data<br>Collection          |
| 2:15-2:30   |  |  |  |  |  |

Figure 10. First Trimester Schedule

As can be seen in Figure 10, I scheduled five 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade groups and four 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade groups three times a week. The remaining two 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade groups and all of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade groups were scheduled twice a week. There were three additional blocks of time in which I scheduled one-on-one instruction for three different students with severe phonetic deficits.

Fullan (2001) asserts that for successful change, leaders must build relationships and remain open to opposition. To develop a collaborative relationship and avoid tensions around the schedule, I gave the teachers the opportunity to look at the schedule and provide feedback prior to principal approval. I, along with the principal, met with each grade level during their weekly grade-level team meeting. Teachers in second through fourth grades indicated that they liked the schedule and that it would work for them.

The two fifth grade teachers with BSRP students, however, had concerns because their students were being pulled from their additional literacy period, which they used for Writer's Workshop. The principal suggested that the teachers move their Writer's Workshop to their 90-minute morning literacy block and do a guided reading period during the 30-minute literacy period instead on the days where they had students leave for the BSRP. Rearranging their schedule in this way would allow them to meet with small groups rather than deliver full class instruction while BSRP students were out of the room. One, fifth grade teacher agreed to make this change twice a week to accommodate her BSRP students. However, the other fifth grade teacher was not willing to make the change. I recalled:

*One fifth grade teacher seemed a bit inflexible with her classroom schedule. She said that she did not feel it was fair to change the schedule for 18 other students just because two students were leaving during that time. I really want to make sure that these students*



*don't feel additional stress by missing two periods of writing a day with a teacher who may or may not help them to make up missed work. (October 15, 2015)*

After the fifth grade meeting, I went to my schedule to see if I could make a change to help make the fifth grade teacher more comfortable with the schedule. This particular teacher's class had Spanish during the same time period as the additional 30-minute literacy period. After a discussion with the classroom teacher she agreed that having the students miss Spanish one day and one period of Writer's Workshop another day was a good plan. I made this adjustment for the other fifth grade class. These final, minor adjustments to the schedule marked the end of the initial stages in the implementation of the BSRP.

Throughout the first stage of the implementation I had felt the strain of being the sole BSRP teacher. However, I was confident that the adjustments to caseload and dosage had made the program more practical for one person. Although two weeks later than intended, I was ready to move onto the next step in the implementation process, which was to begin instruction.

### **Beginning Instruction: There is Never Enough Time**

It is Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup> and I have been meeting with small groups of students for one week. During that first week of instruction, I spent time getting to know my students.

This morning, as I stand in the hallway and greet students entering the auditorium to wait for their classroom teachers, I am approached by a few of my students. "*Mrs. Opiela! Am I coming to read with you today?*" and "*Last night I read two books to my little sister!*" I feel energized by not only the children's excitement for coming to but also by the feedback I have been getting from other staff members. Fran, a fourth-grade teacher, stopped to chat with me about one of her students. "*I'm so glad you are finally taking Ava, she needs support so badly. Yesterday, during a book discussion in her reading*

*group, she really struggled to identify the main idea of a few sections of the nonfiction book we are reading. Maybe you could work on it with her at some point.” “Of course!”*

I respond, making a mental note to look back at my lesson plans and make some adjustments to be able to work on identifying the main idea. The 8 o'clock bell rings and I head back into my classroom. In thirty minutes, my first group will arrive and my day will begin. I will meet with nine groups today, and as I learned in the first week of instruction, the day is fast paced so it is important that all of my materials are ready for each group. I spend about fifteen minutes organizing the books and letter trays before looking at my anecdotal notes about my students so I know what I will focus on during each students' one-on-one reading conference. At 8:30, I'm ready to start my day.

As this vignette from a day at the start of the program shows, there was a lot of excitement about the BSRP from both the students and the teachers. I was thrilled that the students seemed happy to be a part of the BSRP and impromptu chats about students became a common occurrence when teachers would see me in the hallways. While these initial weeks of the program felt successful, as time went on, I began to feel more and more stressed by the lack of time I had for both instruction and communication with classroom teachers.

School reform literature often cites time as one of the greatest constraints to any change initiative (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Fullan & Miles, 1992). I, like many classroom teachers, had felt the constant pressure of time (Collinson & Cook, 2000; Leonard, 2001). As an interventionist, I looked forward to meeting with small groups of children away from the distraction and disruptions of a classroom full of students. I believed that stepping outside of my third-grade classroom would relieve me of many of the day-to-day tasks (i.e. attendance, dismissal plans, homework collection, holiday celebrations), which stole valuable instructional

time. While this might have been my new reality, I would soon learn that believing I would feel less pressured by time, was naïve. Throughout the first trimester of instruction, I felt like I was in constant race against the clock to ensure I made the best use of the instructional time.

Additionally, finding the time to collaborate was a challenge. These issues will be discussed in more detail below.

**Impacts to instructional time.** The research clearly indicates an association between the amount of time allocated for reading instruction and increases in student achievement (Allington, 2009; Berliner, 1981). More importantly, the efficient use of classroom time and the use of effective instructional strategies greatly influences student learning and outcomes (Levin & Nolan, 1996; NCES, 1993). As the BSRP teacher, time was finite in that I only had a certain amount of instructional time (30 minutes, 2-3 times a week) with each group, therefore, it was of the utmost importance that I used my time efficiently. I wanted to start on time and make the most of every minute, however, as the following journal entry shows, this goal was not always a reality.

*Today I felt like I was on a wild goose chase for students. I had three instances where I was missing students from a classroom and I could not reach the classroom teacher on the phone. Then I took the other students with me to try and locate the students. I found two of my groups in the library utilizing the class sets of Chromebooks and the other class was outside working in our courtyard because the weather was nice. This caused the teacher and students to be out of routine and therefore forget about sending the BSRP students at their regular time. I can completely understand this as a classroom teacher, however on the other end it feels frustrating. By the time we got back to my classroom we had under 15 minutes left. (November 23, 2015)*

Although this journal entry recounted just one moment in time, the struggle to get started on time became a frequent problem. Each day when students arrived at their session, I took attendance and wrote down the start time. In an analysis of a few sample weeks, on average most groups started 5 to 10 minutes late. This may not seem significant when thinking about one session at a time, however, chronic late starts added up to a significant amount of lost instructional time. For example, if a group met three times a week and started ten minutes late each session, over the course of a week 30 minutes of instruction would be lost. In a month's time two hours, and over the course of a trimester, almost six hours of instruction would be lost.

There were a wide variety of reasons for the sessions starting late. In general, the students in the lower grades tended to report that their teacher had forgotten to send them, while the fourth and fifth graders were more likely to say that they had forgotten. Another reason that instruction started later than anticipated was not because the students came late, but because I, often, was not ready for them. To utilize as much time in my schedule for instruction, I did not build in any time between groups. This lack of transition time was a consistent thorn in my side.

*I feel like I should have somehow built in transition times. But then all of the minutes that I don't have students become part of my prep time. The principal never really told me how much time can be open in my schedule as compared to classroom teachers. Contractually it is the same, when I asked him about it, he never really gave me a straight answer. (November 9, 2015)*

Each day felt like a sprint to clean up from one group and be ready to meet with the next.

Not only was it hard to get the groups started on time, as the first trimester progressed, it became apparent that the dynamics between group members also had an impact on instructional time. The BRSP groups were made without a knowledge of the students, aside from their

benchmark scores and anecdotal records regarding reading behaviors. Therefore, on paper, the groups made sense because the students had the same reading level and similar reading deficits. It was the assumption that grouping in this way would enable me to make the most of the 30 minutes of instructional time. However, I was surprised at how challenging a small group of four students could be. I recorded these instances in my researcher journal.

*WOW. One of my second grade groups has a lot of attention issues. Three of the four students needed to be redirected over 10 times during our first 30-minute session.*

*During our second session, this group wasn't any better. They continue to struggle to move at a good pace while keeping focused. (November 2, 2015)*

Keeping students focused throughout the lesson was not the only challenge I encountered. Sometimes the students came to my group upset about something that had happened earlier in the day. As a consequence, I found I had to turn my attention away from the rest of the group in order to help a student be able to get calm.

*Today I spent ten minutes trying to calm down an emotional 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. He came to group angry because he had gotten in trouble with his classroom teacher and was going to have to miss recess. I had the other students do a familiar reread of their last book, which wasn't my plan for today, just so I could spend some time calming down this student (November 10, 2016)*

In another journal entry, I captured what it was like when members of a group could not get along.

*This group just doesn't seem to be working well together. Two of the students regularly*

*come into the room arguing and it is often hard to get them to settle down. It seems that even in a small group of 4, they need more one-one-one instructional time. (November 9, 2016).*

When group members were distracted or they did not mesh well together socially and behaviorally, valuable instructional time was taken to address behavioral issues.

While some students struggled with their behavior within their groups, it became apparent to me that not all of my groups were homogenous in terms of reading ability. I wrote about a fourth-grade group in my journal:

*In this particular fourth grade group, one student seems more competent than the other readers. Even though her instructional reading level is the same according to my assessments. In a one-on-one conference, I pulled a higher-level book and started working with her on it. She did well, I think I need to see if there is a higher fourth grade group she can join. (November 9, 2015)*

The purpose of small group instruction is to be able to provide students with a higher level of differentiation in reading than can occur within a large group setting. Within small groups, teachers can match readers to text, teach at an appropriate pace, and focus on the specific instructional needs of the students (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). Differentiating instruction became a much harder task when the groups were not homogenous. While group dynamics and late starts were two factors that impacted my ability to make efficient use of the limited instructional time, disruptions to the school day was another contributor.

While I could work towards improving the tardiness of students and make changes to the groups to improve efficient use of instructional time, I had no control over planned and

unplanned disruptions. Teachers are often frustrated by interruptions to the school day which reduce the amount of planned instructional time (Leonard, 2001; Leonard, 2003; Suarez, Torlone, McGrath, & Clark, 1991). I felt particularly stressed when my group sessions were interrupted because I was never able to recoup that time. As a pull-out teacher, I did not have the flexibility to meet with groups at any other time during the day. If instructional time was missed due to an assembly or fire drill, it was simply time lost.

November was the worst month for disruptions because there were three early dismissals due to parent-teacher conferences as well as four days off for the NJ Teachers' Convention and Thanksgiving. Some groups were affected by these days off and some weren't resulting in less instructional time for some students than others. After the NJ Teachers' Convention, I wrote about this problem and my plan to make the instructional time more equitable amongst the groups.

*I realized that the groups that I meet with on Thursday and Friday will have potentially four days off this month. I am thinking that I will change my schedule when the Thanksgiving holiday comes and on that week I'll take my Thursday schedule on Monday and my Friday schedule on Tuesday. I need to make sure I tell the teachers in advance so I should send an email soon. (November 9, 2015)*

When the Thanksgiving holiday came I used my modified schedule. The change in routine proved to be quite challenging for teachers and students to remember.

Whether it was late starts, behavior-management issues, or externally imposed disruptions, I never could have imagined the amount of instructional time that would be taken from my already short sessions with the students. Making the most of the time I had was a daily battle and I worried that this would have negative impacts on student outcomes. As I had packed

my week with groups of students, I also had very little time to communicate with the classroom teachers.

**Never Enough Time to Communicate.** Effective school reform is not the responsibility of one person, rather it is the result of a collaborative effort amongst the stakeholders (Fullan, 2007). To reach the goal of helping the BSRP students reach grade level expectations in reading, it was crucial that they receive quality instruction in their small group pull out as well as in their general education classrooms. As Bean and Lillenstein (2012) suggest, I wanted to take a team approach in making instructional decisions for each of my students. I wanted to support and reinforce the skills they were learning in their classrooms, as well as keep the classroom teachers abreast of what their students were working on during their BSRP sessions. However, I quickly realized that trying to communicate with teachers across four grade levels was not an easy task. The BSRP utilized a pull-out model, where I would meet with students separate from their classrooms, and as research has documented, this structure made it difficult to find time to collaborate and communicate with classroom teachers (Bean, 2004; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Often, I felt as if I was working within a vacuum. I had packed my schedule so full, that it left me with very little time within the school day to continue to communicate with teachers.

I began to lay the foundation for sharing information about students as soon as I began the initial F&P assessments. After the students from a class were assessed and their running record was analyzed, I wrote a brief paragraph describing the reading behaviors during testing. This description was then sent to each child's classroom teacher. An example of one of these descriptions is below.



*Oliver was easy going and friendly. He told me a few things about his summer. He left first grade at an instructional G, however when I assessed him he maxed out in errors on the G (level book), however, the F (level book) was instructional. He really struggled with his fluency and his reading rate was slow. He didn't show word solving strategies, he wanted me to give him almost every word that felt tough or was unknown- when I told him to try a word he got a bit frustrated. He had issues with the sight word "why" and replaced it with "what" and "way" or "where." His phrasing was off in a lot of places. At times, he would say to me that it didn't make sense, but when he reread he wasn't able to clear up the issues. His comprehension of the F was satisfactory, he was able to retell a lot of the details. When I asked him some higher level questions he was also able to answer them, but he did struggle on answering questions about the structure of the book (the book was a question/answer format, he did not get that at all). (September 23, 2015)*

As can be seen in this example, comments were made regarding the student's overall demeanor and the reading level obtained at the end of the previous school year. Reading behaviors in terms of word attack strategies, sight word recognition, and fluency were also described in addition to information regarding the comprehension ability of the child. In the communication to classroom teachers about a student's benchmark assessments, the narrative was detailed and took quite a bit of time. I felt that this was time well spent because it would help me to understand the students better as readers and be able to make groups of children with similar reading levels and needs. However, being that there were only so many hours that I had to assess the students, I completed most of the analysis and written narratives at home.

While it was a struggle to make time to communicate with teachers during the assessment period, it was even harder to continue to communicate with teachers once I began instruction and

my schedule became less flexible. In a journal entry towards the end of the first trimester, I reflected about the lack of time I had to communicate with classroom teachers.

*Staying in contact with teachers regarding student progress is completely overwhelming. I have 50 students and while I feel like I am really starting to know their strengths and weaknesses, I rarely have the time to discuss their progress with the teachers. I try to keep in contact with the teachers through email mainly and update them when I move up a level. I discuss student progress whenever I happen to see teachers, whether it be quickly when we pass each other in the hallways. There are some teachers that I have no common preparatory time with and therefore, it is a real challenge to make the time to communicate. I feel a bit isolated from the regular education curriculum. I wonder if the teachers are seeing any improvements in my students. (December 3, 2015)*

As can be gleaned from this journal entry, trying to communicate with teachers across four different grade levels was impossible. My preparatory period was at times when most classroom teachers were unavailable and so there was no space in the schedule to meet with teachers about students in the BSRP program. Additionally, whereas classroom teachers received 45 minutes of preparatory time, mine was often split up into smaller 15 or 30-minute increments. These short time frames made it even more challenging to check in with my colleagues about our students

**Summary.** While we were a bit slow to get the program started, once instruction began, time began to move at lightning speed. Throughout the first trimester there were many factors that impacted the amount of instructional time I was able to provide to my students and I felt unsuccessful in being able to set up a system for communicating efficiently and effectively with classroom teachers. The implementation research as well as change literature posit that

successful implementation requires that an innovation be adaptable and responsive to the local context (Century & Cassata, 2016; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fullan, 2007). In the case of the BSRP, I knew that I needed to make some adjustments to the BSRP groups and the schedule to help to make the most efficient use of the instructional time as well as free up some time in my schedule, so I could communicate with teachers of the children in the BSRP. As I began the first round of progress monitoring, I had a chance to make some of these adjustments.

### **Changes Made to Improve Efficiency of Instructional Time and Increase Communication**

The following vignette was taken from a typical lesson at the end of January, shortly after the second trimester of instruction began.

It is 8:30am on the dot and I hear the door creak open as my first group of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders from Mrs. John's class arrive. The two girls, Maria and Ainsley, come in with smiles and greet me with a big hug.

We enter from my office space into our little reading room furnished with two cozy rugs and milk crates with cushion tops placed in a circle. The girls elect to sit on a milk crate while Davis takes a cushion, sits on the rug, and leans up against the wall.

We begin as most lessons do, with a quick review of word work. Over the last few sessions, I had noticed that this group was having a hard time reading words with the -s and -es endings. They often omitted the ending altogether.

I ask, *"Someone tell us, how does adding -s or -es to a word change it?"*

I point to the chart that has two columns, one for "add s" and one for "add -es." Davis puts his thumb up to indicate that he wants to respond. I wait a few seconds and the girls' thumbs go up, too. I ask Davis to share what he thinks.

He responds, *"It makes the word more than one. Like there was one bench but now there are two benchES."* He stresses the ending.

*"There could be more than two,"* Ainsley chimes in.

*"Yeah,"* Davis agrees, *"There could be a million."*

*"Talk to each other for a few minutes and see if you can come up with a few words to add to each list,"* I say.

They turn and talk in their small group as I listen in. After I hear that they have some words to add, I ask them to share out as I write them on the chart. I share some words that they will see in their book and add them to the chart. This mini lesson lasts for about 5 minutes and we move to our next step.

*“Today we are going to read a new book. This book is called ‘How Bear Lost His Tail.’ You’ve read classic tales before. Take a look at the cover and think about the title, who are usually the characters in classic tales?”*

I ask the students to put the answer “in their heads.” Once all three students have their hands on their heads, I ask them to “put it in their hands.”

Then I say, “One, two, three, blow!” and in unison the three say, “Animals!”

I continue with the book introduction and ask them to make a prediction.

I give them some think time before calling on Ainsley.

She says, *“I think we will learn why the bear has a tiny tail, the rest of it got lost or something.”*

Davis chimes in, *“Maybe another animal got it!”*

I tell them that they have great predictions and that their job as readers is to think about whether or not those predictions come true and if they don’t how was the story different than expected. I continue to preview the text and prepare them for reading. I send them off to select a reading spot and begin my one-on-one conferencing.

There is a low hum in the room as each child whisper reads to themselves. I decide to start my conferencing with Maria. I take a quick peek at my notes from last session and see that we were working on reading dialogue with proper phrasing and expression. I sit down next to her and start listening in. After a page, I tell her what I notice.

*“Wow, your reading sounded just like talking. I felt like the fox was right here in the room with us!”*

She smiles and continues reading. I continue to coach her to notice punctuation within dialogue and remind her to pay attention to the endings on words. She is doing well with the words ending in -s and -es, however as she reads the word “dip” she omits the -ed ending. I remind her to notice the ending. She repeats the sentence and says “dip-did” instead of “dip.” I write down on my clipboard that next time we should work on the three sounds that -ed makes. I move onto the two other students. Ainsley finishes the book before the other two, but goes right back to the beginning to begin a reread, a well-known and followed routine in our class sessions.

After all students are done their first read I ask them to please come back to the meeting rug.

*“Now let’s talk about what we’ve read. I want you to start by giving your partner a five-finger summary.”*

I ask Maria and Ainsley to work together and Davis to work with me since he often has a hard time with summarizing. I show the students the five-finger summary anchor chart so they can reference it as they work on a summary.

I work with Davis while I also keep an eye on how Maria and Ainsley are doing in their partnership. When the students are done and have gotten a chance to share out their summaries, I begin a comprehension conversation to engage in some higher level thinking.

*“Before you leave, I want to push your thinking about this story. I want to know why Fox was so unhappy when others complimented the Bear’s tail.”*

The students are quiet for a minute. I notice that Maria starts flipping through the first few pages of the book.

*“Good Maria, you are looking back in the text.”* I comment.

The other two start to do the same before Ainsley speaks.

*“I think Fox wanted the other animals to like his tail best.”*

The other two students put their thumbs to their chests to signal “me too” in agreement.

I then say, *“So this story explains why bears don’t have tails, but there is also something else that it explains about bears. Can you find it in the story?”*

The students are able to identify that we also learn why bears hibernate in the winter.

*I end the session by saying, “Tomorrow when you come in, your first job will be a familiar reread. While you are reading I want you to be thinking about the lesson that Bear learned. Let’s put our materials back in our baskets and get ready to go.”*

As the students clean up their materials, I flip my chart and grab the next bin in the cart. As I say good-bye and give high-fives to this group of second graders, I am greeted with the next group of children.

A lot had changed since the first trimester of instruction. At this point students knew where and when to report and followed well-established routines. Disruptions to instruction were at a minimum and I could provide each group with focused, face-paced, direct instruction.

To get to this stage required that I examine my practice closely in order to improve it, or better understand what works (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). To do this, I read through my journal entries from the first trimester of instruction. I also engaged in informal conversations with classroom teachers about how the program was working. I learned that some teachers were struggling with the schedule.

*-Today while I was at the photocopier, a third grade teacher came in. As soon as she saw me she smiled and said, "Sorry I forgot to send my group today! I always forget to send them on Thursday because it is in the afternoon!" (November 19, 2015)*

*-During our faculty meeting I was sitting with the fourth grade team. I asked them how they felt the schedule was working and they said that they were okay with the time period but that they wished that their groups met on consecutive days. (November 23, 2015)*

The third-grade teacher and the fourth-grade teams would have preferred that their BSRP groups be pulled at the same time period, consecutive days in a row.

On December 7, 2015, I recorded a list of challenges that I wanted to address moving forward.

*First Trimester Challenges:*

- 1. Short time periods*
- 2. Groups weren't well matched behaviorally and academically*
- 3. Lack of transition time between groups*

4. *Loss of instructional time – disruptions to school day, starting late, etc.*

5. *Schedule challenges- scattered times for groups*

*(December 7, 2015)*

Resolving each of these challenges was not something I could do easily. I would have loved to have been able to hire on an additional BSRP teacher or change the master schedule to make it more accommodating for a pull-out intervention program, however, I did not have the authority to do so. Initially, I considered further reducing my caseload and taking fewer students in the second trimester. While this seemed to be a quick-fix to my main challenges, I felt conflicted about this decision.

*I wish I had more time to meet with my groups. Perhaps I should have accepted less students from the beginning. I anticipate being able to exit some students because they have reached grade level expectations, however, I don't believe it will be enough to make more room in the schedule. I could just take less students this trimester, but I don't really know a fair way to take students out of the program- this might send a message to their parents that they are not struggling any more and it could make classroom teachers angry if their students are dropped from the program even though they are still struggling. I just don't feel like this is an option, I'm going to have to just make the most of the time frames that I have. (December 8, 2015)*

Ultimately, I did not want to remove any students from the BSRP. I believed that there were some strategic changes that I could make specifically to the groupings and schedule that would help to address some of the issues I had during the first trimester.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, I began administering the benchmark assessments for the BSRP students. I made reflective notes about each students' progress in the program as well as what I

gleaned from the assessments. As with the initial assessments, I shared this information with classroom teachers and used it to create new instructional groups. All 50 of the BSRP students' levels increased from the initial benchmarks. Twenty-three students increased their instructional reading level by one, ten students increased by two, and seven increased by 3 levels. Nine students made more drastic changes (increasing by four or more instructional reading levels). Out of the 50 students, four second-grade and two fourth-grade students were exited out of the program because they had reached grade level expectations for their instructional reading level. I regrouped the students based on their new reading levels.

Grouping, in general, for the second trimester was a much easier task than it was for the first trimester. A better knowledge of the students in terms of reading levels, reading strengths and weaknesses, and behaviorally helped to make groups that would function better together. I was also able to keep students who didn't work well together separated. I reflected in my researcher journal how easy the process of grouping was the second time around.

*Today I finished assessments and began regrouping students. This process was much easier. It took only about an hour to form new groups. In a lot of instances, I was able to keep the students from the same class in the same group. This was mostly lucky because there was less of a range of levels when I assessed this time around than there was in September. For example, Ms. Leaper's second grade class has 7 BSRP students. In the first round, these students had such a range of levels and needs that I saw them in 5 different BSRP groups. This time, I was able to group many of her students together and was able to see all of her students in 3 different groups. It was also so much nicer to actually know these students as readers. I was able to make decisions about students more easily. For example, one third-grader was a bit of an outlier in this round of*



*assessment. He didn't make as much progress as his peers and according to his benchmark scores, he wasn't fitting into any groups. Rather than meet with him one-on-one and have to find an additional space of time, I was able to quickly make the decision that he would be fine to read with a group a level above what he tested. I knew he would be okay because his reading fluency was very high but his comprehension was weaker. Therefore, it would be better for him to join a group that was a bit higher than him rather than lower. I also knew that the group he would be joining would be better for him socially and that the peers in that group would be good role models for him. This was important because this child does have some issues with staying on task and keeping motivated. (December 21, 2015)*

Next, I set out to make improvements to the schedule. I wanted to develop a schedule that was easier to follow for the students, classroom teachers, and myself. Specifically, I wanted to try and make groups meet at consistent times and on consecutive days and reduce the amount of BSRP groups within one classroom. To do this, I began by changing the number of groups that received instruction three times a week. The reassessment of students showed that many of my students had progressed quickly and therefore many groups were closer to meeting grade-level reading expectations. Therefore, I reduced the number of groups that received three sessions per week from eight to three, 2nd grade groups and one 3rd grade. The remaining groups in these grade levels as well as the fourth and fifth grade groups would receive instruction two days a week. The reduction in the number of times per week I met with each group helped me to schedule the groups at the same time and consecutive days. For my second and third grade groups, I developed a schedule in which the groups I met with three times a week were seen on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The groups that received instruction twice a week would

meet on Thursday and Friday. This way a group would meet for two or three consecutive days in a row rather than having a sporadic schedule throughout the week. The fourth and fifth grade groups only met two days a week, therefore, I scheduled the groups for either Monday and Tuesday or Wednesday and Thursday. I used the remaining available open spaces on Friday afternoon to schedule the groups that received specific phonetic instruction.

Another change from the first trimester was that I stopped instruction at two o'clock each day. This was important because the last 45 minutes of each day were set aside for grade level team meetings. A "free" period at the end of the day allowed me to be able to meet with teachers during this time or test students during a time that would not disrupt their regular classroom time. Figure 11 shows the new second trimester schedule.

| TIME        | Monday                                       | Tuesday                                      | Wednesday                                    | Thursday                                     | Friday                                       |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 8:00-8:15   | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  |
| 8:15-8:30   |  |  |  | Second Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>3 students |
| 8:30-8:45   | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 5</b><br>3 students |
| 8:45-9:00   | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>4 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students  |
| 9:00-9:15   |  |  |  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students  | Third Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students  |
| 9:15-9:30   | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 6</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 6</b><br>3 students |
| 9:30-9:45   | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | Second Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>3 students | <b>Prep</b>                                  | <b>Prep</b>                                  |
| 9:45-10:00  | <b>Lunch/Non-Contact</b>                     | <b>Lunch/Non-Contact</b>                     | <b>Lunch</b>                                 | Lunch/Non-Contact                            | Lunch/Non-Contact                            |
| 10:00-10:15 |  |  |  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>2 students  |
| 10:15-10:30 | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>2 students | <b>Lunch/Non-Contact</b>                     | <b>Prep/Testing/<br/>Data<br/>Collection</b> | <b>Prep/Testing/<br/>Data<br/>Collection</b> |
| 10:30-10:45 | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>3 students  | Fifth Grade<br><b>Group 1</b><br>3 students  | Fifth Grade<br>Orton one-on-one              |  |  |
| 10:45-11:30 | Second/Third<br>Grade<br>2 students          | Second/Third<br>Grade<br>2 students          | <b>Prep/Testing/<br/>Data<br/>Collection</b> | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>2 students | Fourth Grade<br>Orton (2 students)           |
| 11:30-11:45 | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 2</b><br>3 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 4</b><br>2 students | <b>Prep/Testing/<br/>Data<br/>Collection</b> | Third Grade<br>Orton one-on-one              |
| 11:45-12:00 | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>4 students | Fourth Grade<br><b>Group 3</b><br>4 students | <b>Prep/Testing/<br/>Data<br/>Collection</b> |  |  |
| 12:00-12:15 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12:15-12:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12:30-12:45 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12:45-01:00 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:00-1:15   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:15-1:30   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:30-1:45   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:45-2:00   |  |  |  |  |  |

Figure 11. Second Trimester Schedule

A reduction in the number of groups who received instruction three times a week as well the creation of a schedule with more consistency in meeting times was extremely helpful to the

students, classroom teachers, and me. I noted in my researcher journal several times how this schedule change really helped.

*This schedule is so much better. It is so much easier knowing that Mon-Wed are pretty much the same and then Thurs and Fri are the same too. I am able to be much more efficient in setup and am more easily able to remember what groups are coming to me next. (January 12, 2016)*

In a few informal conversations with teachers that took place during the month of January, I began to get a bit of feedback as to how the new schedule worked for them.

*- I was in a second grade teacher's class as she was writing her schedule, she also said that he loves coming to see me. She began to write the BSRP times on the board for this child as a reminder to both him and her and she said "It is so much easier for me to remember what times he goes now that you changed the schedule; I really like the consistency of Mon-Wed at 8:30, I also like how he goes out right away in the morning, he really is best focused first thing in the morning. (January 19, 2016)*

*-Today I was at the copy machine and I asked a third-grade teacher how it was going with the schedule. She said that she really liked the new schedule and that it helped her to be able to have a more consistent guided reading schedule in her own classroom.*

*Later, another teacher told me that she really liked the new schedule. She said since the second trimester schedule started she hasn't had to remind her students once to go to the BSRP. (January 28, 2016)*

Overall, the changes made to the groupings and schedule helped to address the main challenges I encountered throughout the first trimester. There were less disruptions to instructional time and I had more time to communicate with teachers. I continued with the new groups and schedule

until the end of the second trimester, when I did a second round of progress monitoring. While I exited a few more students, there were relatively few changes to the groupings and schedule as I moved into the last trimester of instruction. With over half of the school year complete, the BSRP had moved from an initiative to an implementable program. There were many aspects that worked well in the first year, however, there were other elements that needed to be adjusted along the way.

## **Conclusion**

School reform has evolved from the idea that creating change within schools requires strong leadership from principals and superintendents to positioning teacher leaders at the forefront of leading school improvement efforts (Fullan, 2007; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). As the designer and implementer of the BSRP, I became not only a teacher leader but a teacher researcher as well, as I documented what happened when a basic skills reading program was implemented within my school. Smylie, et al., (2002) have conceptualized teacher research as a new form of teacher leadership as a means to promote change at the school level. As a teacher researcher, not only did I use the literature to create a program based in research, but throughout the implementation phase I was reflective, critical, and analytical. This enabled me to be able to identify the elements of the BSRP that were working well and to address the challenges that weren't. However, up until this point, these changes were informed only by my own reflections in my researcher journal and through my informal interactions with classroom teachers. To gain a fuller picture of the strengths and challenges of the program, I needed to view the implementation process through a different lens. The next chapter aims to understand how the classroom teachers perceived the implementation of the program as well as how they describe their students' experiences throughout their participation in the BSRP.

## **CHAPTER 5: PERCEIVED IMPACT AND EFFECTIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS**

The previous chapter described my experiences, as the BSRP teacher, throughout the implementation period. As the main purpose of this study was to inform programmatic improvements to the BSRP, it was important that I created an evaluation which yielded useful findings for the primary users, myself and the principal, as we would be responsible for deciding upon and enacting any changes to the program (Patton, 2008). The previous chapter recounted the implementation of the BSRP from my viewpoint. However, to ensure that the BSRP was responsive to the contextual conditions it is necessary to also elicit the perspectives of the other stakeholders. While there were many stakeholders such as the parents, principal, and upper administration, this study focused on the classroom teachers' perspectives because they were involved with the BSRP on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, successful school reform relies on not only effective implementation, but also teacher buy-in. The goal of the BSRP was to shrink the achievement gap in our school and because teacher's reactions to change initiatives have the potential to impact student success or failure (Ravitch, 2001) it was important that the teachers' supported the program. Because of the rising pressure to increase reading achievement in their students, the classroom teachers had a vested interest in helping to make sure that the BSRP was functioning well.

This chapter documents the implementation of the BSRP through the classroom teachers' perspectives. I begin by describing the changes that the classroom teachers reported seeing in their students throughout their participation in the BSRP. Then, I will turn the focus to which design elements of the BSRP the teachers said worked well and may have contributed to these changes.

### **Perceived Student Changes**

The BSRP was designed to be a support system for teachers to help increase the achievement of the students who were struggling to read at grade level expectations. Therefore, it could be argued that, from a classroom teachers' perspective, the success of the BSRP could be measured first by the amount of progress they saw in their students. Twelve classroom teachers were surveyed and nine were interviewed to gain a better understanding of how the teachers believed their students changed as readers throughout their participation in the BSRP. However, before speaking directly about reading achievement, many teachers focused first on the changes they saw in their students reading self-efficacy. In what follows, I will describe how teachers said their students' perceptions of themselves as readers changed before turning to how the teachers reported the BSRP impacted their students' reading achievement.

### **Increasing Reading Self-Efficacy**

It is well documented in the literature that students' perceptions of themselves or self-efficacy mediates their academic achievement. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to work harder, participate more, and persist longer when they encounter difficulty (Bandura, 1986; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Lynch, 2002; Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005; Schunk, 2003). Conversely, students with low self-efficacy are likely to display avoidance tactics and give up easily when they are met with an academic challenge.

While it can't be assumed that the BSRP students had low self-efficacy, teachers' descriptions of their BSRP students prior to the intervention suggested this might be the case. All nine teachers interviewed described their BSRP students at the start of the program as lacking confidence in themselves as readers, which they believed was evidenced by quietness or avoidance tactics.

For example, Felicia, a fourth-grade teacher, said that Anna, a female African American student, “*wouldn’t even come to her guided reading groups because she was embarrassed.*”

Isaiah, a Hispanic, second-grade student in Gabriele’s class displayed many different avoidance tactics when it came to practicing reading. Gabriele said:

*It [reading] was difficult for him and so he just kind of avoided it. He wasn’t bringing home his books to read, I gave him books every night and he would “forget” to bring them home. He was the kid who would just cry if things were difficult for him.*

Fern, a mixed-race, third-grade girl, had little confidence in her reading ability, especially when it came to reading out loud. Fern’s teacher, Christine said she would:

*mumble through all the words and read so softly she could barely hear her. She just didn’t have the confidence that she needed, she always thought she would mess up.*

When Felicia, Gabriele, and Christine spoke about the changes they saw in these students, all three reported positive improvements in their students’ self-efficacy in reading.

Felicia said:

*I’ve just seen her grow in confidence a lot, which is a huge thing for her. Now she comes to guided reading group-which is a huge improvement. She does her assignments, she answers the questions, she’s more willing to share. Before it was just a ‘I’m not going to come and you can’t make me’ type of thing. Now, she’s here, she’s ready, she’s got her work done, she’s discussing, so I think that’s major.*

While Felicia reported that Anna’s participation increased, Gabriele saw a decrease in Isaiah’s avoidance tactics as she said he began to realize that he was becoming a better reader. She said:

*With the extra instruction at the BSRP, I think Isaiah got a chance to realize he really can do it. He started reading every single day and it just clicked for him. He got moved to a*



*different reading group and was exited from the BSRP and I think that just really inspired him.*

Christine described similar changes in Fern:

*Fern has gotten a lot more vocal in guided reading and in whole group. She's more comfortable answering questions, and I think she just feels more confident in herself. I have a group that just focuses on fluency and that's something she works on at the BSRP and now she is so loud and expressive and so over the top when she reads. You would never believe that it is coming out of shy little Fern. But it is something she does all the time, it is now comfortable to her.*

Christine believed that the extra time spent on improving Fern's fluency at the BSRP was just what she needed to become more confident in herself and participate more not just during oral reading, but in her book discussions as well. Christine recounted:

*The other day, I was meeting with Fern's guided reading group and we were talking about how the main character in the book was really struggling to fit in in her new school. Fern was leading the conversation, she was giving examples from the text and giving suggestions about what she thought the character could do to make things better. She even asked a question to the group. It was pretty amazing, very different from the little girl who would barely speak in the beginning of the year.*

Survey results were in line with interview data in that 84% of the teachers surveyed, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I saw increased confidence in the BSRP students." The remaining two teachers were undecided. Overall, the nine classroom teachers who were interviewed believed that participating in BSRP may have helped to increase their students' self-

efficacy because, as research suggests, they saw changes in their students' participation, work ethic, and independence to complete tasks.

### Becoming Better Readers

As this study was focused on the implementation of the BRSP, not outcomes, it is impossible to know whether the BSRP had a direct impact on the students reading ability. However, reading scores from both the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and the San Diego Word List seem to indicate that the BSRP had some effect on student achievement. The F&P benchmark assessment uses a combination of student oral reading accuracy and ability to comprehend the text to indicate a student's instructional reading level.

Results from the benchmarks administered in March indicated that all 48 students increased their instructional reading score by at least one level, with more than 50% of students increasing by three or more levels. Table 2 shows the increases to instructional reading level separated by grade level.

Table 2

#### *Increases in Instructional Reading Level (F&P BAS)*

|                       | One Level | Two Levels | Three Levels | Four Levels | Five + Levels |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade | 0         | 6          | 3            | 4           | 10            |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade | 1         | 2          | 5            | 3           | 0             |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade | 1         | 1          | 3            | 1           | 3             |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade | 0         | 4          | 0            | 0           | 1             |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2</b>  | <b>13</b>  | <b>11</b>    | <b>8</b>    | <b>14</b>     |

To put these level increases into context, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) indicate that typical growth for a student who is reading on grade level at the start of a school year in grades two through five is three to four instructional reading levels. At the start of the school year, the students who were identified to participate in the BSRP were students who were reading "far

below grade level” which meant that they were reading two or more levels below expectations. The student participants’ initial benchmark scores indicated that their scores ranged from two to eight levels below grade-level expectation. Therefore, to reach grade level expectations, all of the BSRP participants would need to make accelerated growth throughout the school year. To measure that growth, Table 3 shows how many students, over the course of six months, achieved grade level expectation, were approaching grade-level expectation, as well as those who were still in the far below grade-level expectation.

Table 3

*Student Progress Toward Grade Level*

|                       | Grade-level<br>(exited from the<br>program) | Approaching (1 level<br>away) | Far Below (2 or more<br>levels away) |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade | 7   | 3                             | 13                                   |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade | 1   | 4                             | 6                                    |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> grade | 2   | 2                             | 5                                    |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> grade | 0   | 1                             | 4                                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>10</b>                                   | <b>10</b>                     | <b>28</b>                            |

The gains in instructional reading levels meant that ten students appeared to have accelerated growth in that they reached grade-level expectations by March (the end of the second trimester of instruction). Additionally, ten students were one instructional reading level away from meeting expectations. This was a positive change as all 48 students originally identified were in the “far below” grade-level category when they began participation in the program indicating that these students were also growing at a slightly accelerated rate. The remaining 28 students, while their instructional reading levels increased, did not appear to be increasing at a speed which would allow them to reach grade-level expectations within the school year.

The San Diego Word List, which reports an instruction reading level (in terms of grade level) by assessing students' ability to recognize words out of context, yielded similar results (see Table 4 below).

Table 4

*Increases to Grade Level (SDQA)*

|                       | One Grade Level | Two Grade Levels | Three Grade Levels |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade | 12              | 10               | 1                  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade | 9               | 2                | 0                  |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> grade | 3               | 6                | 0                  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> grade | 2               | 3                | 0                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>26</b>       | <b>21</b>        | <b>1</b>           |

Twenty-six total students increased their reading level by one grade-level, twenty-one increased by two levels, and one increased by three grade-levels indicating that all 48 students made gains throughout their participation in the BSRP.

Not only did the assessment scores indicate reading growth in students, classroom teachers reported improvements as well. Seven of the nine teachers who were interviewed described positive changes in their students' reading abilities and described their students as more strategic readers. These seven teachers spoke about the changes they saw in their students reading ability (23 out of the 48 students initially identified). While their descriptions lacked detail, they said that their students improved in three areas: decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

Before students can become fluent readers, they must first be able to decode words with automaticity. Each BSRP lesson began with a short lesson in word work, aimed specifically at the sound patterns the students had difficulty reading. Beginning with word work seemed to impact students, as five of the seven classroom teachers said that their students improved in their

ability to decode words. Evelyn, a second-grade teacher described her student, Ariella as not having any decoding strategies. She said:

*When Ariella came to a word she didn't know she would just wait for me and now she will use the decoding strategies on her own.*

While Evelyn, as most of the other teachers were vague in their descriptions of the specific strategies they saw their students using, Stacey, a third-grade teacher, provided a bit more detail when she spoke about her BSRP student, Kristin:

*She no longer asks what to do. She used to appeal a lot and say, 'I don't know this word.' I just knew that she didn't have the strategies in place and now she doesn't do that. She knows what to do and she does it. Last week we were reading a book and she got to the word apologize and she couldn't read it just right away so she started covering the words on her own without me even telling that to her. Or if I'm reading with another student I'll turn around and I'll see her covering the words or I'll hear her – or see her scanning her finger across and sounding out the different letters to try and put them together. She will look at the picture, think about the word in the sentence, and try and think what would make sense in the sentence. She does a lot of these skills independently now.*

In addition to citing the ability to decode words more efficiently, teachers also reported an improvement in their students' fluency, which is the ability to read with accuracy, expression, and appropriate phrasing (Rasinski, 2010). Of the 23 students described in interviews, 13 were said to have made gains in their ability to read fluently. Of the six teachers who reported having students who improved fluency, most of them lacked detail and simply said, "*their fluency improved.*" Leann, a third-grade BSRP student was described by her teacher, Lynn, as feeling

*“proud when she reads, she reads with much more expression than she used too.”* Lynn also described another student, Joseph’s improvements. She said:

*His fluency has improved greatly since he’s been in the program, he reads quite well, like an on-level third grader, he sounds like one. When he has a sentence with an exclamation mark he will read it with excitement. He attends to other punctuation like commas, this is something he really didn’t do before.*

When readers strengthen their ability to decode words and read fluently, they are able to attend to the meaning of text (Rasinski, 2010). Of the twelve respondents on the survey, eleven indicated that they had students who showed an increase in their ability to comprehend texts. Five of the teachers interviewed described the improvements they saw in their students’ ability to comprehend text.

Again, teachers lacked detail in their description of the specific improvements they saw. Felicia, a fourth-grade teacher with three BSRP students, said that her students’ ability to comprehend the text was evident in the types of conversations about the text she was now able to have with her students. Felicia said:

*So now it’s helped have richer guided reading group discussions because they are actually aware of what they’ve read and they are able to answer questions about it. A lot of times we couldn’t go anywhere with our discussions because what they were saying was not from the book so we can’t really discuss that. That was the missing piece, now they understand the text. So now that they are able to answer questions and find answers within the books we can talk about it. I can ask things like ‘why do you think that?’ and ‘why do you think the author did that?’ and it’s making our discussions richer because they are now thinking beyond just the text.*

Not only were Felicia's students able to move beyond just the literal meaning of the text, but they were also able to use text evidence to support their answers which was also mentioned by four other teachers. Leah, a second-grade teacher spoke about a specific book conversation when she described an interaction with Omar during a guided reading session:

*I was reading with Omar and Lucas, just the three of us. We are reading a book about lungs and when I asked Omar 'Why do your lungs get smaller, what happens?' he was about to just make something up, instead he went back and reread the sentence. The fact that he used the text and didn't just make something up.*

Evelyn, another second-grade teacher said that her student, Ariella was also using text evidence in her written work to demonstrate her comprehension of texts. She said:

*Ariella's initial work was completely wrong even citing a page number where she found her answer. Now if she is writing about how a character felt about a certain event in the text or if she is writing about why she thinks certain character is a certain character trait she will actually use examples from the book and cite the right page it came from. This really demonstrates how much her comprehension of the text has improved.*

While the survey, interview, and benchmark data all indicate that the BSRP had a positive impact on the students' reading ability, there were instances when the opposite was true.

### **Worked for Most, But Not for All**

In line with the tiered intervention literature which asserts that there will typically be a small percentage (about 5%) of students who will not respond to a secondary intervention such as the BSRP, of the twenty-six students discussed throughout the interviews, two students did not show the same progress that the other students did. Christine, a third-grade teacher in an inclusive classroom with two BSRP students, and Fran, a fourth-grade teacher with three BSRP

students, each had a student that, despite the additional reading support, made slow progress throughout the first trimester. Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (2008) posit that students who are unresponsive to more intensive intervention at the second tier should be provided with a comprehensive evaluation to determine special education eligibility. In the cases of Christine and Fran's students, both were convinced that their students had an underlying reading disability which had not yet been identified. They described their student as needing a "*different kind of support*" or "*more support than we can give them,*" and believed the level of student need was beyond the scope of what the BSRP could provide. To give the reader a sense of the type of instruction at the BSRP and the students' lack of response to the intervention, both Liviana and Ava will be described in more detail below.

**Liviana.** Liviana, a Caucasian, third-grader was described by her teacher, Christine, as an "*interesting case.*" Christine, who had also been Liviana's teacher the previous school year reported that when she first started working with Liviana as a second grader, it quickly became evident that Liviana had serious issues in her phonetic ability. This was evident in not only her lack of oral reading accuracy and fluency, but also in her spelling. Christine explained how she, "*spent the entire year trying the strategies in class, and still not seeing any real progress.*" Christine was very worried about Liviana because she "*wasn't making as much progress as the other students in her group.*"

Christine was hopeful that the 2015-2016 school year would be more successful for Liviana. She said:

*I really thought the BSRP would help boost Liviana's progress. I thought maybe I just wasn't doing a good enough job teaching her. I just couldn't give her what she needed.*



Of the 48 initial BSRP students, I saw Liviana the most amount of time per week. She attended the BSRP with two other students for 30-minute sessions, three times a week. Additionally, she received one-on-one instruction with a focus on explicit phonics instruction once a week.

Rasinski (2010) asserts that there are three important dimensions of reading fluency that lead to comprehension; accuracy in word decoding, automatic processing, and prosodic reading. Liviana was struggling in all three areas. To address the first concern, word decoding, I engaged in explicit and systematic phonetic instruction in which I focused on blending and segmenting sounds as well as strengthening her sight word recognition during her weekly one-on-one BSRP lesson. The second and third concerns, automatic processing and prosodic reading, were addressed in her small-group BSRP lessons. Liviana's reading rate was slow and she struggled to parse the text into semantically and syntactically appropriate units, as evidenced by her lack of phrasing and inattentiveness to punctuation. Therefore, I used research-based strategies such as assisted and repeated readings (Kuhn & Stahl, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003) to help strengthen Liviana's reading fluency.

Throughout the first trimester, Christine and I communicated on a weekly basis regarding Liviana's progress and both agreed that we would have expected to see more progress given the additional support. The F&P Benchmark in December of 2015 confirmed the lack of progress we both saw. Liviana's instructional level remained the same and she continued to rely heavily on the meaning of the text to take a guess at unknown words, rarely using syntax or visual cues as sources of information to solve unknown words. For example, Liviana read the sentence, "We'd better *quit*," as "We'd better *stop*." Replacing the word stop for quit showed that Liviana was attending to the meaning of the text, but did not use the visual information to read the word correctly. Errors similar in nature were common for Liviana. While the instruction Liviana

received in the BSRP was targeted specifically on her skill deficits, assessment results indicated that, despite an additional two hours of instruction a week in the BSRP Liviana was still struggling in the targeted areas.

**Ava.** Ava, a Hispanic fourth-grade girl was described by her teacher, Fran, as a student who, “*just doesn’t get it*” and “*was struggling in all subjects.*” Fran said that Ava was not monitoring for comprehension as evidenced by the fact that, often, Ava was unable to recall the main events of the text. As Fran described:

*She often goes off on tangents when she is talking about the book and, although she is often making connections to her own life, these connections don’t really have anything to do with helping her to understand the book.*

Fran asserted that when Ava went off on tangents it wasn’t because she was unfocused, but because she was trying to hide the fact that she didn’t understand what she had read in the text. Fran also noted that Ava would often skip words or read words incorrectly and “*often doesn’t catch her mistakes.*”

By the end of September, Fran had already spoken with me regarding her concerns about Ava’s reading ability. She felt that Ava’s inability to comprehend fourth grade level texts was impeding her progress in all subject areas. Ava’s benchmark assessment score showed that her instructional reading level was an N, two levels below grade level expectations for the beginning of fourth grade. Ava was placed in a group with two other students who met for 30 minutes, two days a week.

As research suggests (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2004; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009), I engaged in explicit teaching of reading strategies such as summarizing, predicting, and questioning to aid in comprehension monitoring (Boulware-Gooden, et al., 2007). During each

session, I gave Ava opportunities to practice the reading strategies on her own and she engaged in book discussions with her group. To monitor her progress, I conducted a weekly running record. The discussions were scaffolded to help Ava to not only talk about and understand the literal meaning of the text, but to think more deeply about the text. The following is a reflection from my researcher journal describing a running record I took with Ava on December 1<sup>st</sup>, about six weeks after the start of the program.

*Today I took a running record with Ava, I was particularly interested in checking in on Ava's ability to self-correct when she miscued and to think more deeply about the text. She read about seven pages aloud and during that time she made nine errors, which placed her at 96% reading accuracy, and one self-correction. There were instances where she did not monitor for comprehension (example: she read "Manny! Grab the eggs!" when the text read, "Manny! Grab the edge!"). During the comprehension conversation, Ava told accurate details of the story. She said, "Rosa tried to save Manuel from drowning when he fell through the ice. She used a stick to help pull him out but then she fell in." When Ava was asked to dig deeper in the text and talk about the kind of person Rosa was, she said she thought "she was kind of mean because she saved herself first and left Manny." Ava clearly was confused about the text because in fact Rosa saved herself because she knew it was the only way she would be able to help Manuel.*

This comprehension conversation concerned me because I had done a lot of work with Ava to teach her to use the character's actions to help her describe a character's traits and she was still unable to use this strategy independently.

At the end of December, Ava was given the second round of benchmark assessments which confirmed that her progress was minimal. Her instructional reading level had remained at level N and Ava's reading accuracy percentage at her instructional reading level was the lowest of the fourth-grade students. One area that Ava showed a small improvement was in her ability to recall details she had read in the text. For example, after she read a book that told about the many popular myths that people believe about snakes, she could retell each of the myths. However, when Ava was asked questions that required her to go beyond the literal meaning of the text she struggled. For example, when Ava was asked why she thinks people might be afraid of snakes she responded, "*because they think they might die.*" When asked to tell more, she began talking about how snakes are dangerous and when they bite you will die. Ava is not wrong in her belief that snakes can be dangerous and cause death, however, the point of the book was to debunk the many myths about snakes, one of them being that all snakes are dangerous and can kill you. While Ava could retell the myths she had read, she was not yet able to understand the bigger ideas of the text, which was the main focus of her BSRP instruction.

With the slow progress that Fran had seen in her day-to-day classroom interactions with Ava and the benchmark assessment information, Fran was very concerned:

*Well the fact that her progress was so slow and other students were moving two or three levels is concerning. If she's going to basic skills and still not doing well in my classroom then something could be wrong.*

Fran went on to explain that when she said, "*something could be wrong,*" she meant that she believed that Ava may have a reading or learning disability that had not yet been detected.

The cases of Liviana and Ava both seem to highlight the limitations of the BSRP. Despite the targeted reading instruction that both students received at the BSRP, it seemed that the BSRP couldn't reach them.

### **Summary**

There was overwhelming support from the nine teachers who were interviewed and the twelve who completed the survey. Classroom teachers felt that the extra support of students in the BSRP had a positive impact on their students' reading self-efficacy. The teachers also reported that most of their BSRP students made improvements in their overall reading ability. However, for some students who may have been struggling with an undetected reading disability, the BSRP was just not enough.

The BSRP was designed using the research base on best practices for reading intervention. That is, the way students were identified, the frequency of intervention, and the instructional practices used in the BSRP were all grounded in what is known to work for struggling readers. While it is impossible to know for sure whether the BSRP alone is responsible for the students becoming better readers, the benchmark assessment scores along with teacher perceptions indicate that student participants increased their instructional reading levels and improved in their reading behaviors and motivations. In the next section, I turn to the question of *why* the teachers believed that the intervention had positive impacts on their students.

### **The BSRP Design**

The BSRP was created using what the research says is best practice when creating an intervention program. The classroom teachers were supportive in two major design elements. They believed that the pull-out model and the ongoing assessment throughout the year

contributed to the improvements they saw in both their students' reading self-efficacy and their reading ability.

### **The Pull-out Model was the Right Choice**

The research has yet to show which model of reading intervention, push-in or pull-out, had direct impacts on reading achievement (Allington, 2009; Archambault, 1989) and therefore, the literature does not make specific recommendations as to what model to use when designing a reading intervention (Denton, 2012; Gersten et al., 2009; Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). As described in chapter four, despite the drawbacks often illustrated in the literature, a pull-out model was chosen for the BSRP. Eight of the nine classroom teachers who participated in the interviews reported that the pull-out model was the appropriate choice and worked well within the context. They believed that the pull-out model contributed to the improvements they saw in their BSRP students because the model allowed for a better learning environment and no instructional time was lost.

**Allowed for a better learning environment.** The survey and interview data revealed that the primary reason that teachers were supportive of the small group, pull-out model was because they believed that by delivering reading intervention away from the classroom, a better learning environment was created. Tiered intervention literature asserts that intervention is most effective when the design allows for homogenous small-groups (Gersten et al., 2009). In line with this research, classroom teachers in both the interviews and survey believed that the pull-out design of the BSRP enabled groups to be better matched in terms of student reading level and need because I could create groups of students across many classrooms which, in turn, they believed allowed for the BSRP teacher to deliver more individualized instruction (Shanahan, 2008).

Small group instruction was listed fifteen times (out of 23) as a benefit to the pull-out model. In both the survey and teacher interviews, all classroom teachers used adjectives such as “individualized,” “focused,” and “intensive” when they described the small group instruction they believed the BSRP could provide. They attributed a higher level of differentiation to the fact that the intervention was away from the classroom. Stacey, a third-grade teacher, described her BSRP student’s small group.

*She (BSRP student) is in a small-group with other kids who are at or near her level.*

*There’s not a huge gap between her and the other students that she’s working with- which can happen in a normal classroom model.*

As Stacey suggests, in a push-in model or when teachers are meeting in small groups within their own classrooms, teachers may have to have groups that aren’t matched well, therefore providing instruction that is less individualized. Gabriele, a second-grade teacher, spoke about how difficult it was that one of her four BSRP students was much lower than anyone else in her class. She said:

*If Lauren came into my classroom for intervention, she’d have to take all of my strugglers at the same time or she would have to not meet with some of them or maybe meet with them for less time. It just wouldn’t work. Aileen has very different needs than the other three BSRP students, because Lauren pulls them out, she can arrange it so that Aileen can be with other second graders from another class who are at the same level.*

As Gabriele described, if a basic skills teacher pushed in only once to a classroom, they may have to take the low readers in a class together, not necessarily students who are on the same reading level or have the same reading deficits which would also lead to less individualized instruction.

The teachers also reported that students recognized the benefits to the small group instruction. Leah, a second-grade teacher, believed her students really liked “*working in small groups*” and as Fran explained, “*they want that time with a teacher in an even smaller group.*” One teacher surveyed, wrote that her students “*felt more comfortable asking questions, making mistakes, and participating because they are in a room with just a few other students who also need support.*” Fran, a fourth-grade teacher agreed, “*I think they love working that closely with the teacher. I think it gives them a chance to be heard and to really practice the skills.*”

Teachers also reported that the small group, pull-out model allowed for a learning environment which was more suited for their struggling students, who many of them described as “*easily distracted*”. On the survey, when asked to list the benefits of a pull-out model, half of the twelve teachers noted that the model allowed for students to learn or receive instruction in a setting where there were “*less distractions.*” Similarly, seven of the nine teachers interviewed said that they thought their students needed a quiet environment to learn, which the pull-out model was able to provide. Evelyn, a second-grade teacher, spoke about a previous experience with the push-in model. She said:

*Push-in is just disruptive for everyone. I've had it in the past with ESL instruction and it makes the classroom feel chaotic and loud, which is not good for the students, especially the BSRP students who struggle to focus when there are a lot of distractions.*

Leah, a second-grade teacher not only felt, like Evelyn, that her students would be distracted if they received intervention inside her classroom, but she also felt they would lose the opportunity to get a break and refocus. She said:

*It [the pull-out model] works well because they are getting out of the room. A lot of them have difficulty with attention and it gives them that break to walk there and to walk back.*



*It's helpful to them to get out and to have quiet, if it were to be push-in and Lauren were to come in here there are other kids doing other things and they would be distracted.*

The BSRP was, in the classroom teachers' opinions, a place where students could get small-group, individualized instruction free from the distractions of their classroom.

Children who have difficulty learning to read frequently become frustrated and often times experience emotional distress. There is research to suggest that emotionally positive learning experiences can change children's attitudes and motivate them to learn (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Scharer, et al., 2005). Therefore, it is particularly important that students who are struggling to read are given the opportunity to have positive experiences with reading as they will be more likely to read frequently, become deeply engaged with the text, and have an overall better perception of themselves as readers, which can lead to greater reading achievement (Henk & Melnick, 1995; Lynch, 2002; Scharer et al., 2005). As the goal of the BSRP was to increase reading achievement, it was of the utmost importance that the students had positive associations when they attended the BSRP. One of the drawbacks to a pull-out program such as the BSRP is that students who leave the room for additional support can feel singled out which can have negative impacts on their perception of themselves as readers (Bean, Cooley, Eichelberger, Lazar, & Zigmond, 1991; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). While it cannot be determined exactly how the students felt about going to the BSRP because no students were interviewed in this study, the teachers in both the survey and the interviews made references to how they believed the BSRP created positive reading experiences for their students. Felicia, a fourth-grade teacher, commented on how she believed the students in her classroom felt when they returned from the BSRP.

*Everybody is enthusiastic about it. No kids come back looking upset or discouraged, they come back looking like they just had the best time. So everyone else is like wait, I want to go.*

According to Felicia, not only did her students love going to the BSRP, but the other students in the class were asking to go as well. Third-grade teachers, Christine and Lynn, as well as Fran, a fourth-grade teacher, expressed similar sentiments. Christine said that when the students in her class asked her BSRP students where they were going that they would proudly respond, *“to our extra reading group!”* It seemed, from the teachers’ perspectives, that the students were having positive experiences at the BSRP. This was evidenced by the fact that, Stacey, a third-grade teacher, along with two other teachers, said that her BSRP student frequently *“asked to go to the BSRP more.”*

Teachers also inferred why the students liked the program so much. They believed that the students knew they needed a program like the BSRP because the work they were doing in their classroom was often times too hard. Leah, a second-grade teacher said, *“They enjoy going and they leave the lesson so excited because a lot of things are hard for them.”* Fran also felt that her students enjoy leaving the room because they were able to get a break. *“I look at their faces and those are the kids that know they are having problems and they are looking at the clock and getting ready to go.”*

**Instructional time is not lost.** When students are pulled-out of the classroom for intervention instruction, they often lose valuable reading instruction because it can be difficult for teachers to arrange their schedules and routines to ensure that their students are still a part of the whole class mini lessons and their guided reading groups (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Additionally, the literature also cites that when students come back into the classroom

they can be disruptive which leads to a loss of instructional time because the teacher has to spend time reacclimating the students back to the classroom (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Contrary to the literature, six of the nine teachers interviewed asserted that the pull-out model made it easy for them to be able to ensure that their BSRP students received as they described it, “*double instruction*.” Stacey, a third-grade teacher said:

*Scheduling is really not that bad because Lauren sort of worked with us pretty closely to determine when in our language arts block the kids would be pulled. I usually have at least two reading groups in a day, so I worked out my groups and my minilessons so that I'm meeting with another group when she [her BSRP student] is pulled for the BSRP. So she's not missing the whole group instruction she is just missing a Daily 5 (academic choice) round. I think that that's pretty good because I would prefer her to be in the classroom for the whole group lessons. I think the pull-out model in my classroom is working. So for Kristin, I meet with her in guided reading 3 days a week and she goes to the BSRP 3 days a week, so essentially her instruction is doubled.*

The other five teachers described similar methods to organizing their reading block time when the BSRP students left for instruction. They all believed that it was okay for the students to miss the time when the students would have been completing independent work. Leah, a second-grade teacher with seven students who attended the BSRP, described why she believed it was better to have the students out of the classroom:

*When students are pulled out it helps me to know that they are getting the extra reading instruction they need, instead of just doing independent work in my classroom, which they might not be able to do.*

Leah said that even when she gave the students work that was on their level, because reading was a struggle, the students would often need her help which would disrupt the group she was working with. She said, *“they just need such a high level of support with everything, when they are out of the room at the BSRP it is a better use of their time.”*

The classroom teachers also spoke about how their students were able to quickly transition back to their classroom routine when they returned from the BSRP. Christine described her students as being able to just *“slide back in.”* Evelyn, a third-grade teacher said,

*“They aren’t disruptive at all when they come back from the BSRP. Usually I either have something waiting for them on their desk or they come right to my guided reading table. On those days they get two reading groups in one day, that is really great.”*

It wasn’t only the concept of *“double instruction”* that the teachers said helped their students to make reading progress; teachers also believed that a better learning environment was created when the instruction was away from the classroom.

### **Assessment is Cyclical**

Assessment is an essential component of a tiered intervention program such as the BSRP (Denton, 2012; Grambrell & Mazoni, 1999; Gersten et al., 2009, Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). It was this cyclical nature of assessment that teachers said was a strength of the program. As described in the previous chapter, the BSRP employed universal screening to initially identify students for the program. Teachers were unanimous in their support for the identification system. Eighty three percent of the teachers surveyed “agreed” with the statement “The identification process for the BSRP accurately identified students in need of reading support,” and the remaining 17% “strongly agreed.” In the interviews, one teacher said, *“I think they were identified well,”* while another teacher commented on the ease of the process and effectiveness

of the primary benchmark used to assess all students, *“It is an easy, simple way in the beginning of the year, an F&P assessment...it becomes pretty evident who needs extra help.”*

At the end of each trimester of instruction, the initial assessments were given again to monitor the progress of the students. Evelyn, a second-grade teacher with three BSRP students, described the importance of assessment:

*She (Lauren) reevaluates every semester to see if somebody needs to be exited or if there is a need to add somebody else. This is really important because not all students will need the support all year.*

The teachers knew that, as Evelyn said, students could move in and out of the BSRP as needed. In fact, at the end of the first trimester of instruction, five students were exited from the program, and three new students were entered.

Fran described an instance in where a student who was originally excluded from the BSRP entered the program during the second round of screening.

*Eleanor is one of those kids that does everything right, she reads and she really works hard and I think I kept on thinking that maybe she'll come along and maybe she'll progress because she does all the work. I have her in a small group and so thought well what is it? Why isn't she moving ahead? She was one of those kids that moved only one level but that's not what we expected of her and so, when we administered the benchmark assessments again, she was identified and accepted into the BSRP so she could get that little extra push.*

Some students like Eleanor, needed more support as the school year progressed, others needed the BSRP for a short period of time, while others needed the support for the entire school year. The system of assessment for the BSRP was designed to be flexible to the ever-changing needs

of the students. The classroom teachers felt confident that even if a student was not originally identified for the program, if they were still struggling they would be able to get support from the BSRP later on in the year.

## **Conclusion**

Formative evaluation gives the evaluator an early picture of how well the program is doing in terms of moving towards the intended outcomes (Patton, 2008). By engaging the classroom teachers in the evaluation process, I was able to see aspects of the implementation of the BSRP through their eyes. It was clear that the classroom teachers believed that the BSRP was making strides in improving their students' reading ability. They attributed these gains specifically to the model of instruction, which was to deliver reading intervention in small groups and in a setting separate from their regular classroom. Additionally, they believed that the assessment system put into place not only identified the right students for the program, but ensured that students who were still struggling throughout the school year would have access to the program as well. The next chapter will discuss the findings from both chapters four and five and explore what these findings suggest for making specific improvements to the BSRP.

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS**

The pressure to increase the reading achievement of our youngest students is on the rise. Given the fact that third grade reading achievement is predictive of students' ongoing academic success (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Hernandez, 2011; Torgeson, 2002), elementary school teachers are faced with the challenging task of ensuring that their students have the foundational skills necessary to become effective readers. Vaughn and Denton (2008) assert that while most students will respond well to effective classroom instruction, 20-30% of students will require additional instruction. Therefore, schools need to be prepared to provide supplemental interventions to students who are struggling to learn to read.

This study documents the implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) designed to provide additional support to struggling readers in second through fifth. The previous two chapters described the design of the BSRP as well as the successes and challenges during the implementation of the program. In this chapter, I explore the implications for improving the BSRP moving forward. Using my own experience as the BSRP teacher as well as the voices of the classroom teachers, I seek to offer suggestions as to how we might not only improve the BSRP within the school, but also how our school might take a broader approach to intervention as we continue to try and address the reading achievement gap. I begin with a summary of the research design before examining the two main findings of this study in relation to the research base. The chapter concludes with implications for programmatic improvement.

### **Research Summary**

My research questions sought to examine what happened throughout the implementation of the BSRP. A utilization-focused implementation (Patton, 2008) study was developed to assure that the findings would help to inform program improvements moving forward. To

collect information on the BSRP in action, I documented my daily experiences as the BSRP instructor in my researcher journal. Each day, detailed notes were made regarding the successes and challenges as I identified students for the program, created groupings, and a schedule. Data collection continued throughout the first six months of instruction. To gain a broader perspective of the implementation of the BSRP as well as to obtain a preliminary understanding of how the program might be impacting student participants, nine classroom teachers were interviewed. Additionally, twelve classroom teachers participated in an anonymous, online survey. Both the interviews and surveys examined how the teachers described the strengths and weaknesses of the BSRP throughout the implementation period as well as the perceived changes they saw in their students throughout their participation in the BSRP.

Data were analyzed in several steps. First, drawing on the literature and my theoretical framework, the data from my researcher journal and other BSRP documents was coded deductively into different categories such as “program components,” “scheduling,” “pull-out,” “resources,” and “communication.” Looking across the codes, bigger themes within the data were identified (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Then, the themes were used to create a description of the development of the BSRP. Additionally, I detailed my experiences as the instructor of the BSRP throughout the implementation period and described the factors that mediated the implementation of the program. Next, drawing on the research questions, I looked across several sources (teacher survey, teacher interviews, and student benchmarks) and inductively coded the data into categories which included, “increased confidence,” “more strategic readers,” and “benefits to a pull-out model.” Lastly, patterns were identified to describe the changes teachers saw in their students throughout their participation in the BSRP as well as the elements of the BSRP that teachers believed led to the changes they saw.



Several steps were taken to ensure validity of my findings. First, multiple data sources were used to triangulate the data, helping to provide justification for the themes and a deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009). Member checks were engaged throughout the course of the study to rule out the possibility of misinterpretation of the teachers' responses in the interviews (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, members of my dissertation support group served as peer reviewers to challenge and support my assumptions helping to reduce the bias in my study (Merriam, 2009).

### **Findings**

Data analysis led to two key findings. The first of these findings was that in its inaugural year, the BSRP made strides toward addressing the main goals of the program. At-risk students were identified and provided with additional reading support in the hopes of improving their reading ability. Additionally, in line with previous research, the findings of this study illustrated how contextual factors mediated the implementation of the BSRP. In what follows, I discuss these findings in relation to other research studies.

#### **Progress was Made: Improvements to Reading Achievement**

The purpose of a tiered intervention program such as the BSRP is to identify students who are at-risk for reading failure and provide research-supported interventions linked to individual needs (Askew et al., 2002; Barnes & Harlacker, 2008; Vaughn & Denton, 2008; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012; Wanzek et al., 2016). Research on tiered reading interventions has shown that students who receive supplemental reading instruction make overall improvements in reading outcomes (Jaeger, 2006; Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, & Anthony, 2005; O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, & Bell, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2009; Vellutino et al., 1996; Wanzek et al., 2015).

The findings of this study suggest similar outcomes for the participants in the BSRP. These positive findings were manifested in two ways: teacher reports and improved reading scores.

The data from the teacher survey and interviews indicated that teachers perceived the BSRP to have an impact on their students' reading self-efficacy. Eighty-four percent of the teachers surveyed and 100% of the teachers interviewed indicated that their students exhibited increased confidence in themselves as readers after attending the BSRP. As previous research has documented (Bandura, 1986; Henks & Pelnick, 1995; Lynch, 2002; Scharer et al., 2005; Schunk, 2003) improved self-efficacy in reading is evidenced by a variety of behaviors. The first of these behaviors is increased participation during lessons. Additionally, these studies found that when students had increased confidence in their ability, they persevered through challenging tasks and began to independently use reading strategies during reading. Teachers in this study reported similar changes within their students throughout their participation in the BSRP.

In a recent meta-analysis, Wanzek et al., (2016) found that Tier 2 reading interventions yielded positive effects on foundational reading skills such as decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension. In line with these findings, seven of the nine teachers interviewed described marked improvement in some of their BSRP students in these three areas. The classroom teachers reported that their BSRP students began to use a variety of strategies to solve unknown words in the text while reading. Additionally, they spoke about improvements in their students' oral fluency and mentioned specifically that their students now attended to punctuation and read with appropriate phrasing. Lastly, teachers said that during book discussions, which were used to informally assess their comprehension of text, their BSRP students were now able to find evidence in the text to support their claims and thoughts.

Although the research base is still relatively unclear as to what specific features of a tier 2 intervention may be associated with improved outcomes (Wanzek et al., 2016), this study seems to suggest that there were certain aspects of the program that helped students achieve. The teachers attributed two specific design elements of the program, small group size and the pull-out model, as helping their students to be more successful readers. This study found, as previous research has shown, that the use of small, homogenous groupings allowed for a high level of differentiated instruction (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Condrón, 2008; Gersten et al., 2009; Morrow et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). Teachers believed that by having four or less students with similar reading needs and levels, I was able to use materials at an appropriate level, teach at a pace which matched the group members, and provide instruction based on individual needs. Additionally, echoing the findings of Woodward & Talbert-Johnson (2009), the teachers believed providing instruction away from the classroom allowed struggling students the opportunity to participate more fully in a small group with peers at similar literacy levels. Teachers also described the separated instruction as beneficial because of less distractions than their regular education classrooms.

Echoing the findings of Jaeger's (2016) study of tier 2 reading intervention programs, the benchmark assessment scores seemed to confirm the teacher reports of improved reading ability. The Fountas and Pinnell reading benchmark allows teachers to find an instructional reading level for students. An increase in the instructional reading level indicates that a student made improvements in either their reading accuracy and reading comprehension, or a combination of the two. The achievement gap was fully closed for ten of the original 48 BSRP students, meaning that these students met grade-level expectations and were exited from the program. The remaining 38 students saw improvements ranging from one to eight levels, however, at the end

of the second trimester of instruction these students were still reading below grade-level expectations. Of these 38 BSRP students, 79% (38 students) saw an increase of 3 or more levels over the first two trimesters. In line with previous research (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007), the range in improvements indicates that while some students made marked improvements, the progress of others was slower. Of the remaining fifteen students, 13 improved by two levels.

Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (2008) predict that 6% to 8% of the general population will require special education services in terms of reading. In the cases of both Liviana and Ava, (described in more detail in the previous chapter) their teachers believed that their student did not respond to the additional instruction because they were struggling with an undiagnosed reading disability. While this might seem like a logical explanation for the lack of response other researchers argue that some students who have been labeled as learning disabled may not, in fact, be disabled but rather are a product of limited exposure to reading readiness activities and/or inadequate schooling (Clay, 1987; McLaughlin, 2006; Vellutino et al., 1996). The fact these two students were in third and fourth grade and had not previous received any reading intervention is concerning and might also explain their limited progress.

Due to the design of the study, I cannot say definitively that the BSRP alone contributed to these mainly positive results. Since the study was qualitative in nature and did not employ an experimental design, there is no way to know if the students would have made the same amount of progress if they did not attend the BSRP. Additionally, the study did not control for other factors such as differences in the instruction or expertise and experience of the students' classroom teachers or the support the students may or may not have been receiving outside of school from parents or other tutoring. However, given the fact that the BSRP was designed and

implemented based on documented effective reading interventions and that most student benchmark scores increased and teachers reported observed improvements, in their students reading behaviors, it seems likely that the BSRP contributed to these positive outcomes.

### **Contextual Factors Affecting Program Implementation**

A number of studies on school reform have established that there are many contextual factors that influence the implementation of any new initiative (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon, Nicotera, Veeh, 2006; Century & Cassata, 2016; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Domitrovich et al., 2008; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman, et al., 2009; Fullan, 2007; Mendenhall, Iachini, Anderson-Butcher, 2013). Some of these contextual factors include how well the intervention fits with the priorities of the school and the buy-in among stakeholders (Anyon et al., 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2013). Others include the amount of resources set aside to deliver the program such as time for staff to communicate, the amount of staff allocated for the program, and other resources necessary for the program to run effectively (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon et al., 2006; Domitrovich et al., 2008; Mendenhall et al., 2013). This study was no different in that several contextual factors influenced the implementation of the BSRP. On the one hand, the compatibility and adaptability of the BSRP facilitated the successful adoption and implementation of the program. On the other hand, a lack of resources and the pressure of time made it hard for the program to continue to be successful.

**A compatible and adaptable program.** Two characteristics of an innovation which have been found to contribute to higher levels of implementation is the program's compatibility and adaptability (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Compatibility refers to how the intervention fits with the school's current priorities and contextual appropriateness. A program is adaptable when it is

able to change from its original design to meet the needs of the context. The BSRP had both of these attributes.

As a teacher in the school for nearly a decade, I made a conscious effort to develop a program that matched the goals of the school and fit into the existing routines and structures of the school. Having inside knowledge of the school's student population and needs, administration, teachers, and schedule allowed me to create a program which was compatible with the context in two ways.

The first of these ways was that the program matched the current priorities of the school. As all elementary schools, Riverside Elementary's main priority is to ensure that their students are given the opportunity to achieve. However, each year reading benchmark scores indicated that there were far too many students reading below grade-level. Additionally, for the past several years, there was no intervention provided to students who were not reading at grade-level. One third-grade teacher said:

*Having a basic skills program for reading is so important. We (classroom teachers) can't reach all of our students alone, especially our strugglers. This program is just what our school has been missing for many years.*

Not only was this program designed to help Riverside meet its goal of improved reading achievement, the teachers believed the program was necessary. The match between the intervention and the school's mission and goals was important because this type of compatibility can lead to higher levels of implementation (Anyon et al., 2016).

The second way in which the program was compatible with the local context was that the program seemed to fit in well with the existing routines and practices of the classroom teachers (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon et al., 2026; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). The pull-out design

was utilized because I knew I would be able to provide services to more students because I could take students from several different classrooms at a time. Additionally, teachers were told by the principal that they were still responsible for delivering whole-group and small-group instruction to their BSRP students as the BSRP was intended to be a supplement to their regular instruction not a replacement. Therefore, when I created the BSRP schedule, I tried to pull most students out during times when I knew students would not miss whole class or small-group reading time. Christine, a third-grade teacher said:

*Once we had the schedule for the BSRP, I rearranged the times I met with my BSRP students in their guided reading groups. I also made sure that my whole-group mini-lesson wasn't during a time when they left the room. It really wasn't hard to do.*

Comments similar to Christine's were made by other teachers as they reflected on the ease in which they could fit the BSRP students' schedules into their own classroom routines.

While some reform designers believe in the importance of implementation fidelity, other implementation studies have shown stronger implementation when the providers make adaptations to the original design in response to the context (Anyon et al., 2016; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002; Rogers, 2003).

The BSRP was designed using what is known in the literature regarding best practice for tiered intervention programs (Allington, 2009; Bean, 2004; Fuchs et al., 2008; Gersten et al., 2009; Sailor, 2009). Building off the recommendations from the Institute of Educational Science's (IES) practice guide for reading intervention (Gersten et al., 2009), I set lofty goals for the BSRP in terms of who would qualify for the BSRP and how frequently they would receive services. I wanted to be able to provide all students in grades two through five who were reading below grade level some level of support. However, after the initial two rounds of the

identification process revealed too many students for one teacher to service, adjustments had to be made. Therefore, the requirement for acceptance was changed from all students who did not meet grade-level reading expectations, to students who were reading 2 levels or more below grade-level. Additionally, it was originally planned to have 40-minute instructional periods for each group. However, due to the inflexibility of the school's master schedule, the meeting times were reduced to 30-minute sessions, which allowed me to see each group two or three times a week.

The design of the BSRP allowed for the program to not only fit within the context but was also easily adapted to the local needs once implementation began. Although these two qualities of the program contributed to the success of the implementation, there were other challenges that were not so easy to address.

**Resources and Time.** Previous research has found that implementation quality is lessened when there is a lack of resources and time (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Anyon et al., 2016; Collinson & Cook, 2000; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Mendenhall et al., 2010) and in the BSRP this was no different. In terms of resources, the BSRP was well equipped with educational materials and space to provide small-group instruction to four grade levels. However, the lack of staff dedicated to providing school-wide intervention was an issue right from the start. As described in the previous section, the requirement for acceptance into the BSRP was adapted because during the identification process it quickly became apparent that one teacher could not service all below grade level readers across four grade levels. However, even when the requirements for acceptance to the BSRP were changed from all students reading below grade-level, to just the students who fell into the category of "*far below grade-level*," the master schedule did not allow for one teacher to meet with these students two to three times a week for



40 minutes as was the original plan. Therefore, reductions to instructional time I met with groups of children and the amount of weekly meetings had to be made. Although I would have liked more time with the students, the amount of weekly instructional time that students received was still in line with the IES practice guide for tiered intervention (Gersten et al., 2009).

Classroom teachers agreed. When asked what improvements need to be made to the BSRP for the future, seven of the nine teachers interviewed spoke about the need for additional staff for the BSRP. Stacey, a third-grade teacher reported:

*There is one student who I really feel like needs it but unfortunately because this student is ESL he doesn't qualify for the program. But could certainly benefit from extra reading instruction. If there were more teachers maybe we'd be able to help the ESL population as well.*

Fourth-grade teacher, Melissa said:

*The program needs to be expanded. I think there should be one teacher for the lower grades and one for fourth and fifth. This way my students could attend the BSRP more than just two days a week. Even though it was great we at least had a program, to really make an impact the students need to go more.*

Classroom teachers believed that having an additional BSRP staff member would allow for a wider range of students to be accepted into the program and for the students to receive services more frequently.

Once instruction began the pressure of time was a salient issue that could not easily be solved. From my perspective as the BSRP teacher, it felt like there were constant impacts to the already reduced instructional time I had with the students. Students coming late, fire drills,

assemblies, and days off from school were a just a few issues not within my control that reduced instructional time.

From the classroom teachers' perspectives, time constraints made communication difficult since my schedule was dedicated primarily to instruction. Initially, my preparatory time was not the same as the classrooms teachers at any grade-level and I only shared a lunch period with the third-grade team. Therefore, when teachers wanted to know more about the instruction their students were receiving or their progress they had to rely on email or spontaneous and impromptu meetings in the teachers' lounge, hallway, and before or after school. Seventy-seven percent of classroom teachers spoke about wanting to know what their students were doing during their BSRP lessons. The teachers wanted to know what reading level their students were on, what strategies they were working on, and what the students were still struggling with. Additionally, I wanted to know more about what was happening in their classrooms so that there would be a higher level of continuity between the instruction the students were receiving in their classrooms and in the BSRP. Additionally, there was not enough time to speak to teachers about the progress, or lack of progress, they were seeing in their students.

### **Summary**

While a lack of time and resources caused some challenges, the first year of the BSRP had a successful start. The program's design fit nicely within the context of the school and was flexible enough to adapt to local circumstances. Most notable was the impact that classroom teachers reported to have seen in their students. Not only did they believe that their students were more confident readers, they reported marked improvements to their students' foundational reading skills. While the findings suggest that adapted design of the BSRP was achieving its aim

of improved reading achievement, they also imply that there is room to make changes to strengthen and improve the program's effectiveness.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

Full implementation of a new change initiative is not a one-time event but rather a process that often requires two to four years (Fixsen et al., 2005). It is during these years that a school must strive to achieve sustained implementation, defined by Han & Weiss (2005) as the continued use of a program with adequate fidelity and positive student outcomes. The findings of this study would suggest four implications for ensuring that the program is improved and can be sustained in future years as well as informing the implementation of similar programs in other schools. The first of these is to develop stronger methods of communication between the classroom teachers and the BSRP teacher. The second is to consider expanding the role of the BSRP teacher to one that provides professional development to teachers along with instruction to students. A third implication is that stronger intervention services are provided at the primary grades and not the higher elementary grades. Finally, the lessons learned from this study provide suggestions for teacher leaders in other schools who are leading similar change efforts.

### **Putting Structures in Place for Stronger Communication**

Students who struggle benefit from having extra time to master the developmental material of the regular education classroom (Allington, 2008; Borman, Wong, Hedges, & D'Agostino, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial that teachers are given the opportunity to share information regarding instruction in the general education classroom and in the pull-out program. However, as other studies have shown, there is often a lack of integration between the instruction delivered in the intervention setting and what takes place in the classroom (Bean, 2004; Ogel & Fogelberg, 2001; Quatroche et al., 2001; Shanahan, 2008; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009)

because it is often difficult for both specialist and general education teachers to find time to effectively communicate. Allington and Johnston (1987) have coined the term *shared knowledge* to describe when there is coherence and balance between classroom instruction and the instruction taking place in the intervention setting. In the case of the BSRP there was a clear gap in shared knowledge. Additionally, there was also very little time for teachers to communicate student progress, which is important because when schools set aside time to discuss progress, achievement tends to increase (Allington, 2009). Therefore, it is important that structures be put in place to increase the opportunity for communication between the reading specialist and the classroom teachers (Allington, 2009; Bean, 2004; Ogel & Fogelberg, 2001). To engage as many teachers as possible, communication with classroom teachers should take place in different ways.

The first of these ways is to increase the amount of written communication throughout the year regarding student progress. After the initial benchmark assessments were completed in the fall of 2015, I wrote a paragraph, that I shared with the classroom teachers, describing the reading behaviors of each student in their classroom that were observed during the assessment. However, throughout the rest of the year, there was an absence of purposeful, planned for written communication.

To address this issue, a Google document for each student was created and shared with the classroom teachers in the next year of the program. The document is updated every other week, or more frequently, to inform each teacher of the specific strategies which have been taught and descriptive information as to how their student is responding to the instruction. The shared student document has been well received by the teachers as many have expressed to me how helpful it has been to receive updated information on student progress. In addition, a few

classroom teachers have written their own comments that has allowed me to better understand how the student is performing in their regular education setting.

Whilst the shared document has been well received by teachers, not all teachers have actively read and engaged with the Google document as frequently as I would like. Therefore, utilizing the times when teachers meet naturally such as grade-level team meetings and preparatory times would allow for more in-person discussions between the classroom teachers and the BSRP teacher. Currently, at Riverside Elementary School, grade-level team meetings occur weekly. This weekly meeting would be an appropriate venue for conversations to take place regarding student progress. Additionally, because the teachers use this time to discuss curriculum and plan instructional units it also provides an appropriate space for the BSRP teacher to gain a deeper understanding of the core curriculum at each grade level as well as to share what is being taught in the intervention lessons. To follow up on the work being done during grade level team meetings, the BSRP teacher's schedule should be developed in a way that allows for common preparatory time with the grade levels that are being serviced. Allowing for the BSRP teacher to have common preparatory times would provide daily opportunities for the BSRP teacher to plan lessons together and discuss student progress with the classroom teachers.

### **Rethinking the Role of the BSRP Teacher**

Putting structures in place for teachers to communicate is a first step in improving the BSRP moving forward. However, it is also important to go beyond simply sharing information with the classroom teachers to sharing expertise. The initial design of the BSRP focused on providing struggling readers with instruction beyond what their classroom teachers were able to provide. As recommended by tiered intervention literature, a highly qualified reading teacher

was appointed as the BSRP instructor. Additionally, the program utilized a pull-out program which meant that students received their intervention away from the classroom. These two design elements placed most of the emphasis on the BSRP teacher as being expert in providing instruction to remediate reading problems, not necessarily with the classroom teachers. In fact, as a reading specialist and the BSRP teacher, classroom teachers saw me as having valuable knowledge and expertise as to how to help their students succeed. Felicia, a first-year teacher, said:

*I know that she knows a lot more strategies than I do, and she has this kind of wealth of knowledge that I'd like some of that so I can make sure I'm supporting them in the same way.*

Additionally, experienced teachers like Evelyn who has been teaching for over 15 years said:

*I feel Lauren has more expertise as to noticing what exactly it is that the students need. So then when we talk about those students, she can help me to know exactly what to work on.*

As previous research has found, the classroom teachers not only viewed me as expert in reading instruction but as an important resource to helping them strengthen their own practice (Swan & Knaub, 2003). They were not only interested in knowing more about *what* I was teaching but also *how* I delivered my instruction. Stacey, a third-grade teacher with three years of experience said:

*Sometimes I don't really know if I'm doing the right thing with my struggling readers. So, I would love to be able to just sit and watch her (BSRP teacher) in action. Then I could take notes and ask questions either immediately after or while it is fresh in my*

*brain and I think that would be really useful in helping me to strengthen my own instruction.*

Teachers wanted to learn research-based practices for working with struggling readers.

Furthermore, they wanted to see these strategies in action.

Therefore, I suggest that the role of the BSRP teacher be redesigned in two ways. The first of these role shifts is to consider moving from an interventionist who takes struggling students away from their regular education classroom, to placing the BSRP teacher inside general education classrooms. The BSRP teacher would provide small-group intervention lessons during the same time that the general education teacher is meeting with guided reading groups. During the times when the BSRP teacher pushes into the classroom s/he could also be using this opportunity to observe BSRP students in their own classroom environments. In this way, the BSRP teacher would be better able to provide lessons that are focused not only on individual needs but also on reinforcing the skills and strategies being taught in the general education curriculum.

Providing small-group intervention to students in their regular classrooms would also allow for the BSRP teacher and classroom teacher to have a more collaborative relationship. The BSRP teacher would be able to better understand the reading curriculum and the struggles the students might be having. Additionally, pushing into classrooms would allow for the BSRP teacher and the classroom teachers to communicate more frequently about instructional practices, curriculum, and student progress.

The second role shift would be to expand the role of the BSRP teacher from solely an instructional role to one that is also responsible for developing and delivering professional development (PD) (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002; Quatroche, Bean, &

Hamilton, 2001). In a professional development role, the BSRP teacher could model research-based intervention lessons for classroom teachers within their own classrooms. By embedding professional development (PD) into a teacher's setting, it is more likely that teachers will implement the strategies into their own practice (Bean, 2004). In addition to working with teachers in their classroom, additional professional development could be held during meetings of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) which are held twice a month. To inform the content of the professional development I would begin by developing a needs assessment (Silberman, 2006) to understand what teachers say they want to learn in terms of instructional strategies for their struggling readers. Transforming the role of the BSRP teacher to a dual-role of resource to both the students and the teachers is an important step in improving Tier One (classroom) reading instruction. When the core reading instruction is improved, the number of students who require supplemental instruction will hopefully be reduced (Taylor, 2008).

### **The Importance of Intervening Earlier**

The research is clear as to how crucial it is to identify students at-risk for reading failure at an early age and provide these students with effective, evidence-based reading intervention. Longitudinal studies show that students who have not acquired average-level reading skills by the end of first grade almost never close the gap in reading achievement by the end of elementary school (Juel, 1988; Shaywitz et al., 1999; Torgeson & Burgess, 1998). Additionally, several studies which examined intervention programs implemented for students who have low response rates to previous interventions (Beringer et al., 2002; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Vaughn et al., 2009; Velluntino et al., 1996) found that even when the additional interventions offered increased intensity or changed the focus of the intervention, often times students continued to struggle significantly in reading. Given the fact that the BSRP was



developed for struggling readers in grades two through five, students at Riverside were advancing to the middle and upper elementary years without the skills needed to read proficiently. Therefore, it would seem a better use of resources if the district were to provide more intervention at an earlier age.

To achieve the goal of intervening earlier and taking a more preventative approach, Riverside Elementary should join forces with the primary school within the district, which services pre-kindergarten through first grades, to more closely align our basic skills programs. This alignment might include using common screening processes for the identification of at-risk students across both schools. The use of common assessment tools will allow longitudinal records of student progress to be kept. These records can be used to identify low and non-responders and provide more intensive supports to those students in the hopes of reducing the number of students who may need supports in the upper grades.

Providing more intensive supports for our youngest students may require that the two schools, the primary school and Riverside Elementary consider utilizing the two basic skills reading teachers in kindergarten through grades two. Currently, the primary school's basic skills teacher serves kindergarten and first grade while Riverside's BSRP teacher serves grades two through five. Utilizing the two teachers in the district in the 1<sup>st</sup> three grade levels, will allow for students to be provided with an increase in the duration and intensity of the reading support in the grades where we know intervention is more effective.

Since the conclusion of this study, small strides have been made to improve the BSRP to create lasting change. After a year of lobbying to have the BSRP focus on our youngest students and despite opposition from the Language Arts Supervisor, I have been assigned this year to work with only second and third grades reducing my caseload from an average of 50 students to

30. With this number of students, I can now meet with groups of three students for 30 minutes, five days a week. My next steps will be to set up monthly meeting times with the basic skills teacher at the primary school to discuss the needs of the students and the instructional strategies being taught.

### **Suggestions for Teacher Leaders**

Over the last the last three decades, teacher leadership roles within schools have been utilized to decentralize authority and give teachers a voice in shared decision-making at the school level (Fullan, 2007; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). However, recently, teacher leader roles have been less focused on managerial tasks and instead have placed teachers at the forefront of school improvement initiatives (Bean, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Over the last ten years, I have worked hard to establish myself as a teacher leader. Due to my years of experience, reading specialist certification, and my active role in leading professional development, I seemed the logical choice to lead the design and enactment of the BSRP. However, all of my work as a teacher leader had been focused on literacy instruction and not on leading change beyond my classroom. Throughout my first year as a the BSRP teacher, I learned two valuable lessons which I would like to share with other teacher leaders who are involved in spearheading school-wide reading intervention initiatives.

The first of these lessons is that not everything will go according to plan. I learned that it is important to take the time to understand your context and develop a program that is able to change to meet the needs of the school. One way to understand the context better is to develop strong communication between all stakeholders, particularly teachers and school administrators. By communicating with key stakeholders regularly, the teacher leader is able to learn about

unforeseen issues that might come up during implementation. This information then allows the teacher leader to make on-the-spot improvements to the program.

The second lesson that other teacher leaders might find helpful is the importance of taking a school-wide approach to reading intervention. The struggles I experienced with not having time to communicate with classroom teachers along with the fact that the BSRP was a pull-out program meant that the instruction in the BSRP was separate from the general education curricula. This lack of integration between the BSRP and classroom instruction was problematic given that many of the classroom teachers interviewed reported that they did not always know how to instruct their struggling students. To take a broader approach to intervention, schools should work towards strengthening the collaboration and coordination between the classroom program and the intervention program staff (Shanahan, 2008). This would require ensuring that all classroom teachers are trained in research-based strategies for teaching struggling readers as well as ensuring that classrooms are equipped with the necessary materials to provide at-risk students with texts and materials that are matched to their levels. By strengthening Tier One, the instruction provided within the general education setting, intervention can happen throughout the day and not just during the times students are taken out of the classroom for specialized instruction.

### **Moving Towards Sustainability**

This study drew upon Fullan's (2007) theory of change which asserts that for a change initiative to be successful, school leaders must engage in three steps: initiation, implementation, and continuation, or sustaining the change. The BSRP was initiated in response to underperformance in reading and a lack of reading support in the school. During the initiation phase, a research-based intervention was designed to meet the needs of the school. Throughout

the implementation of the BSRP, there were many successes and some challenges.

Understanding the challenges, enabled me to be able to identify areas of improvement which are critical to moving the BSRP into the last phase of change; sustaining the initiative.

Sustainability should be a focus from the day a project is implemented (Adelman & Taylor, 2003). As Adelman and Taylor (2003) suggest, sustainability can also be viewed in terms of institutionalizing system changes. Institutionalization is not simply just continuing the program but developing practices that become a long-lasting part of the community (Kramer, 2002). The long-term goal of the BSRP is to reduce the number of students who are not meeting grade level expectations in reading. As the findings of this study suggest, while the implementation of the BSRP in the first year was, in general, a success, more can be done to help improve the program to ensure continued positive effects and sustained change. It is the hope that by putting structures in place for multiple modes of communication amongst teachers and by placing the BSRP teacher inside the classrooms, the teachers will strengthen their ability to instruct struggling readers. Therefore, at-risk students will not only receive intervention during their time in the BSRP but throughout their day. By improving the tier one classroom instruction, it is expected that fewer students will be referred to the BSRP over time. Additionally, by using the resources within the district to provide our youngest students with intensive supports, there should be fewer instances of students reading far below grade level expectations in the upper elementary grades.

To make these recommendations a reality, a greater commitment from the administration will be necessary. To start, hiring an additional BSRP teacher should be considered. Increasing the basic skills reading staff will enable the district to provide more services in the younger grades without taking the support away from the upper elementary grades, where it is still

needed. Additional staff will also allow for a decrease in caseload and more opportunity to create a schedule which allows for the BSRP teacher to attend grade-level meetings and have common preparatory times with the classroom teachers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As this is a study of one BSRP in one school, this study is limited in several ways. The first of these limitations is a result of my role as a teacher researcher. I acknowledge that my dual role as teacher and researcher might have created a personal bias about the success of the program. I spent a lot of time developing and implementing a research-based program that I wanted to be successful. The better the program was seen and shown to be successful the more beneficial to me in terms of receiving continued support from the administration. It is possible that this bias may have impacted my interpretation of the data. I tried to minimize potential bias with the use of triangulation, peer review, and self-reflexivity.

In addition, because I was both the BSRP teacher while simultaneously collecting data on the program, I was not able to observe classroom teachers and students as they experienced the implementation of the BSRP. These observations would have permitted me to be able to see how the schedule was working for the students as well as how they were functioning in their general education classroom. Given I am continuing as the BSRP instructor for a second year, I would like to hire an external evaluator to increase the validity and credibility of future studies.

Additional research should take place in the third or fourth year of the BSRP once the program is running efficiently. To understand more fully the impact of the BSRP, future research should take the form of an evaluation that focuses not only on implementation but also the outcomes of the program. Quantitative studies should be designed to study the impact of the BSRP allowing for the control of mediating factors on the program such as individual teacher

differences, time in intervention, and group size. Additionally, a longitudinal study should be developed to track BSRP students' progress throughout their time in the program and to keep track of students who might have been exited from the program. It would be important to know if the students who have reached grade level while receiving additional reading instruction are able to continue to keep up with grade level demands in reading.

### **Conclusion**

The inaugural year for the BSRP provided a successful starting point for addressing the reading achievement gap within the school. The findings of this study have yielded some positive changes however, as one second-grade teacher stated, "*we need to do more if we really want to make a big impact.*" Transforming the BSRP into a program in which there are strong supports in place for a high level of communication and collaboration between teachers, highly effective Tier 1 instruction, and a focus on early intervention will take commitment from the administration. I will continue to use data to inform my practice and I am confident that the findings of this study will be used to ensure that all students are taught the skills they need to be successful readers.

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**Appendix A****TEACHER CONSENT FORM****SURVEY**

**Title of the Study:** Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program: A Mixed Methods Study

**Principal Investigator:** Lauren Opiela (609-468-3399), email: lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu)

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in an evaluation study of the Basic Skills Reading Program. The purpose of this study is to understand what happens when I implement a basic skills reading program (BSRP). I am interested in evaluating the BSRP to help make informed decisions regarding the improvement of the program for next year. You have been asked to participate because you are a teacher with students enrolled in the BSRP.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a survey that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey will take place during the month of March.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

There is no risk to you as a participant in this study. All data collected will be secured on a password protected computer file and pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity. I will not share any identified data with anyone.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes any additional training you have received in literacy instruction. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location on a password protected computer.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years. While there may be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in this study, I would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow me to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

### **RISKS & BENEFITS**

I do not anticipate any risks in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. However, results from this study will help the district to improve the BSRP.

### **WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact the principal investigator Lauren Opiela 5816 Fox Run Drive Plainsboro, NJ 08536, [lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu), or at (609)468-3399. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Sharon Ryan at 10 Seminary Pl. New Brunswick, NJ 08901, [sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu), or at (848)932-8080.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey

Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200

335 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Phone: 732-235-9806

Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in this research study \_\_\_\_\_ Initial

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**TEACHER CONSENT FORM****INTERVIEW**

**Title of the Study:** Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program: A Mixed Methods Study

**Principal Investigator:** Lauren Opiela (609-468-3399), email: lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu)

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in an evaluation study of the Basic Skills Reading Program. The purpose of this study is to understand what happens when I implement a basic skills reading program (BSRP). I am interested in evaluating the BSRP to help make informed decisions regarding the improvement of the program for next year. You have been asked to participate because you are a teacher with students enrolled in the BSRP.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in a person-to-person interview regarding the implementation of the BSRP as well as to tell more about the students that attend. The interview will take place during the month of March. The interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted by a peer student. The interview was designed to take approximately 45-60 minutes.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

There is no risk to you as a participant in this study. All data collected will be secured on a password protected computer file and pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity. I will not share any identified data with anyone.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes any additional training you have received in literacy instruction. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location on a password protected computer.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years. While there may be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in this study, I would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow me to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

### **RISKS & BENEFITS**

I do not anticipate any risks in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. However, results from this study will help the district to improve the BSRP.

### **WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact the principal investigator Lauren Opiela 5816 Fox Run Drive Plainsboro, NJ 08536, [lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu), or at (609)468-3399. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Sharon Ryan at 10 Seminary Pl. New Brunswick, NJ 08901, [sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu), or at (848)932-8080.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey

Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200

335 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Phone: 732-235-9806

Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in this research study \_\_\_\_\_ Initial

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_ Initial

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

\_\_\_\_\_ Initial

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be audio-recorded during the interview. \_\_\_\_\_ Initial

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix B****PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

**Title of the Study:** The Implementation of a Basic Skills Reading Program: A Mixed Methods Study

**Principal Investigator:** Lauren Opiela (phone: (609) 468-3399, email: lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu)

I am excited to inform you about a research project that will be taking place at your child's school this year. I am examining the implementation of the Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) and am specifically interested in understanding more about reading skills of students in grades two through five. Your child's basic skills group has been chosen to be part of the project.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

The purpose of the research is to learn about the reading ability of students in the BSRP, specifically to understand if students' comprehension scores and word identification ability change after being in the program.

As I am the BSRP instructor, part of my job is to complete formal reading assessments three times per year to identify a child's reading level. Scores from two assessments will be collected for this study. The first assessment begins with your child reading a portion of a text aloud while I record errors. From there a reading accuracy score will be determined. Depending on the level of the text, the student will be asked to read the rest of the text silently. I will then engage the student in a comprehension conversation in which they will tell about the story or talk about what they learned in the text. The students will be scored in their recall ability as well as their ability to make inferences about the text. These scores are combined to identify the students' instructional reading level. The second assessment will ask students to read words from several graded lists to identify the child's instructional reading level.

At times, your student may be audio taped orally reading or in discussions about the text.

In addition to test scores, your child's general education teacher may be interviewed. In the interview, the teacher will be asked to discuss your child's progress in reading ability during their regular reading instruction and in other content areas.

Your child is not the focus of the study beyond being a member of the BSRP.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The only risk to you and your child is a possible breach of confidentiality. All data collected will be secured and pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study. There is no compensation for participation.

**IS PARTICIPATION OPTIONAL?**

Yes, participation in this study is optional. If you chose not to consent and do not want your child to participate in the study, please do not sign this form. If you do not consent, there will be no consequences to you or your child.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research you should contact the principal investigator Lauren Opiela at (609) 468-3399 or [lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:lauren.smith@gse.rutgers.edu). You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Sharon Ryan at 10 Seminary Pl. New Brunswick, NJ 08901, [sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:sharon.ryan@gse.rutgers.edu), or at (848)932-8080.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the principal researcher, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact:

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey  
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200  
335 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
Tel: (732) 235-9806  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Please indicate your level of participation below:

I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the

(name of child)

research project without using his/her name.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to be audio-recorded  
while reading.

(name of child)

I DO NOT give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to be audio-  
recorded while reading. (name of child)

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C****Student Assent Form**

Dear Student,

I am doing a study to learn more about the Basic Skills Reading Program. I would like to learn more about how well the students comprehend, or understand the books they read. I am asking for your help because I want to be able to make improvements to the program.

If you agree to be in my study, I will collect your reading benchmark scores. In addition, I may record you while you read out loud, tell about the book, and answer questions.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to participate in the study, you can ask to stop your participation.

This study is optional. That means that you can choose not to participate at all. There is not penalty to you if you chose not to participate.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Thank you,

Mrs. Opiela

\_\_\_\_ Student ID number

\_\_\_\_ Acknowledged

Signature of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Basic Skills Reading Program Survey

This year, a new Basic Skills Reading Program (BSRP) has been implemented. As this is a new program, it is really important to evaluate the program to identify the strengths and areas of improvement. The results of this survey will be used to make informed decisions regarding future changes and improvements to the program. All answers on this survey, which will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and will be kept anonymous. Please feel free to be open, honest, and descriptive with your answers.

#### *Instructional Model of the Program*

1. Currently the BSRP uses a pull-out approach. Pull-out is when a student or small group of students leave the classroom to receive instruction. However, there are other models to choose from. Choose your preferred method of basic skills instruction.
  - a. Pull-out
  - b. Inclusion, or push in (basic skills teacher instructs inside your classroom)
  - c. Combination of pull-out and push-in instruction
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe two benefits of the pull-out basic skills model.
  - a.
  - b.
3. Describe two drawbacks of the pull-out basic skills model.
  - a.
  - b.

#### *Program Components (Identification, Time, Schedule, Communication)*

For questions 4-11, indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD).

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 4. The identification process for the BSRP accurately identified students in need of reading support. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 5. I have students in my class that I believe should be in the BSRP but are not.                | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 6. The amount of time students receive basic skills instruction is sufficient.                  | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 7. The students in the BSRP often have schedule conflicts with their general education program. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 8. Reading lessons taught in the BSRP should match the ones being taught in the classroom.      | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 9. The BSRP teacher effectively communicates information regarding the readers they work with.  | SA | A | U | D | SD |

***Student Reading Ability***

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 10. Students involved in the BSRP show an increased confidence during the literacy period | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 11. Students involved in the BSRP show an increased ability to comprehend texts           | SA | A | U | D | SD |

12. In a few sentences, describe what aspects of the BSRP are working best.

---



---



---

13. Please take a moment to describe any changes that you believe should be made to improve the program.

---



---



---

14. Is there anything else that you would like to include about the BSRP that hasn't been asked? In a few sentences, write below.

---



---



---

***Please tell a little bit about yourself.***

15. Please circle the one that best describes you:

2-3 grade teacher

4-5 grade teacher

16. Do you have any specialized certifications in reading or literacy?

Yes. Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

No

17. How many years have you been teaching?

0-5

6-10

11-15

15+

18. How many years have you been teaching in this school?

0-5

6-10

11-15

15+

19. What is your highest level of education?

a. BA

b. MA

c. Doctorate

## Appendix E

### Teacher Interview Guide

#### Introduction

Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you today. I am currently in Lauren's dissertation program and I know a bit about her study of the Basic Skills Reading Program.

She has shared with me that this is a new program and it is important for her to learn more about its implementation and to describe the students in the program.

Please be as open and honest as you can as the purpose of this study is to strengthen the program for next year. Please note that your answers will be kept confidential. Just to remind you, this is being audio-recorded.

#### Components and Implementation of the Program

*Let's begin with talking a bit about the components of the program: specifically how students were identified and the pull-out model that is currently being used.*

*We will start with who participates in the program.*

1. Please tell me about the type of student you feel benefits from a basic skills reading program?
2. How were the students in your class identified for the BSRP?
3. What are your thoughts about the identification process?
4. Tell me about the students in your class that were identified for the BSRP program.
  - a. How would you describe them as readers?
  - b. In your opinion, are they the type of student that you feel should be in the basic skills program? Please explain.
5. When you think about the students in your class who *aren't* receiving basic skills instruction, are there any students that you believe should?
  - a. Tell me about those students
  - b. Tell me why you think they should be receiving basic skills instruction.
  - c. What were the reasons you were given for why they weren't included?
  - d. What do you see as solutions moving forward to address the needs of those particular students?

*Now, let's discuss the pull-out model.*



6. Tell me what it is like for *you* on a typical day when a student or students are pulled out of your classroom?
  - a. How does it happen?
7. Now, talk about what you think it is like for a student to be in the pull-out BSRP?
  - a. What do they miss?
  - b. What's it like to come back in?
  - c. What strategies do you use to help the student transition back into the classroom?
8. Talk about a time when the pull-out program hasn't worked.
9. Talk about what works well with the pull-out model.
10. If you were to create an intervention program, describe the model that you would like to see implemented.
  - a. Tell me about the model.
  - b. Why you would choose that model?

### **Students of the BSRP**

*The intent of the BSRP is to provide students that are not yet meeting grade level expectations focused reading instruction in addition to the instruction they receive from you. In turn, it is the hope that reading difficulties can be identified early on and further difficulties can be prevented. Therefore, it is important to know more about how the students are functioning in the classroom. So this next set of questions is designed to help get your perspective on this.*

11. Talk about the changes you've seen in (student name) from the start of the school year until now.
  - a. Discuss any changes in the students during your small group reading instruction.
  - b. Children need to be able to understand what they have read. Can you give me some specific examples in terms of (student name's) comprehension?

Repeat for each student they have in the BSRP.

### **Recommendations**

*I'm going to conclude the interview by asking you to think about any recommendations you have for the program.*

12. If you could create a wish list for the program moving forward, what would be on it?
  - a. How would you change communication with and collaboration with the BSRP teacher?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add about the BSRP that I haven't asked?

*Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today.*



## Recording Form

*The New Girl* • LEVEL O • FICTION

Recording Forms

**Part One: Oral Reading** *continued*


Sources of Information Used

| Page     | Text   | E | SC | E |   |   | SC |   |   |
|----------|--|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|---|
|          |  |   |    | M | S | V | M  | S | V |
| 2        | <p>A month later, Nora walked into her new school. Her sneakers squeaked on the shiny, polished floors. She was not surprised that the other kids turned, stared, and whispered, but didn't say hello. "No one ever talks to the new girl," she told herself.</p> <p>At lunch, Nora looked around the crowded cafeteria. At every table kids were eating lunch with their special friends, talking and laughing. No kids invited Nora to sit with them. Only one girl smiled at Nora. She was sitting by herself looking lonely and nervous.</p> |   |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |
| Subtotal |  |   |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |

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**Part One: Oral Reading** *continued*


Sources of Information Used

| Page   | Text   | E     | SC | E |   |   | SC |   |   |
|--|--|-------|----|---|---|---|----|---|---|
|  |  |       |    | M | S | V | M  | S | V |
| 2<br><i>cont.</i>  | "She's probably new, too," Nora thought, so she just ignored her. Nora dreamed of being in a group of friends, just as she was in her old school.  |       |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |
| 3  | That night she told her mother about her terrible day. "Did you talk to anyone?" her mother asked. Nora shook her head. "All the kids ignored me." |       |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |
| Subtotal   |  |       |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |
|  End Time ____ min. ____ sec. |  | Total |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |


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Have the student finish reading the book silently.

## Recording Form

*The New Girl* • LEVEL O • FICTION



| Accuracy Rate | Errors | 13        | 11-12 | 9-10 | 6-8 | 4-5 | 1-3 | 0    |
|---------------|--------|-----------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| %             |        | Below 95% | 95%   | 96%  | 97% | 98% | 99% | 100% |



|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| <b>Self-Corrections</b> | _____ |
|-------------------------|-------|

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|                      |   |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Fluency Score</b> | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | <b>Fluency Scoring Key</b><br><b>0</b> Reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to author's meaning or punctuation; no stress or inappropriate stress, and slow rate.<br><b>1</b> Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- and four-word groups and some word-by-word reading; almost no smooth, expressive interpretation or pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; almost no stress or inappropriate stress, with slow rate most of the time.<br><b>2</b> Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups; some smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; mostly appropriate stress and rate with some slowdowns.<br><b>3</b> Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups; mostly smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns. |
|                      |   |   |   |   |   |



|  |   |                       |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Reading Rate</b><br><i>(Optional)</i> | End Time  | _____ min. _____ sec. |
|  | Start Time  | _____ min. _____ sec. |
|  | Total Time  | _____ min. _____ sec. |
|  | Total Seconds   | _____                 |
|  | $(RW \times 60) \div \text{Total Seconds} = \text{Words Per Minute (WPM)}$<br>$13,860 \div \text{_____} = \text{_____ WPM}$ |                       |

## Part Two: Comprehension Conversation

Have a conversation with the student, noting the key understandings the student expresses. Use prompts as needed to stimulate discussion of understandings the student does not express. It is not necessary to use every prompt for each book. Score for evidence of all understandings expressed—with or without a prompt. Circle the number in the score column that reflects the level of understanding demonstrated.

*Teacher:* Talk about what happened in this story.

### Comprehension Scoring Key

- 0 Reflects **unsatisfactory** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.
- 1 Reflects **limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.
- 2 Reflects **satisfactory** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.
- 3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

| Key Understandings   | Prompts  | Score                |
|--|--|----------------------|
| <p><b>Within the Text</b></p> <p>Tells 3–4 important events from the story, such as: Nora had to move to a new school; she doesn't like leaving her school; none of the kids talked to her at the new school; her mom told her to do something herself; she made one new friend.</p> <p><i>Note any additional understandings:</i></p>   | <p>What was Nora's problem in the story?</p> <p>What happened?</p> <p>What else happened?</p> <p>How did Nora solve her problem?</p>   | <p>0   1   2   3</p> |
| <p><b>Beyond the Text</b></p> <p>Nora was very unhappy about moving because her friends were important to her (or other reason consistent with the text).</p> <p>She acted like the other kids when she wouldn't talk to the other new girl.</p> <p>She learned that she had to make friends if she wanted to be included.</p> <p><i>Note any additional understandings:</i></p> | <p>Why was Nora so unhappy about moving to a new place?</p> <p>How was Nora like the kids she complained about at her new school?</p> <p>How did Nora change in the story?<br/>What did she learn?</p> | <p>0   1   2   3</p> |

*Continued on next page.*

## Recording Form

*The New Girl* • LEVEL O • FICTION**Part Two: Comprehension Conversation** *continued*

| Key Understandings   | Prompts   | Score                |
|--|---|----------------------|
| <b>About the Text</b><br><p>The title is good because Nora was a new girl in her school. Her friend is also a new girl and the story shows how she treated her.</p> <p>The author meant that Mom was always teaching her things with short little pieces of advice.</p> <p>You knew Nora had learned a lesson when she smiled at the new girl.</p> <p><i>Note any additional understandings:</i></p> | <p>What makes the title <u>The New Girl</u> a good one for this book? Any other reason?</p> <p>What did the author mean when she said Mom was always coming up with sayings that sounded like "bumper stickers"?</p> <p>Find the part of the story where the author showed that Nora had learned something.</p> | <p>0   1   2   3</p> |

**Guide to Total Score**

- 9-10 Excellent Comprehension  
 7-8 Satisfactory Comprehension  
 5-6 Limited Comprehension  
 0-4 Unsatisfactory Comprehension

Subtotal Score: \_\_\_\_/9

Add 1 for any additional understandings: \_\_\_\_/1

Total Score: \_\_\_\_/10

**Part Three: Writing About Reading** *(optional)*

Read the writing/drawing prompt below to the student. You can also cut the prompt on the dotted line and give it to the child. Specify the amount of time for the student to complete the task on a separate sheet of paper. (See *Assessment Guide* for more information.)

**Writing About Reading**

- 0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text.  
 1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text.  
 2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text.  
 3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text.

Write about how Nora solved her problem and what you think she will do now in her new school. You can draw a sketch to go with your writing.

## APPENDIX G

San Diego Quick Assessment

## San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability

Grade level K-11  
Word Recognition  
Individual testing  
10 minutes

- **WHAT** ➔ This test measures the recognition of words out of context. Generally, proficient readers read as accurately both in and out of context. This test consists of 13 graded word lists from preprimer to eleventh grade. The words within each list are of about equal difficulty.
- **WHY** ➔ Weak readers overrely on context and recognize words in context more easily than out of context.
- **HOW** ➔ Begin with a list two or three sets below the student's grade level and continue until the student makes three or more errors in a list. Present the Student Material word list to the student. Use a paper to cover word lists not being read. Mark errors on the Record form by crossing out each missed word. Mispronunciations can be written down next to the word.

When the teacher says "next", the student should move the paper down and read the next word. Encourage the student to read words that he or she does not know so that you can identify the techniques used for word identification. Wait no longer than five seconds before moving on to the next word.

- **WHAT IT MEANS** ➔ Each list completed by the student can be scored as shown below.

| Errors/List | Reading Level       |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 1 error     | Independent Level   |
| 2 errors    | Instructional Level |
| 3 errors    | Frustration Level   |

**Student Reading Level** = The student's reading level is the last grade-level word list in which the student reads eight or more words correctly.



## San Diego Quick Assessment – Record Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Begin with a list that is at least two or three sets below the student's grade level. Have the student read each word aloud on that list. Continue until the student makes three or more errors in a list.

Reading Levels: One error- independent level; two errors- instructional level; three errors- frustration level. When testing is completed, record the highest level in each of these categories in the spaces below.

INDEPENDENT \_\_\_\_\_ INSTRUCTIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ FRUSTRATION \_\_\_\_\_

| Preprimer |  | Primer |  | Grade 1 |  | Grade 2   |  | Grade 3    |  |
|-----------|--|--------|--|---------|--|-----------|--|------------|--|
| see       |  | you    |  | road    |  | our       |  | city       |  |
| play      |  | come   |  | live    |  | please    |  | middle     |  |
| me        |  | not    |  | thank   |  | myself    |  | moment     |  |
| at        |  | with   |  | when    |  | town      |  | frightened |  |
| run       |  | jump   |  | bigger  |  | early     |  | exclaimed  |  |
| go        |  | help   |  | how     |  | send      |  | several    |  |
| and       |  | is     |  | always  |  | wide      |  | lonely     |  |
| look      |  | work   |  | night   |  | believe   |  | drew       |  |
| can       |  | are    |  | spring  |  | quietly   |  | since      |  |
| here      |  | this   |  | today   |  | carefully |  | straight   |  |

| Grade 4     |  | Grade 5    |  | Grade 6    |  | Grade 7    |  |
|-------------|--|------------|--|------------|--|------------|--|
| decided     |  | scanty     |  | bridge     |  | amber      |  |
| served      |  | business   |  | commercial |  | dominion   |  |
| amazed      |  | develop    |  | abolish    |  | sundry     |  |
| silent      |  | considered |  | trucker    |  | capillary  |  |
| wrecked     |  | discussed  |  | apparatus  |  | impetuous  |  |
| improved    |  | behaved    |  | elementary |  | blight     |  |
| certainly   |  | splendid   |  | comment    |  | wrest      |  |
| entered     |  | acquainted |  | necessity  |  | enumerate  |  |
| realized    |  | escaped    |  | gallery    |  | daunted    |  |
| interrupted |  | grim       |  | relativity |  | condescend |  |

| Grade 8    |  | Grade 9       |  | Grade 10   |  | Grade 11     |  |
|------------|--|---------------|--|------------|--|--------------|--|
| capacious  |  | conscientious |  | zany       |  | galore       |  |
| limitation |  | isolation     |  | jerkin     |  | rotunda      |  |
| pretext    |  | molecule      |  | nausea     |  | capitalism   |  |
| intrigue   |  | ritual        |  | gratuitous |  | prevaricate  |  |
| delusion   |  | momentous     |  | linear     |  | visible      |  |
| immaculate |  | vulnerable    |  | inept      |  | exonerate    |  |
| ascent     |  | kinship       |  | legality   |  | superannuate |  |
| acrid      |  | conservatism  |  | aspen      |  | luxuriate    |  |
| binocular  |  | jaunty        |  | amnesty    |  | piebald      |  |
| embankment |  | inventive     |  | barometer  |  | crunch       |  |

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**San Diego Quick Assessment – Student Material**

|      |      |        |           |            |
|------|------|--------|-----------|------------|
| see  | you  | road   | our       | city       |
| play | come | live   | please    | middle     |
| me   | not  | thank  | myself    | moment     |
| at   | with | when   | town      | frightened |
| run  | jump | bigger | early     | exclaimed  |
| go   | help | how    | send      | several    |
| and  | is   | always | wide      | lonely     |
| look | work | night  | believe   | drew       |
| can  | are  | spring | quietly   | since      |
| here | this | today  | carefully | straight   |

|             |            |            |            |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| decided     | scanty     | bridge     | amber      |
| served      | business   | commercial | dominion   |
| amazed      | develop    | abolish    | sundry     |
| silent      | considered | trucker    | capillary  |
| wrecked     | discussed  | apparatus  | impetuous  |
| improved    | behaved    | elementary | blight     |
| certainly   | splendid   | comment    | wrest      |
| entered     | acquainted | necessity  | enumerate  |
| realized    | escaped    | gallery    | daunted    |
| interrupted | grim       | relativity | condescend |

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capacious  
limitation  
pretext  
intrigue  
delusion  
immaculate  
ascent  
acid  
binocular  
embankment

conscientious  
isolation  
molecule  
ritual  
momentous  
vulnerable  
kinship  
conservation  
jaunty  
inventive

zany  
jerkin  
nausea  
gratuitous  
linear  
inept  
legality  
aspen  
amnesty  
barometer

galore  
rotunda  
capitalism  
prevaricate  
visible  
exonerate  
superannuate  
luxuriate  
piebald  
crunch

## APPENDIX H

Instructional Reading Level Expectations for Reading

| Fountas & Pinnell                            |                                   |                                     |                                     |                           |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL EXPECTATIONS FOR READING |                                   |                                     |                                     |                           |
|  | Beginning of Year<br>(Aug.–Sept.) | 1st Interval of Year<br>(Nov.–Dec.) | 2nd Interval of Year<br>(Feb.–Mar.) | End of Year<br>(May–June) |
| Grade K                                      |                                   | C+                                  | D+                                  | E+                        |
|  |                                   | B                                   | C                                   | D / E                     |
|  |                                   | A                                   | B                                   | C                         |
|  |                                   |                                     |                                     | Below C                   |
| Grade 1                                      | E+                                | G+                                  | I+                                  | K+                        |
|  | D / E                             | F                                   | H                                   | J / K                     |
|  | C                                 | E                                   | G                                   | I                         |
|  | Below C                           | Below E                             | Below G                             | Below I                   |
| Grade 2                                      | K+                                | L+                                  | M+                                  | N+                        |
|  | J / K                             | K                                   | L                                   | M / N                     |
|  | I                                 | J                                   | K                                   | L                         |
|  | Below I                           | Below J                             | Below K                             | Below L                   |
| Grade 3                                      | N+                                | O+                                  | P+                                  | Q+                        |
|  | M / N                             | N                                   | O                                   | P / Q                     |
|  | L                                 | M                                   | N                                   | O                         |
|  | Below L                           | Below M                             | Below N                             | Below O                   |
| Grade 4                                      | Q+                                | R+                                  | S+                                  | T+                        |
|  | P / Q                             | Q                                   | R                                   | S / T                     |
|  | O                                 | P                                   | Q                                   | R                         |
|  | Below O                           | Below P                             | Below Q                             | Below R                   |
| Grade 5                                      | T+                                | U+                                  | V+                                  | W+                        |
|  | S / T                             | T                                   | U                                   | V / W                     |
|  | R                                 | S                                   | T                                   | U                         |
|  | Below R                           | Below S                             | Below T                             | Below U                   |
| Grade 6                                      | W+                                | X+                                  | Y+                                  | Z                         |
|  | V / W                             | W                                   | X                                   | Y                         |
|  | U                                 | V                                   | W                                   | X                         |
|  | Below U                           | Below V                             | Below W                             | Below X                   |
| Grade 7                                      | Z                                 | Z                                   | Z+                                  | Z+                        |
|  | Y                                 | Y                                   | Z                                   | Z                         |
|  | X                                 | X                                   | Y                                   | Y                         |
|  | Below X                           | Below X                             | Below Y                             | Below Y                   |
| Grade 8+                                     | Z+                                | Z+                                  | Z+                                  | Z+                        |
|  | Z                                 | Z                                   | Z                                   | Z                         |
|  | Y                                 | Y                                   | Y                                   | Y                         |
|  | Below Y                           | Below Y                             | Below Y                             | Below Y                   |

**KEY**

Exceeds Expectations

Meets Expectations

Approaches Expectations:  
Needs Short-Term Intervention

Does Not Meet Expectations:  
Needs Intensive Intervention

The Instructional Level Expectations for Reading chart is intended to provide general guidelines for grade-level goals, which should be adjusted based on school/district requirements and professional teacher judgement.