READING, REFORMS, AND RESOURCES: HOW ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TEACH LITERACY IN CONTEXTS OF COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND REQUIRED CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

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This descriptive, mixed method study investigated the literacy-related contextual factors and local curricular decision-making of experienced elementary literacy teachers in one large U.S. public school district. The study's guiding research question was: How do elementary in-service teachers teach literacy within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and educational policies? The study's questions are premised on the ideas that norms (or educational requirements) and tools (or instructional resources) are key aspects of the activities in which teachers and students engage as literacy is taught and learned. However, teachers and children make local decisions to create meaningful learning opportunities using these resources and within those norms in various ways. Influenced by theories of local agency and decision-making within highly organized institutions, the study explored teachers' thought and action in context through a survey of a broad sample of experienced elementary school teachers from the district and in a series of in-depth case-level studies of six teachers as they thought about their literacy curriculum and enacted classroom instruction.

A descriptive, mixed method design was used to capture quantitative and qualitative information about the classroom contexts, instructional resources, and teaching practices of a large sample of experienced teachers who have been in practice during the changes in requirements and resources brought about by the last 15 years of reforms to literacy education. Using data from both a broad sampling of teachers and in-depth examinations of teachers'

thought and action reflect the study's focus on both teachers' experiences within one district as well as the interplay of widely shared and individually negotiated aspects of literacy curriculum and instruction. The study's analyses were descriptive in nature and blended the cycle of inductive and deductive reasoning from data characteristic of qualitative research, especially grounded theory development. Data analyzed included survey responses, interviews, observations, and textual artifacts related to the teaching of literacy in this district.

From the seminal work of Schwab, the study found the teachers working to coordinate four commonplaces to interpret, use, and in some ways change the curriculum as it was provided through instructional resources. In this sense, they echoed Schwab's commonplaces for curriculum design. However, the ways the teachers' responded in the surveys, answered interview questions, and conducted their practice, and used or adapted materials are reflected in what this dissertation calls, the four "contemporary commonplaces." These show the curriculum not as the teacher's domain but as a site of negotiation, even a struggle, to meet external academic demands, yet teach in coordinated and locally meaningful ways. This study contributes to teacher education and teacher learning in outlining the realities and the challenges of teaching literacy in today's elementary school grades. The field of literacy research gains new knowledge and understanding of elementary literacy teaching and teacher learning in these times of educational reform that has been mostly absent from the research literature to date.

Keywords: literacy; literacy instruction and assessment; elementary teaching; educational policies; educational reforms; sociocultural theory.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

This study examined how elementary school teachers in their local classroom contexts work within the complexities of educational reforms and policies as well as required curriculum in planning and enacting literacy instruction for all students. The last 15 years of educational policymaking and initiatives within the United States have brought about significant change to K-12 public schools and a series of educational reforms. These reforms have often been focused on the ways in which teachers teach literacy to our nation's students. Some of the most prominent shifts in literacy instruction came under the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* (2001), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and its subsequent *Reading First* and *Early Reading First* initiatives (U.S Department of Education, 2009) that targeted early childhood and elementary reading instruction with scientifically-based methods of reading instruction. Today, elementary school settings in grades K-5 are charged with adopting a new educational reform: *The Common Core State Standards*, a national initiative involving 48 U.S. states whom have elected to adopt these academic standards in reading and mathematics in grades K-12 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). This reform will bring about new, more universal academic standards for what it means to be a proficient, on-grade level reader and writer in grades K-12 throughout the United States.

These standards in literacy also present a change for many in elementary literacy instruction from the directive approach to instruction and a skills-oriented emphasis in curriculum required under NCLB, to a more dialogic meaning-making approach centered upon students' strategic knowledge and readings of text as literacy learners (e.g., Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011; Coburn, Pearson, and Woulfin, 2011). This, in addition to studying

teaching in the context of the NCLB-era, much of which remains in effect in school policies and materials, this dissertation study looked at the rise of *The Common Core State Standards*, as yet another educational reform coming on the heels of—and in many ways in reaction to—the reforms of NCLB. The study finds that it, too, is impacting teachers' thinking about curriculum and their instructional planning and teaching for students' literacy achievement.

Elementary schoolteachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, as experienced professionals within the field of education, have been viewed as both the causes and the solutions in student achievement or failure in literacy as each of these waves of educational policy and reform initiatives have been enacted within their classrooms (e.g., Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). These waves have brought many of these teachers' new educational standards for their teaching and students' learning, new testing measures, and new curriculum resources. Many of these teachers have been required to adopt new literacy curriculum into their classrooms. Whether or not they viewed these changes as beneficial, each has experienced the challenge of adopting this curriculum into what they already know, believe, and know how to do. In increasing cases, teachers have been required to incorporate published materials (e.g. basal reading series) with requirements for how they should be followed or to what degree of "scripting" or "fidelity" should be used while teaching for their students' learning (e.g., MacGillivray et al., 2004; Shelton, 2010). Elementary in-service teachers also face unprecedented complexity, as their classrooms grow increasingly diverse. We have few studies of how teachers enact literacy instruction and learning within these complex times of required literacy curriculum, differing educational policies, and increasingly diverse students (e.g., Kersten, 2006; Kersten & Pardo, 2007).

Purpose and Rationale for the Study

The research question for this study was: *How do experienced elementary teachers teach literacy within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies?* This mixed-methods study sheds light on how complex contexts for literacy learning influence elementary literacy instruction and how in-service teachers teach literacy in widely diverse school contexts. It contributes to our understanding of how elementary school teachers create opportunities for students to construct more authentic meaning in literacy within contexts laden with requirements imposed by educational policy makers in the name of reform.

This descriptive study used mixed methods, or a combination of research techniques, to gather information on teachers' experiences in one large metropolitan school district. It used a large sample survey of K-5 elementary literacy teachers to gather trends, issues, and patterns in experience along with in-depth case studies of a range of experienced teachers. By looking at these analyses together, the study attempted to build understandings of how these teachers develop and implement their literacy teaching under reform-based mandates and curriculum. This study, through a broad sample and in-depth cases of teachers in local classrooms, demonstrated how their decisions about how and what to teach are influenced not only by external mandates, but also by their immediate classroom context and students, their teacher identity, including their sense of agency or autonomy in teaching literacy, and their professional content knowledge. Teachers describe their efforts to use of pre-packaged curriculum resourcefully, integrate best practices in literacy instruction, and adapt these to the complexities of their diverse students and classroom contexts. Across the sample, there was apparent consensus, in surveys, talk, teaching, and text that for literacy learning to occur, they bear the

burden of teaching all learners with differentiation yet with often insufficient instructional resources.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review examines research literature relevant to the study's focus on how experienced teachers teach literacy to our youngest readers in grades kindergarten through fifth. What influences and affects teachers and their teaching of elementary literacy within these contexts? Contexts, as a term used widely throughout this study, are the layered tools and activities of a particular setting or a nested series of settings, the local experiences within and beyond the individuals surrounding these settings, and how individuals use or negate cultural and meditational tools available within these settings, often with highly institutionalized through norms and functions, in negotiating the various meanings and complexities to achieve localized sense-making and decisions (deCerteau, 1984; Erickson, 2004; Cole, 1996). Schools and classrooms are nested systems of contexts in which children learn and teachers teach. The consideration of context becomes relevant when thinking about the research conducted and the findings surmised in relevant educational research.

The following review of literature relevant to this study shows that theorists and researchers who focus on teaching in context think about teaching as influenced by (a) a landscape of complex educational policies and reforms, (b) how these teachers learn and develop their instruction for teaching and literacy, and (c) their knowledge of literacy teaching and learning within this complexity. It was therefore essential, within the design of this study, to consider the literature and contexts of previous educational research in order to summarize the broad educational policies and practices which shape the work of teachers and then to narrowly

focus upon teachers, their opportunities for learning, and their work within the classroom for literacy teaching and learning.

A Landscape of Complex Educational Policies and Reforms

A landscape of complex educational policies and reform initiatives has influenced the forms of instruction and assessments found in elementary literacy teaching. As evidenced by subsequent research, these policies and reforms have created affordances and constraints for literacy learning, all of which have been aimed at improving a student's literacy achievement over the last 15 years (e.g., Samway & Alvarez, 2008; Kersten & Pardo, 2007). These years brought about changes and challenges in the ways that teachers support and instruct a student's literacy learning from the National Reading Panel (2000) to the most recent reform of *The Common Core State Standards* (2010).

The National Reading Panel. One of the most pronounced shifts in literacy instruction occurred as a result of the findings of the National Reading Panel in 2000 in kindergarten through fifth grade. The Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) identified five key areas for effective reading instruction based on a meta-analysis of empirically based quantitative research studies. These five areas included instructional emphases on: (a) phonemic awareness instruction, (b) phonics instruction, (c) fluency instruction, (d) text comprehension instruction, and (e) vocabulary instruction. This report created an emphasis on test-based accountability measures for measuring students' academic performance, and the students' progress in attaining literacy standards. Educational policies were then developed that emphasized these five instructional areas, and that directed many teachers away from more authentic reading opportunities that built meaning making strategies and holistic reading development toward the

measurement of skills that could be quantified and measured (e.g., Kersten & Pardo, 2007; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012; Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, a revision and reauthorization of the 1965 and 1994 federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), was another landmark educational policy that drastically impacted the ways in which teachers taught reading. The federal government's flagship program of Title I funding for disadvantaged students was included in *No Child Left Behind* or NCLB. This law set out to promote substantial improvements in student achievement in reading and mathematics and held states and schools accountable for the yearly progress of their students (*Education Week*, 2011). NCLB had a number of core initiatives that were designed to bring about important changes to educational practices within U.S. classrooms. These initiatives included annual testing for all students in grades third through eighth in reading and mathematics, annual report cards of school performance made available for public use, and requirements for every teacher to be "highly qualified" in their particular grade level or content area specialization (*Education Week*, 2011, p. 1-2). These initiatives also created a series of sanctions where schools that did not meet proficiency goals for the state's adequately yearly progress (or AYP) would face increasing penalties, such as reduced funding in their Title I subsidies to school-wide governance change.

The Reading First Initiative. NCLB supported the *Reading First* initiative, a federal initiative focused on "putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms" to enhance students' reading achievement at the elementary education level (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These proven methods were based on the five key reading instructional areas outlined in the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, text comprehension, and vocabulary. Schools and school districts who received state-

level funding through this program and had a student population where a majority of students were living below the poverty line, were required to "apply scientifically based reading research – and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research – to ensure that all children [would] learn to read well by the end of third grade" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). To do this, schools and school districts looked at programmatic interventions, rather than systematic instructional changes (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). Often these were prescriptive basal programs that had been field-tested by publishers to provide the scientific evidence that supported the programs. Commercial literacy programs, while not directly endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education, were used as exemplars in professional development workshops and in preparation sessions for states wishing to apply for federal grants to implement *Reading First* in their states, guiding what was considered eligible and recommended for use in *Reading First* programs (e.g., Ness, 2005; Florio-Ruane, 2010; Gamse et al., 2008).

The *Reading First* initiative, under and during the time of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, became a catalyst for the widespread adoption of required reading curriculum throughout the country (e.g., Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000; Long & Selden, 2011). Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin (2011) argue that the process and products of the *Reading First* initiative served as an instance of federal and state educational policies that used or misused reading research to establish required curriculum, assessments, and professional development found in the schools that received *Reading First funding*. At the same time, a particular vision of reading instruction was established that promoted an emphasis on skill-based reading instruction with rote memorization through required literacy programs. Such programs did not promote the development of authentic literacy experiences that would promote strategic reading in students to

develop meaningful interpretations and the students' construction of new knowledge. At its conclusion, Gamse and colleagues (2008) examined the *Reading First* initiative and found that it had no statistically significant impacts upon students' engagement with print or reading comprehension during the five-year program in *Reading First* schools. The curriculum materials of this reform still remain in many schools today due to the adoption cycles and economic constraints faced by many school districts (Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). These materials, from the times of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and *the Reading First* initiative, become the curriculum tools teachers must try to use with students as they remain accountable for the expectations of the prior reform, yet are expected today to adopt the latest educational reform.

The Common Core State Standards. The *Common Core State Standards* are the latest educational movement that we know is once again changing the scope and breadth of literacy instruction and assessment. These standards in the English-Language Arts and Mathematics did not come from the U.S. Department of Education, but were instead developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) "in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011, p. 1). There are now 48 states throughout the U.S. who have adopted the *Common Core State Standards*. The key emphasis in these standards is to establish increasingly complex skills and strategies in literacy and language learning for college- and career-readiness by the end of high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011). Currently, the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessment* is under development as the new collective assessment system for

all students in grades 3rd through high school in 20 of the 48 states participating the *Common Core State Standards* (PARCC, 2013). This assessment will be implemented fully in academic year 2014-2015.

Currently, practitioners and their school-based leadership are experiencing a transitional period as they strive to integrate and to respond to new standards, policies, practices, and texts. The transition to the *Common Core State Standards* initiative in most states, for example, now creates a focus on complex literacy learning that has the potential to conflict with the skills-based literacy learning that has dominated the literacy instructional resources developed during the NCLB era. Additionally, aligning curriculum materials to these new, more rigorous standards, which bring about considerable changes to the types of instruction and texts that students engage with in literacy learning, presents new opportunities to textbook publishers with schools who are striving to adopt the *Common Core State Standards* (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). These standards also may be maligned in how they are framed or taken up, and sometimes ignored, by teachers within their classrooms and across schools or school districts (Shannon, Whitney, & Wilson, 2014).

In addition to changes brought by the *Common Core State Standards*, teachers are now facing new pressures under teacher evaluation systems. Youngs (2013) points out the teaching and instructional practices called for under the *Common Core State Standards* are not measured by most teacher evaluation systems. A traditional teacher evaluation system, such as value-added models of teacher evaluation, have been shown to be inconsistent in showing a teacher's influence over student performance and often misses the contextual factors influencing student learning (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). Value-add models of teacher evaluation have linked students' achievement scores on standardized assessments to

teachers' evaluations. This model has been viewed as a traditional way of measuring teacher effectiveness in instruction in relation to a teacher's overall performance and the subsequent career decisions (i.e. reassignment) made for the teacher (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Youngs, 2013). New approaches to teacher evaluation are necessary to reflect how teachers are learning and teaching. Such approaches as classroom observation protocols and teacher performance assessments, including multiple observations and multiple years of students' assessment performance, have been effective in demonstrating how teachers are revising their instructional practices and using newly acquired professional knowledge to affect students' achievement (Youngs, 2013). Teacher evaluation systems place pressures upon how a teacher enacts literacy instruction and supports students' literacy achievement.

These policies and reforms complicate the in-service teachers' decision-making about what to teach and how to teach. This newest reform of the *Common Core State Standards* along with the half-lives of the remaining curriculum and mandates from NCLB and the *Reading First* initiatives have the potential to support or restrict the capacity of an elementary teacher. The adoption of a new reform, with often differing definitions of literacy, is likely to be impacted by the contexts in which over a decade of NCLB have established in schools. The history of the past reforms and educational initiatives are critical in order to understand how teachers have experienced these changes and how those changes might inform the introduction and enactment of the *Common Core*.

Teachers and Their Learning in Times of Educational Reform and Change

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and the *Reading First* initiatives directly impacted the educational practices of teachers around literacy. Experienced teachers had to learn new instructional content, instructional practices, and ways of collecting student achievement data as

part of these educational reforms (e.g., Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). Often times, professional development was provided, but it was limited at best to support teachers in these changing contexts of literacy instruction (Gamse et al., 2008; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). Previous research has found the importance of continuous, sustained professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) to support teachers in expanding their pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., Shulman, 1986) as well as helping them to develop an understanding of the continua of literacy teaching, which addressed the need for comprehensive literacy instruction that attends to contextual and content needs for both teachers and students around literacy learning (e.g., Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011).

How Teachers Learn and Develop Their Instruction in Teaching and Literacy

Teachers learn and develop their instructional design and teaching methods through their professional knowledge, development, content-specific skills, and teaching strategies acquired throughout their professional career in teaching and education. This development begins in their teacher preparation programs and lasts throughout various transitional phrases in the beginning and middle years of their teaching careers (Huberman, 1989; Lynn, 2002). This development supports their content-specific knowledge of literacy learning and teaching. These factors are then contextualized and influenced by their local classrooms for elementary teaching and literacy learning (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011).

Strong pedagogical content knowledge, or PCK, can become essential to how every teacher learns to use and enact literacy curriculum and learning with her/his students (Shulman, 1986). This knowledge is essential for teachers to have as they work to develop comprehensive literacy instruction for their diversity of students across diverse school contexts (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). A teacher must gain knowledge in specific content areas and

processes, or pedagogical strategies, necessary for each content area, to cultivate their PCK (Shulman, 1986). This strategic knowledge is shaped by diverse subject-specific and pedagogical development, often offered through coursework or professional development opportunities. This knowledge enhances a teacher's subject matter expertise as well as affords them a variety of instructional skills and strategies for delivering subject matter. It also includes understanding of the learners in a teacher's classroom and the contexts for educational learning (Shulman, 1986). The teacher then plans instructional opportunities and contexts that will promote student learning within a given subject.

Strong pedagogical content knowledge can be demonstrated concretely through the use of effective teaching practices in a given subject matter. For example, in literacy instruction, teaching reading comprehension strategies, such as questioning the text or making connections, has been found in research to be effective to supporting a child's comprehension of texts (e.g., Duke & Pearson, 2002). We have also learned from this work that teachers who instruct students in using a variety of reading comprehension strategies support their students' reading achievement. An elementary teacher who attains strong pedagogical content knowledge and demonstrates effective teaching practices, such as teaching reading comprehension strategies, may more easily critique curriculum materials, wisely plan instructional opportunities for students, and be better equipped to strategically teach to a diverse student population (e.g., Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013). Further investigation is still needed though on how we can best support every elementary teacher in reaching his or her fullest potential in these efforts.

Continuous, sustained professional development becomes necessary to scaffold an elementary school teacher beyond beginning instructional practices to more sophisticated, effective practices within a subject matter for teaching and learning. Research has found that

improving a teacher's professional knowledge is essential to student achievement and improving efforts to reform schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Ideally as this professional knowledge is embedded into their practice, teachers can sustain approaches found by research to be characteristic of effective teaching and optimal student learning. Teacher change is thus linked both to knowledge and context.

Years of research has demonstrated a need to provide extended learning opportunities to all teachers in order to improve on issues of instruction, student learning, and professional decision-making. Yet, previous research has highlighted the importance of sustained professional development in improving teachers' knowledge and instruction in literacy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). An example of such continuous, sustained professional development for teachers came from Richardson (1994) and colleagues when they developed a long-term professional development on reading comprehension with upper elementary school teachers. Over the course of the study, these teacher educators found that professional development could be "significant and worthwhile" for teachers' practices and knowledge about reading and instruction, particularly in reading comprehension, when teachers could gain scaffolding to think about their educational practices and were committed to their students' education (Richardson, 1994). Yet, so often, these purposeful types of sustained professional development opportunities are replaced with traditional, often ineffective, modes of professional development with practicing teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Feiman-Nemser, 2001). These ineffective modes of development are often cost-effective and more easily developed within school settings. A lack of quality in teachers' professional development leaves limited opportunities for teachers to cultivate their professional voice and agency for greater participation in curriculum development, assessment, and other aspects of decision-making (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). This

development around central tasks in teaching can support teachers in their work and afford them opportunities to enact local decision-making around teaching and students' learning.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) offers scaffolds, or central tasks, to think about as useful to teachers as they continue to improve their learning within the content areas, their instructional practices, and their sense of agency as teachers. First, a teacher must continue to work to deepen and extend their subject matter knowledge for teaching through professional development. This deepening and extending of subject matter knowledge is achieved as teachers learn to develop their knowledge of their students and how it informs their use of pedagogical content knowledge in instruction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Second, a teacher must work to extend and refine their repertoire of teaching skills and strategies. For example, an elementary school teacher may want to learn about guided reading in order to more fully develop small-group reading instruction in her/his classroom. This disposition to reflect to improve their teaching and their students' opportunities for learning is the third task in professional development. Finally, a teacher must cultivate leadership skills in order to play a more active part in her/his broader school community which "will help them see and appreciate the growth of their own knowledge and skills" as teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1040). These professional knowledge and skills can be applied purposefully in creating optimal instructional opportunities for students.

A rich knowledge and experience base for elementary school teachers is necessary to create a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction and assessment within the classroom. Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael (2011) describe the continua of literacy teaching development across two separate continuums that deal with (a) contextual factors or the contextual continua and (b) content factors or the content continua in order to develop instructional practices associated with comprehensive literacy instruction. Teachers must

consider the aspects of authenticity, classroom discourse, teachers' roles, and curricular control within the contextual continua. These factors relate to the teacher and students' roles in relation to the curriculum and the contexts for literacy learning. Within the content continua, teachers must consider aspects of skill contextualization, text genres, and response to literature in a student's literacy learning (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael, 2011). In skill contextualization, a teacher operates between a scope of contexts for literacy instruction where a required curriculum lays out how skills and strategies are taught to students as one extreme to another extreme of where texts or tasks, or even the students, determine what skill or strategy will be taught to an individual or a group of students. Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael (2011) state that teachers need to "operate flexibly between these two extremes" to ensure all aspects of the literacy curriculum are covered at any particular grade level (p. 47). Text genres and responding to literature requires the teacher to provide teaching and learning opportunities in which students practice and master a variety of text genres, along with learning how to purposefully respond to these texts.

Skillful teachers in elementary literacy are effective at managing this balance between the content and contextual continua in ways that contribute to students' learning and meet the demands of reform-minded teaching within this era of test-driven accountability. As Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael (2011) describe effective literacy teachers in their conclusion:

> If they are good at what they do – orchestrating a complex curriculum in the face of an enormous range of individual differences among students – then they learn to slide along each of these…contextual and content continua we have identified. At any given moment, they might be at different points along each of the continua, and then, with the slightest change in their instructional ecology of the classroom, change their position on

half of them, knowing that in the very next minute they might make another four or five minor shifts in emphasis (p. 57).

The instructional shifts made by skillful literacy teachers reflect the best practices of literacy instruction and assessment that create opportunities for curricular coherence and high-quality literacy learning (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). These shifts in instruction and learning are also influenced by a series of external and internal pressures that influence the classroom context and opportunities for literacy learning. Varying pressures by stakeholders in education include (a) standardized, high-stakes assessments, (b) building policies and practices, (c) community partnerships, (d) state, national, and professional standards, (e) district policies, and (f) the textbooks and other instructional resources that teachers are required to use within their classroom (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2001).

In the above research by Raphael et al, when asked to represent their place in the ecology of reform, it is important to note that teachers themselves were recipients of reforms and at the center of what they experienced to be pressures imposed by an array of powerful stakeholders in the educational process. For them, the teachers are the ones who worked to acknowledge and adapt to shifts within the literacy curriculum and manage the pressures of instructional mandates that were present in their classrooms. More research is needed to understand the teacher's role within the shifts and pressures of elementary literacy teaching. Teachers work to juggle these multiple interests when they create coherence in their curriculum and classroom learning environment, but they seek a greater voice in framing what it to be taught and assessed within their elementary classrooms that demonstrates students' learning.

Literacy Teaching and Learning in These Times of Policies and Reforms

The recommendations from findings of research on effective or "best practices" of elementary literacy instruction and assessment tend toward a comprehensive view of literacy curriculum and instruction. Yet, the research on which these recommendations were based includes but is not limited to what the National Reading Panel defined as "scientific research" on reading and reading instruction (The Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000). The Panel's definition of "scientific research" related to only research deemed as the gold standard, meaning only large-scale, quasi-experimental research in reading. This definition ignored any research completed at the local levels of classrooms and schools, which had been used to inform literacy teaching and learning (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). The best practices of literacy instruction, as reported by Gambrell and colleagues (2011), require teachers to reach within and beyond the definitions of reading instruction, offered by the National Reading Panel (2000), to more teacher- and student-driven definitions of literacy learning, shaped by more than just curriculum materials or interventions.

It is not surprising that comprehensive literacy instruction cuts against the grain of the contexts, policies, and practices that were called for by *Reading First* and remain in place in many basal series, standardized assessments, and school-or district- expectations for literacy (e.g., Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012; Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). Since standardized assessment continues to be a high-stakes measure of both student learning and effective instruction, there is increasing pressure on school districts to follow prescribed literacy curriculum developed during the NCLB era and claiming to be scientifically- or research-based instruction (Corburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). With these pressures, many teachers have made fundamental shifts often from meaning-making approaches to more skill-oriented delivery

in their literacy instruction in order to comply with these mandates and curriculum, constraining the opportunities and instruction for students' learning (McGill-Franzen, 2009; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). These varying pressures of reform-based mandates and required literacy curriculum require teachers, in turn, to think professionally and strategically about the ways in which they are providing literacy learning and instruction to their students.

Several studies have illuminated the ways in which elementary school teachers have learned to use required literacy curriculum in order to attend to reform-based mandates, engage in literacy learning, and promote student achievement. The conceptualizations of finessing, hybridizing, or bricolaging curriculum materials has grown from the ever-increasing waves of educational policies and instructional mandates that have occurred over several years (Kersten, 2006; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Waldron, 2013). Teachers often interpret these policies, often issued from points distant from their classroom, as a "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching and learning. In turn, they may ignore, finesse, or hybridize their curriculum and instruction. Finessing is defined as the process in which teachers "review the available options and make purposeful decisions to attend to some things while ignoring others" (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). This study taught us how finessing is insufficient, yet quite common, as it leaves much to chance in what is actually taught to the students and how much or how little of the curriculum materials are used in relation to what is required by school policy.

Hybridizing curriculum allows teachers to pull upon "the strengths of their previous best practices [learned] and the policy requirements [of the curriculum and/or materials] to create an original pedagogy" that leads to high-quality teaching (Kersten & Pardo 2007; Freebody & Luke, 1990). We learned from this study how the process of hybridization allows preservice teachers to honor their own teaching beliefs and pedagogical content knowledge, while also attending to the

required curriculum. Finessing and hybridizing curriculum materials, in an effort to achieve high-quality teaching, can lead to a balancing act of resistance and compliance with the curriculum materials and educational policies.

Creating a bricolage (e.g., Levi-Strauss, 1968) of curriculum materials directed by strong pedagogical content knowledge, such as teaching reading comprehension strategies, creates a new possibility of high-quality teaching that exceeds hybridization. More recent research has elaborated how learning to bricolage curriculum materials and pedagogical content knowledge may be powerful for preservice teachers. My colleague, Susan Florio-Ruane, and I (2012) studied elementary interning teachers in how they came to plan and enact their literacy units of study for their internship placements.

We learned in this study that the preservice teachers who possessed strong pedagogical content knowledge and had teacher preparation coursework that exposed them to examples of curriculum materials (e.g., basal reading series) had well developed literacy units of study. These units of study from some of the preservice teachers included (a) the acknowledgement and strategic use of mandated curriculum materials for elementary literacy instruction, (b) employed the teacher's pedagogical knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction (e.g., reading comprehension strategy instruction) in connection with the mandated curriculum, and (c) created a unit of study that attended to the learners' needs, the academic standards present, and the requirements of educational policies affecting the classroom context (Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2012). Additionally, many of these teachers accounted for the pressing issues of time, resources, decision-making, and mandates or controls in their classroom instruction in order to plan and enact literacy instruction within their classrooms.

My own research following three preservice teachers in their internship year worked to further understand the contextual complexity and challenges of how each interning teacher attended to required literacy curriculum and best practices within their diverse school contexts. What I found is that each interning teacher learned to teach literacy, as reflected in each of these in-depth case analyses, in ways that are context-specific, resource-dependent, and policy-driven (Waldron, 2013). These catalysts of learning influenced each teacher candidate to teach literacy in ways that promoted or prohibited their sense of agency over the curriculum and their sense of identity as elementary literacy teachers. Both studies, my joint work and in my independent work, found that only a few of the teachers, three of the ten teachers who were studied in more depth, were able to achieve bricolage in their classroom instruction. This capacity was created in their teacher preparation experiences and pedagogical content knowledge. Yet, a majority of the interning teachers in both studies struggled in various degrees to navigate and negotiate the benefits and challenges of required literacy curriculum and the pressures of educational reforms.

Only four other studies to date could be located that addressed how practicing teachers enact literacy instruction under the milieu of reform-based instructional mandates and required curriculum. Three of these studies examined the elementary school context and how the reforms initiated or present had affected the teachers' sense of agency, identity, and created resistance or colonization in their efforts to teach in these times of reform (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Shelton, 2010). Each of these studies followed several teachers under the pressures of a scripted reading curriculum and how the curriculum changed instructional practices within the classroom contexts. Many of these teachers reported a diminished sense of agency and could only subtly resist the radical changes brought about under their school's reform efforts through the curriculum (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; MacGillivray et al., 2004). The

scripting of the curriculum was often followed "with fidelity" and left no room for teacher input or tailoring in order to meet the needs of their students in their classroom (Shelton, 2010). These studies did not provide information on the types of instructional practices or teaching that the elementary school teachers participated in as a result of this highly prescriptive mandates and curriculum in literacy, but rather focused on their reactions to these reforms. One additional study with English teachers at the secondary level has informed our understandings of how teachers have negotiated these policies and mandates within their practices and teaching for literacy instruction (e.g., Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). This study emphasized the importance of context and policies in how teachers learn or enact literacy teaching within secondary education. Yet, these studies also illuminate the need in educational research to better understand the benefits and challenges faced by elementary school teachers as they try effectively to teach literacy to our youngest readers and writers under the pressures of complex educational policies and required curriculum.

What We Have Learned and Need to Learn about Elementary Literacy Teachers

Research lacks an understanding of how practicing or in-service elementary school teachers are operating within their classroom and broader school contexts under these educational reforms and implementations of required curriculum. While we do know how some in-service teachers have negotiated required curriculum under reform (e.g., Kersten, 2006; Kersten & Pardo, 2007; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012), educational research lacks the understanding of how broad patterns of elementary in-service teachers are using their pedagogical content knowledge, teaching practices, and instructional experiences in meeting the demands of educational requirements and required instructional resources in diverse school contexts. It is important to not only understand the broad impact of these educational reform

efforts, but also look more closely within the localized settings of the classroom- and school-based contexts.

The milieu of educational policies and reform initiatives in existence right now in the United States creates a range of instructional possibilities. It is important to discover this range of literacy instruction under these policies and reforms. This is an unprecedented moment in public education and particularly at the elementary school level from the remaining influences of NCLB and the *Reading First* initiatives to the new arrival of the *Common Core State Standards*. It is a time that has the potential for positive changes or educational innovations or the possibility of continuing on with "business as usual" in educational settings (e.g., Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Concurrently, an ever-growing body of research on effective literacy instruction promotes reflective teaching practices that include students acquiring a wide breadth of literacy skills and strategic knowledge that builds towards authentic meaning making in a wide variety of texts (e.g., Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael, 2011). Yet, educational policies and instructional mandates are often limiting or excluding the types of literacy teaching and complex learning necessary for students' literacy growth (Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). Broad- and cased-based research knowledge is currently needed to develop educational knowledge and understanding around these complexities in elementary teaching and literacy learning.

CHAPTER 2:

THE STUDY

Theoretical Framework

The school and its classrooms are highly institutionalized contexts with norms and social traditions that operate for the education of young people within localized settings (deCerteau, 1984; Erickson 2004). These norms and traditions shape and limit teachers' work. They shape how teachers do their work, including the interactions they have with students around literacy, goals for literacy learning, their own professional knowledge, and the routines of school and classroom life. Yet, teaching day-to-day in interactions with students is also an ongoing communication guided by teachers' planning and reflection (e.g., Kersten, 2006) and the ongoing, negotiated, and often improvisational nature of these conversations (e.g., Erickson, 2004). Thus, teaching is both limited by norms and traditions but also continuously reinvented as it is enacted, even in the most apparently scripted settings. For this reason, to understand teaching, in additional to studying institutional norms and historical traditions, it is essential to study the local decision-making and enactment of teaching. This topic has been a focus of research on teaching since the mid 20th century. It is reflective of social theory during the same period, where the relationship between social structure and individual agency has been an ongoing problem for social scientists and philosophers (Erickson, 2004).

French social theorist, Michel deCerteau (1984), for example, in studying local decision-making in social systems, found that while institutional norms or policies impact individuals' experiences and action, those individuals are not mere "consumers," subject to external forces. Rather, they used their own judgment to make decisions at the local level. His work helps us

account for not only local variation, but also people's volition and human creativity, especially to make social life meaningful and authentic.

deCerteau's (1984) theory has been applied to education by sociolinguists and ethnographers (e.g., Erickson, 2004) to help us understand how institutional norms and policies. These influence the ways in which teachers enact literacy instruction and assessment. These norms and policies also influence how they make local decisions that modify or push back upon those norms as they address the particular needs of their students or situations of their teaching (Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012; Erickson, 2004).

Among the cultural and meditational systems of interest in studies of local meaning within the context of normative structures is the curriculum. Although the curriculum guides teaching, as these resources and texts are enacted, teachers can exercise agency responsively to direct and assess their students' literacy learning (Lasky, 2005; Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1993; Wertsch et al., 1991). The local decision-making with curriculum and how a teacher enacts it can be traced, in part, to his or her own identity formation as a teacher (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008). While identity is a term with multiple nuanced meanings in both research and everyday life, I refer to "professional identity" as a part of teacher learning, within this study. As such, professional identity relates to the multiple contexts, emotions, relationships, meanings, and interactions that surround a teacher's formation across time, shaped by contextualized factors and prior experiences both personally and professionally (Rogers & Scott, 2008; Olsen, 2008).

When individuals enact their lives in terms of both plans and immediate interactions, norms as well as decisions in terms of local context, they can be thought of as acting with a sense of agency, cultivated by what Fairbanks and colleagues (2010, p. 166) describe as "thoughtful opportunities [taken up by teachers] to respond to a myriad of forces" to realize new

opportunities for students' learning. When teachers have a strong sense of agency as part of their professional identity, they understand their own knowledge and beliefs and use these beliefs to guide effective instruction (Fairbanks et al., 2010; Lasky 2005).

This process occurs within a wider context of education where there are multiple stakeholders, policies, and norms: educational policies, instructional mandates, reform initiatives, and curriculum are simultaneously in motion within the classroom context and informing the interactions and reactions of the teachers, students, and other stakeholders (Cole, 1996). These can be thought of as "activity systems" (or contexts of daily practices and behaviors by individuals that are layered within social contexts and norms), operating as autonomous communities of practice but also as an array of forces impacting the teacher and the practice of teaching (Florio-Ruane, Berne, & Raphael, 2001). They interact with teachers' daily classroom decision making as they are accountable most immediately to students in the classroom, but also to the school, school district, state educational policies, and reform initiatives emanating from federal, state, local, professional and commercial stakeholders. These communities of practice, in turn, push upon each teacher to interact and respond to the changing contexts in various ways. Learning to teach has little explicit curriculum to help teachers learn about these dynamics of how to manage them, but research into this topic is increasing (e.g., Drake, 2006; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Waldron, 2013). This dissertation is intended to add to the small but growing body of literature on this topic in teacher education.

Teacher's knowledge. These interactions and responses by the teacher require her/him to call upon specialized knowledge in teaching, pedagogy, and learning. Declarative, procedural, and strategic knowledge are the levels of specialized knowledge that a teacher will call up and use as a part of planning and enacting literacy instruction (Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984;

Pressley, Borkowski, & Schneider, 1987). Strategic knowledge, akin to students' learning how to apply higher order thinking skills in comprehending text, orchestrates foundational world knowledge (declarative knowledge) and sequential ordering for task completion (procedural knowledge) to strategically allocate resources for understanding. This requires expert, adaptive knowledge to address instructional challenges and reflective knowledge that can analyze their teaching experiences, learned knowledge, pedagogical practices, and curriculum resources (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Additionally, a teacher must reconcile these ways of knowing. This reconciliation involves reflecting on their own beliefs and vision about teaching, their understandings of a variety of subject matter and diverse learners, and their repertoire of tools and dispositions in teaching literacy (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Achieving high quality literacy instruction for student achievement requires teachers to use their strategic knowledge for purposeful teaching within contexts laden with required literacy curriculum and educational policies. "High quality literacy instruction," according to Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni (2011), is formed when research-based skills, strategies, and practices for literacy growth are used consistently and strategically as a part of classroom literacy instruction and assessment.

A student's literacy knowledge and learning occurs in school contexts and is also the product of the negotiation and transformation of information that is obtained within and beyond the classroom (Cambourne, 2004). This negotiation and transformation impacts the instructional strategies employed by the teacher and the ways students will acquire literate behaviors. Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni (2011) define "literacy" as the acquisition of skills and strategies within reading and writing, incorporating a constellation of skills for meaning making. It requires instruction and assessment within authentic activities where meaning relates closely to real life

activities and interactions with texts. This locally crafted instruction must also attend to the ever-present, often external, demands and pressures of required literacy curriculum and educational policies while trying to achieve literacy grow and success for their students.

PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Reflecting theories of social organization and local meaning summarized as well as the research on teaching above, the research question prompting this dissertation research was: *How do elementary in-service teachers teach literacy within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies?* This is a broad question that needs to be addressed by a series of more focused, researchable questions. The following research questions directly explored the broad question above through mixed-method analyses of the data collected:

1. What are the everyday activity settings in which elementary in-service teachers are teaching literacy?
2. What contextual factors within these local activity systems do teachers see as supportive or limiting of their practices in teaching literacy?
3. How does the elementary in-service teacher plan and enact (negotiate) literacy within the contexts of his/her classroom instruction and the curriculum mandates within that environment?
4. How is their local decision-making reflected in their planning and enactment of literacy education?

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive, mixed-method research design. This design employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection, its subsequent analyses, and in the reporting of the results from this research. The descriptive nature of the study involved multiple

analyses across two types of research and building grounded theory to better elaborate the contexts and thinking of the teachers within the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). The research questions deal with context and thinking of teachers both as an individual experience and as broader experiences of a large number of teachers working within the same institutional context (i.e. school district). I elected to use multiple methods within each research paradigm for a fully integrated mixed design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). A holistic, integrated design was used to collect and analyze the data within this study (Caracelli & Green, 1997). This study's design was integrated "to be sensitive to human agency and social processes, as well as to structural processes" and holistic so as "the cases themselves are not lost, and the approach is analytic, so some generalization is possible" (Caracelli & Green 1997, p. 24). A mixed method research design was pertinent in capturing the complexity and diversity of the research questions posed within the sample of teachers who will serve as the study's participants.

Data Collection

The data sources for this study included a large sample survey of the K-5 elementary teaching population, along with selected interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analyses of six of the survey participants. Table 1 outlined the research questions and the data sources that were used in regards to answering each question. This was a descriptive study as I was trying to discover and understand experienced teachers' thoughts and actions as they make decisions about how to incorporate new ideas, materials, and requirements aimed at improving literacy achievement into their professional knowledge and various practices of literacy teaching and learning within their classrooms. I tried to gain knowledge in how teachers work with their localized knowledge and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions to respond to these reforms and policies. I chose a mixed-methods design as it allowed me to collect diverse data

and build in-depth, case-based knowledge of literacy teaching. The four methods used were surveys, 1-1 interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analyses to collect information within this descriptive study.

Participants and Contexts. The participants for this study's survey were a sample of 161 elementary in-service teachers in grades kindergarten to fifth grade. This sample was drawn from a population of 939 teachers within one metropolitan school district. These participants were elementary teachers who worked in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. All of these teachers have at least three years of teaching experience, qualifying them to serve as mentor teachers to preservice teachers, and most having gained permanent teaching certification. The participants were located in one metropolitan school district, spanning urban and suburban contexts, within a Midwestern city. There were 72 elementary schools within the school district eligible to participate in this study from their grade levels. The range of geographical locations for these schools allowed for a broad sampling of educational resources, populations of students, and localized contexts. Contrary to historical assumptions, Florio-Ruane & Waldron (2013) found in survey research on a large and widespread group of school districts, where preservice teachers were placed by a university-based teacher preparation program, that required literacy curriculum was not limited to large, bureaucratic, usually urban school districts. The mandating of texts and even of time for their use appeared in all kinds of schools—small and large, urban, suburban, and rural.

For this reason, in this dissertation study, I sought a research site where, within one district with required literacy texts and practices, I would have access to teachers and schools varying in size, location, and socioeconomic status. I therefore sought and received access to a large metropolitan district. The participants were recruited after approval by the school district

and university review and approval of the study proposal. This process ensured protection of the privacy of and minimal risk to the elementary school teachers who voluntarily participate in this study.

All participants responded to an online survey that captured the broad trends and issues of a large sample of elementary literacy teachers in the school district (see Appendix C for a copy of the survey and its questions). Six participants who completed the survey were selected using a purposeful sampling method to participate in clinical interviewing and classroom observations of their literacy teaching (Baumann & Bason, 2011). Previous research demonstrated how strong pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) meant teachers could demonstrate effective teaching strategies within a subject matter. It was essential to select teachers who could demonstrate effective teaching strategies in literacy instruction. This purposeful sampling involved the teachers' years of teaching experiences, mentoring experiences, and demonstrated pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in both closed/open-ended questions on the survey instrument. The years of teaching experience were reviewed to select teachers who are mid-career professionals between seven to eighteen years of teaching experience who are experimenting and reassessing their teaching (Huberman, 1989). They were also individuals who seemed to be "enthusiastic and engaged" as reflected in their use of pedagogical content knowledge for best practices in literacy instruction and their reflections on instructional reforms and local decision-making in their particular classroom (Lynn, 2002).

The technology-enhanced survey used multiple choice and open-ended questions to understand each participant's elementary literacy teaching by asking about teaching strategies, pedagogy, instructional resources, and literacy curriculum used within their classroom (see Appendices). It was delivered using Survey Gizmo, meaning the survey instrument and its

subsequent data were hosted online. A copy of the survey instrument is located in the Appendices. This survey was piloted in the spring of 2013 with 20 teachers who voluntarily participated to ensure that it would produce construct validity and reliable survey responses with elementary in-service teachers of literacy (Baumann & Bason, 2011). A version of this survey was also used in previous research with elementary preservice teachers (Waldron & Florio-Ruane, 2013). The survey allowed me to gain broader understandings of the localized contexts in which elementary school teachers are teaching literacy. For example, several survey questions asked about: "What is the name and publisher of the reading curriculum you use" or "Do you draw upon your own ideas and resources to design and plan the reading lesson and units that you teach in your classroom (e.g., custom-created theme units of study)." Additionally, I learned about what similarities or differences in literacy instruction and assessment were occurring across various geographical school locations. The questions asked within the survey were connected to the research questions, my reading of the literature, previous research work, and the theories shaping this study. This allowed me to gain both a broad and in-depth understanding of their beliefs, practices, and understandings of their localized literacy instruction occurring within their classrooms, schools, and school districts. For example, the survey questions asked Likert scale and yes-no questions to better understand such as issues as "Academic standards (e.g. state standards; the Common Core) inform my instruction in reading" or "I make my own instructional choices and decisions in my literacy teaching."

Teachers who use required literacy curriculum and were in different school contexts were also considered within the parameters of the sample (Baumann & Bason, 2011). The use of required literacy curriculum is the requirement of using a commercially published program for reading and/or writing instruction within each participant's classroom. Elementary school

teachers typically identify these commercially published programs as "basal reading programs" or "writing programs". In this school district, the common literacy program for all school was the *Awards Series*, a basal reading program. The school contexts were defined using the categories of urban, suburban, and rural areas as defined in the U.S. Census of 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). These categories were taken from the most recent census data of the U.S. population to date and the geographical location of the school within the school district. Achieving this range was also be dependent upon voluntary willingness to participate further in the study and scheduling convenience for both the researcher and the participant.

Six participants were purposefully selected, as previously discussed above, using these factors in the completed surveys: the teachers' years of teaching experiences, mentoring experiences, and demonstrated pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in both closed/open-ended questions on the survey instrument. (More information on these participants will be discussed in Chapter 4.) They participated in two semi-structured clinical interviews and an extended classroom observation of their literacy block. The two semi-structured clinical interviews with each participant focused on their elementary literacy teaching practices and pedagogical beliefs. The first half of the interview related to the teacher's use of curriculum materials and resources in planning literacy instruction and assessment. The second half of the interview related to an observed episode of literacy teaching and reflecting on how the lesson went with the students. A semi-structured interview guide was used for each interview to see the kinds of responses within and among the participants in relation to the research questions (Merriam, 2009) (see Appendix C). The interviews also reflect how the elementary teacher's time was spent in the instructional context (e.g., time spent working in whole group literacy instruction; time spent working in individual literacy instruction) and any professional development opportunities they had

participated in for elementary literacy instruction and assessment (e.g., coursework; professional conferences; on-site professional development). A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix C. The interview protocol was previously piloted with in-service teachers, not included as current participants, to ensure reliability and validity in the use of these instruments within this study.

The classroom observations focused on the literacy resources and practices each elementary in-service teacher employed as they taught elementary literacy lessons with their literacy block. The observation was conducted when the six teachers are teaching literacy. I used qualitative field notes, audiotapes of the lessons, and an observational recording form, which I filled out after each observation to document the teaching. The audiotaped observations allowed me to track the pedagogy and instructional language used by the teacher during a literacy instructional period. These observations also investigated how the literacy curriculum (i.e. the required curriculum's teachers' manual; the teacher's lesson plan) was enacted within the classroom instruction for the students. As noted earlier, a majority of elementary teachers have experienced significant shifts towards skill-based approach to literacy learning rather than instructing meaning-making strategies in literacy learning under the policies and initiatives generated from the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), NCLB (2001), and the *Reading First* initiatives. These policies and initiatives created changes and directives on how to teach literacy (reading and writing) and what instructional resources could be used within the classroom contexts (e.g., Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). These observations were pertinent in investigating how these mandates have shaped classroom literacy instruction and how these teachers have accounted for it within their literacy instructional planning and enactment. An observational recording form, to be used by the researcher during instruction, provided data on

the teacher's instructional talk and activities (see Appendix E). It focused observation on teaching strategies observed as well as curriculum resources used and the teacher language/actions within the lesson (e.g., prompting; transitions). This observation recording form was also previously piloted and adapted from other researchers in the fields of literacy and teacher education (Valencia, 1990; Lipson & Wixson, 1991). This observation form was also beneficial in unpacking the types of instruction in reading and writing that may be taking place as a reflection of educational policies and required curriculum because it captures the components of an episode of classroom literacy instruction. This was reflective of the best practices of literacy instruction present or absent within the classroom setting.

These six participants also shared artifacts of their teaching and instructional planning in literacy for analysis. These artifact analyses centered on the teacher's lesson or unit plans of study, curriculum resources, or required curriculum materials. I looked for how teachers are integrating required curriculum (e.g., basal reading programs) and educational policies (e.g., state standards) as they plan for literacy instruction in their classroom. I also analyzed how they included or excluded best practices in literacy instruction as they worked to plan instruction within those pressures. These artifacts were used to gain further understandings of the localized contexts for literacy learning and to triangulate findings amongst the various data sources (Merriam, 2009; Bowen, 2009). The teacher's lessons, unit resources, planning documents, teacher's manuals, and other relevant materials were collected for the artifact analysis. These artifacts reflect the elementary teachers' literacy teaching within his/her classroom context, their social context for teaching (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997). These representations also reflect the literacy curriculum requirements and the educational policies that are present for the teacher on a regular instructional basis.

Data Analyses: Mixed-Method Approach

The analyses used are reflective of a fully integrated mixed methods design in which a mixing of quantitative and qualitative approaches occurred interactively throughout all stages of the research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For example, the survey was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The multiple-choice question response was counted to create frequencies for statistical reporting. The open-ended questions were coded for textual and meaning analyses through open and axial coding in qualitative analysis. These analyses within the survey questions helped me discover how teachers are attending to required literacy curriculum and educational reforms within the local activity setting of their classroom literacy instruction. These specific analyses were congruent and integral across all data analyses to include quantitative and qualitative analyses. This is imperative as you process data within a mixed-methods study.

The analyses of the four data sources (surveys, 1-1 interviews, classroom observations, artifact analysis) proceeded independently as well as interactively to enable me to develop both in-depth cases and broad analytic descriptions in answering the research questions. I looked at the various analyses in relation to one another as I framed assertions or vignettes to include in my case descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was an example of one way to use triangulation of evidence from the four data sources to build grounded theory, and by means of this technique, I was able frame research inferences or interpretations, based in one data set and then crosscheck it with reference to the other data collected (Charmaz, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 2 outlines the data sources and subsequent analyses. The data collected and the modes of analysis proceeded by moving from pre-existing analytic categories, which are reflected in the research questions, then moving into inductive

ways of obtaining information, such as the semi-structured questions from the think-aloud interview. This is an essential dynamic in the discovery of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). There are conceptual and practical relationships between the quantitative and qualitative data sets and also between the analyses I performed on each set. The goal was one study that looked at both broad patterns in a large sample of teachers and describes with depth the local, situated decision-making of a small group of teachers, not because they are "exemplars" or "typical" in their decisions and contexts, but, because like all teachers in the survey, they are negotiating their literacy curriculum in the context of reform-oriented policies and materials.

Quantitative Analyses of the Data

The quantitative methods of frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses and data from the online survey. SPSS v20 Statistical Software was used to complete these analyses amongst the variables of interest. Descriptive statistics were useful with the survey results to demonstrate broad patterns and trends within elementary literacy for the sample of elementary in-service teachers who participated in this survey. The online survey's questions generated a series of important variables to consider in relation to the research questions. The variables that were considered in part of the analysis included: (a) the school building's location coded by urban, suburban, and rural, (b) the best practices in reading instruction (i.e. classroom discussion; small-group instruction) employed, (c) the use of a curriculum in reading instruction (e.g., basal reading series), and (d) the types of instructional planning conducted by these teachers. My previous research indicated it was important to analyze this variables as "best practices in literacy instruction" (Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Waldron, 2013) as many preservice teachers struggled to implement this constellation of

practices in their classroom literacy instruction due to the pressures of educational policies and required literacy curriculum. Also, it appeared that many of their clinical field placements might not have been supportive in implementing these practices. I wanted to further analyze this "best practices in reading instruction" variable within practicing, experienced elementary literacy teachers. Years of research have supported the importance of best practices in literacy instruction in order to support students' learning and achievement in literacy (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). These best practices afford a variety of instructional opportunities and a comprehensive set of skills and strategies to literacy learners as they engage in authentic meaning making opportunities around texts.

A variable titled "best practices in reading instruction" was created using a confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analyses are a version of factor analyses in which specific hypotheses about the relationships of multiple variables within a data set are tested (Field, 2009). This is a part of factor analysis, which is a multivariate analysis technique used to identify relationships between observed and latent variables within a data set. The variable was created using a multiple-choice question that was posed about classroom instructional methods or practices in reading. The following methods or practices in reading were identified for inclusion as best practices in reading instruction: teacher read aloud, student silent reading, discussion, conferring/conferencing, book clubs, literature circles, reading workshop, reading conferences, reading centers/workstations, guided reading, word study, vocabulary, small-group reading instruction, using computers and technology, and using children's literature. These methods or practices were derived from extensive research in necessary reading skills or strategies as well as comprehensive or balanced literacy instruction for all students (National Reading Panel, 2000; Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). It is important to note the data collected in the

survey, for these analyses, was based on self-reported data and may not fully or accurately demonstrate all methods or practices present within the contexts sampled.

Qualitative Analyses of the Data

The qualitative method of constant comparison was used to generate categorical themes and grounded theory in relation to the contexts of literacy learning and the teachers' instructional practices used with students. The analysis of the data proceeded using the constant comparative method, employing both inductive and deductive reasoning for discovering patterns and theory within the data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I compiled the classroom observation and reviewed those observations with the recordings from the audiotapes. This allowed me to further refine the observational notes I made during the observation and align these notes with each elementary teacher's instructional planning and enacted instructional moves during the observed lesson.

I transcribed and analyzed selected portions of the audio-recorded classroom observations, which relate to these activities. Employing the constant comparative method in the observations and the interviews allowed the researcher to group the spoken discourse into theme categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Examples of the initial theme categories focused on the curriculum of literacy, the teachers' professional experiences and background, the contextual factors of literacy instruction, and the educational policies or requirements shaping literacy instruction. The theory building affirmed the credibility as well as describes and analyzes the occurrence of the findings across the various contexts of the elementary teachers (e.g., Glaser, 1965; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The value of such in depth and broad description is that it produces rich descriptions of ordinary processes ongoing in this school district and its

classrooms. The district is one of many and, as such, allows the particular to shed light on the general as we look across school districts (Erickson, 1985).

Open and axial coding, as processes in grounded theory, (Charmaz, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) were used to create categories or themes from the transcribed interviews and classroom observations in order to create a theory or level of understanding about the instructional contexts. It also illustrated each elementary teacher's use, in whole or in part, of instructional practices in literacy instruction and assessment when teaching elementary-age students. Open coding aided in breaking down the themes analytically within the observations and interviews as a part of the constant comparison of data findings. The axial coding aided in forming categorical and sub categorical relationships amongst the observations and transcripts' developing themes for analysis. Table 3 demonstrates examples of how open coding themes were synthesized into axial codes for the transcription coding. The examples provided in this table demonstrate the relationships to Schwab's four commonplaces of curriculum making (see Chapter 3). The artifact analysis focused on the instructional plans and curriculum resources used by the teacher in planning literacy instruction and assessment. An example of an artifact for analysis was the teachers' manuals and related lesson plan documents. I looked for scripting within the teachers' manuals and how this related to the teacher's planned lesson or enacted instruction as observed in the classroom observation visits. These resources were useful in understanding how the elementary teacher was attending to their context for literacy teaching and learning.

The two types of research were used were used iteratively and continuously to analyze the data sources within this study. Table 2 demonstrates the multiple analyses used to analyze the sources of data. Each of the data sources had the potential to work across the research paradigms

to build full analyses. For example, the local activity systems of the teachers were analyzed within the surveys and through the interviews and classroom observations. Each of these sources had multiple contributions within both paradigms. It also unpacked how teachers are experiencing these reforms within their daily classroom lives and in their teaching.

The two types of research were also used to triangulate the findings within and between the case studies of the teachers (e.g., Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). The survey responses, the 1-1 clinical interviews, and the classroom observations were used to attend to and build patterns of analysis or findings for the research questions of this study. Figure 1 outlines the step-by-step procedure followed for building categories and analyses in relation to the research questions. This included analyses of the survey responses using descriptive statistics in relation to the survey questions and within-case analysis, followed by cross-case analysis of the case studies. The broad sample provided trends, issues, and comments affecting a large sample of elementary literacy teachers. The cases of the six teachers allowed independent case study and cross-case analyses to fully understand the local contexts of elementary literacy teaching and learning (Stake, 2006). These multisite case studies generated useful data to examine what it means to teach elementary literacy across diverse school settings within this school. The inclusion of multiple school sites and diverse teachers for these case studies will strengthen the credibility of the study's findings (Merriam, 2009). These syntheses analyzed patterns of commonality and/or divergence in the curriculum of literacy, instructional practices for literacy, the classroom contexts, and the educational policies that affect curricular coherence and delivering literacy instruction as reflected in teachers' local decision-making as they negotiate required literacy curriculum and policies for instruction (Erickson, 2004; deCerteau, 1984). This study used inductive and deductive analyses. Through these analyses, categories and codes emerged that

related to the work of Schwab's four commonplaces of curriculum making, but in different ways that reflected the current climate of educational policies and required literacy curriculum. (Chapter 3 will preview the significance of the four commonplaces across the analyses and findings of this study as related to the research questions.)

These multiple analyses supported answering the research questions in diverse and complex ways by providing quantitative analyses of broad trends from a survey of elementary literacy teaching and qualitative analyses of in-depth, case analyses of elementary literacy teachers within their localized contexts of educational policy and required literacy curriculum. These multiple sources of evidence provided multiple sources for the findings and removed the constraints of one evidence source to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Table 2 demonstrates how triangulation was used with primary, secondary, and tertiary sources of data for the research questions. This triangulation enabled analyses from the broad sample within the survey as well as within and across the case studies of local classroom teachers within the same school district. These analyses built new understandings of how elementary literacy teachers are implementing and enacting literacy instruction and assessment under these series of reform mandates and curriculum.

Progression of Data Collected and Analysis Processes of the Study

A large metropolitan school district located in the Midwest was selected as the setting for this study. The data collection for this study proceeded over a five-month period. The first distribution of the online survey occurred in late September 2013. A second distribution of the survey to increase the response rate for the survey occurred in late October 2013. The survey questions were designed, from relevant research literature and previous survey pilots, to capture the broad sample's instructional practices and understandings around elementary literacy as

previously discussed above. The survey was emailed to 939 eligible participants. The large metropolitan school district, as the setting for this research study, provided a blinded email address list of all kindergarten to fifth grade classroom teachers with the district who had three or more years of professional teaching experience, per the study's design.

This study established a clear process for the research sample and selecting the participants of the in-depth cases within the study. Figure 2 outlines a flow chart of the research sample process. By the end of October 2013, the survey had a total of 161 participants who responded to the survey and allowed their responses, as voluntary and anonymous, to become a part of the broad sample for the study. The respondents represented 66 of the 72 PreK-8th grade elementary school settings within the school district. There was at least one respondent from each building with most buildings have two or more respondents within the sample. This larger sample was then narrowed down to 32 self-identified participants who answered additional open-ended questions and wished to participate in the case portion of the study. These participants had exited the survey and completed a form to briefly summarize their previous responses, but to provide identifying contact information. The researcher began contacting possible participants via email or telephone follow-up in early November 2013.

Of the 32 participants, initial correspondence narrowed down the pool of willing participants to twelve teachers, as the remaining teachers could not make the time commitment or opted not to participate any further at that time. Six teachers were selected for the in-depth case study based on their responses on the form, which reflected their years of professional experience, their pedagogical content knowledge in literacy, and having served as a mentor teacher. Follow-up questions asked by the researcher also validated or informed the information provided further. The questions used in the follow-up questionnaire were taken from the survey's

questions, which allowed for capturing each of their years of experience, their pedagogical content knowledge in literacy along with specific instructional practices around literacy, and their experiences as a mentor teacher. The six teachers selected for in-depth cases participated in the clinical interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analyses around the study's research questions.

After the completion of the clinical interviews and classroom observations in November and December 2013, the broad sample's data from the survey was analyzed using SPSS Statistical Software v. 20. The descriptive statistics were informative in indicating trends, issues, or topics of interest from the broad sample's responses about elementary literacy. Simultaneously but independently, the interviews, observations, and artifact analyses were proceeding using open- and axial-coding by hand to determine the case-by-case analyses and findings.

In January 2014, the data sources of both the broad sample and the in-depth cases were merged using Dedoose, a web-based data analysis tool, to complete cross case and broad sample analyses. Dedoose numerically counted individual coding schemes and indicated cross-case relationships, using those code schemes, within its online application. Initial coding schemes were uploaded to the analysis tool. (The complete codebook for this study can be found in the Appendices.) Categories of analyses and findings within and across the data emerged within the study. Dedoose refined and extended the themes and categories found through hand-coding and defined "key linkages" within the study's data collected in relation to the research questions (Erickson, 1985).

These key linkages from the data and the research questions were used to organize the data from the broad sample and in-depth case analyses. Vignettes, or case examples, were used

within each chapter to provide richly descriptive stories around each category of analysis (Merriam, 2009). These vignettes were crafted using the categories of analysis from the data and in relation to the research questions. These descriptive stories helped to extend or elaborate the trends and issues found within the survey of the broad sample. The forthcoming chapters, four to seven, will be organized around the themes and categories found through the analyses within the study.

CHAPTER 3:

REFORM AND THE COMMONPLACES

The overarching purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of experienced literacy teachers' decision-making in today's elementary school classrooms. While shaped by educational policies and required curriculum, the study aimed to capture the diversity of elementary literacy teachers' response to and enactment of required literacy curriculum in grades kindergarten to fifth grade. To do this, a variety of kinds of data and styles of analysis were employed to look at this topic in a large sample of teachers as well as in the talk, thought, and action of a small number of case study teachers. From analysis of these, series of themes were developed to answer the research questions.

Before the analyses and findings can be detailed and discussed, it is important to layout the setting or background of the broad and in-depth samples within the study and then how Schwab's (1973/1983) commonplaces of curriculum making and planning became instrumental lens for this study's analyses and findings as well as answering the research questions of interest.

The Study's Setting: The City, Its School District, and Its Students

The study's setting was vitally important as means of understanding the contexts and the findings within the school district, its elementary schools, and the students who are enrolled there. As well, the broader context of this large metropolitan city, particularly factors related to population and economic conditions, was essential to understand as potential impacts upon the operations of the school district and the welfare of its students. Overall, this study's setting, from this large metropolitan city to the school district and its schools, provided interesting insights in which to view this study and its findings.

Previous research with my colleague, Susan Florio-Ruane, found the potential impact of economic downturns within various communities, both urban and suburban, on how preservice elementary teachers learned to teach literacy, often linked to a school district's limited instructional resources and creating requirements within the literacy curriculum (Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013). Thus, in this study, it was important to identify the population and economic factors of this large metropolitan city in the Midwest. For the interest of anonymity, the city name will not be identified within this study. This large metropolitan city had a total population of approximately 391,000 as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2013. Approximately 25%, or 97,750, of the people in the Census were children 18 years of age or younger. There was approximately 34% of this population living below the poverty line and the median household income was about $26,500 from the years 2008 to 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This large metropolitan city, as evidenced in these statistics, was struggling with the evident issues of a large population, declining income, and large numbers of individuals who are living poverty. One quarter of the population were children, many of whom were being served by the school district.

This large metropolitan city had one school district for serving its students. A merger of two school districts was completed several years before this study to bring this entire metropolitan city's schools under a unified organizational structure. This school district was identified as a Title-I district-wide unit for federal funding in regards to students' instruction and programming within the school district. This means, in turn, each school was identified as a Title-I school-wide site. Each school's Title I status, meaning how many students required free or reduced lunches, was not tracked. Rather, "every student is given access to free breakfast and lunch to ensure everyone gets what they need" (Waldron, personal communication, 2013). The

school district, in recognizing the economic needs of its students, petitioned their state and the federal government for this broad definition of Title I status to support their students and their families. There were 72 PreK-8th grade schools. These schools were deemed as their "elementary schools" and many of the schools included the word "elementary" in their formal title. There were well over 100 schools within the district with the inclusion of high schools covering grades 9 to 12. Several of the schools, both at the elementary and secondary levels, had adopted specific instructional models of focus such as Montessori or the fine arts. This means the students throughout the school district had access to a broad range of traditional and progressive models of elementary and secondary schools. School choice was an option for students when their "neighborhood school," the school closest to their home, was deemed as failing based on students' achievement scores over several years, according to school district publications.

It was important to gain a broad understanding of the elementary school-age students within this large metropolitan school district. This understanding allowed insights into such factors as the diversity of the student population and the students' achievement on state achievement tests, which were helpful in better understanding the broad sample of the study. The school district reported, on its public webpage, serving approximately 40,000 students a year across its PreK-12th grade schools. Approximately 68% of student population was African American in ethnicity, with the remaining student population being, in descending order of ethnicity's presence, White/Caucasian, Hispanic, Multiracial, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian. Approximately 24% of these students receive special education services and 6% of these students receive second language education services. This large metropolitan school district was serving large numbers of students with a diversity of needs and cultural backgrounds.

The literacy achievement of students at the elementary school level was of particular interest in this study. The state-based report of academic achievement, which reported students' achievement in reading and mathematics at specific grade level intervals, was helpful in learning about the students' literacy achievement. In considering the survey sample, a large majority of the teachers who responded were teaching within a third or fourth grade classroom, as discussed further in Chapter 4. It was important to see the third grade reading achievement within the school district and within each school participating in the broad sample. This achievement may impact the local decision-making of teachers in their literacy instruction.

Third grade was the first assessed grade level on state achievement tests within this Midwestern state. Overall, across the school district, 42% of the third graders, tested in the academic year 2012-2013, were proficient, while 58% were not proficient, in reading. This means just over half of the students at the third grade level were not meeting grade-level expectations in reading. In analyzing third grade reading proficiency by the 66 schools with teachers responding to the study, the third grade reading proficiency levels ranged from as low as 28% proficient to as high as 86% proficient. This demonstrates that there were a range schools categorized from failing to proficient in third grade reading achievement, as measured by the state assessment of reading.

This background information was important to consider with the analyses and findings as well as in relation to the research questions for the study. These achievement scores from students showed that reform enacted in standardized materials, methods, and practices might or might not be a good match for all of the children in a given class—given the diversity present within the classroom. The teachers also showed that interpolation from the requirements to what

the children in these classrooms actually needed and were already able to do would likely be necessary.

These facts, trends, issues, and considerations were part of the larger picture of how teachers might teach and how elementary literacy instruction might be leveraged within this setting. It was all necessary and appropriate in order to better understand, as the overarching research question, what the contexts were in which elementary school teachers were teaching literacy. When we think of what is important in the context and process of literacy education in this and other similar districts and classrooms, a simple, systematic way to organize the interplay of factors is to think in terms of the teacher, the student, the curriculum, and the institutional context. These factors correspond to what Schwab (1973/1983) identifies as the commonplaces of curriculum making and planning. This information would help to illuminate what were to be the commonplaces for elementary literacy teaching and instruction, as evidenced in the data analyses and findings, as taken up by the teachers within their classrooms. This was all as part of the larger setting of literacy learning for the school district and its schools.

Schwab's Commonplaces of Curriculum Making and Planning

Schwab (1973) first wrote about the commonplaces of curriculum making and planning as a way for scholars to think about how to translate valuable theories and scholarly findings into practical curriculum for schoolteachers (see Figure 3). He discussed, at length, how there were four agents, or factors, to be considered when translating theories or beliefs into curriculum that is used by teachers and students alike. The first agent of translation into curriculum was subject matter, which involved the necessity of "someone familiar with the scholarly materials under treatment and with the discipline from which they come," or having expertise in a particular subject matter (p. 502). The second agent was the learners, or "someone familiar with the

children who are to be the beneficiaries of the curricular operation" (p. 502). This would an expert who has knowledge of the learner by understanding their developmental needs or capacities and their trajectory of learning. The third agent of translation was the milieu, "the experiences [or contexts] in which the child's learning will take place and in which fruits will be brought to bear" (p. 503). This involved the various contexts to be considered when planning curriculum or learning experiences as well as how these contexts may nest within one another to inform any particular milieu in which curriculum is used. The fourth agent of translation into curriculum was the teacher and how she used the other agents of "experience of the scholarly subject matter and its discipline, of the child, and of the child's milieus" along with her own background and beliefs as a teacher.

Schwab (1973) went on to define these translations, to be returned to and elaborated in Chapter 8, as "four commonplaces of equal rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter" (p. 508-509). See Figure 3 for Schwab's four commonplaces. He stressed how each commonplace must be included in curriculum making and planning or "disequilibrium" among the commonplaces would create a curriculum that overly emphasized one commonplace over another. In later writings on the four commonplaces, Schwab (1983) returned to the conception of "equality in the commonplaces," stressing how each commonplace is equally important, but there are also instances where focus upon one commonplace or another may be warranted. He said that while it is important for a teacher to consider "all the commonplaces equally, that a decision to favor one or another is justified" (p. 241). This meant that teacher decision-making at the local classroom and school level was often necessary in the process of making curriculum in order to make it appropriate for students' learning and to the contextual needs. Schwab (1983) stressed the importance of how curriculum professors must communicate

to teachers how they must consider for themselves "what education might confer on individual lives" (p. 241). Schwab communicated here how teachers must consider their own autonomy as they make curriculum decisions and plan their teaching as they also hold the responsibility for what the students learn. These four commonplaces of curriculum making and planning can then become enacted in the lives of teacher's work and in the instructional experiences offered to students.

The Commonplaces as Categories of Analyses and Findings

As I began the process of grounded theory development, four broad categories of information were emerging in both the surveys and interviews. For example, teachers reported about and in terms of their own identity, the needs of their students, the pressures of their curriculum, and the contexts of their work. The work of Schwab (1973/1983) came to bear as the teachers discussed their local decision-making. The four commonplaces of curriculum making mapped on to these categories emerging across the data collected. Yet, the emphasis within these commonplaces looked very different today than from the time of Schwab's (1973/1983) research. Teachers within this study were dealing with curriculum in new and different ways as the structure of schooling had remained quite similar to Schwab's work, but the degrees of autonomy or agency experienced by teachers, along with educational reforms, created new contexts for students' learning and teachers' work. It became apparently clear how considerations of the teachers, the subject matter of elementary literacy, the learners' needs, and the complex milieu for literacy instruction and learning were being made by the broad sample and through the in-depth cases of the six teachers in reviewing the analyses and findings of this study. In turn, the heuristic of Schwab's (1973/1983) commonplaces for curriculum making and planning has been used to organize the analyses and findings of this study. These commonplaces,

in the analyses of the data collected, were found to be resoundingly evident in how the work of literacy instruction and teaching was organized, planned, and enacted for students' literacy achievement. Yet, these commonplaces have transformed to meet the needs of the contemporary elementary school classroom.

Later, Schwab's (1973/1983) work resounds clearly throughout the analyses and findings of this study, yet in new ways attending to the contemporary reform-minded contexts in today's elementary school classroom and in supporting students' literacy achievement. The chapters following will introduce the reader to each of the commonplaces of instruction as well as curriculum making and planning found within the study. Just as Schwab (1973/1983) stressed, the broad sample and in-depth cases of elementary teachers demonstrate how each of the commonplaces would be equally or narrowly addressed as they worked to negotiate, plan, and enact literacy instruction for their students.

CHAPTER 4:

THE TEACHERS OF LITERACY

The teachers of literacy within the broad sample and across the in-depth case studies grappled with the complexities and considerations of teaching elementary literacy. This included working under the constraints of educational polices and required literacy curriculum. The research questions for this study centered upon the work of the teacher and how she negotiated local decision-making for literacy instruction with her students. It was important to look broadly and closely at the teachers of literacy as a lens into the teaching of literacy in today's elementary classroom.

Issues emerged in the analyses of the study's data around teacher identity, teacher agency, and a sense of teaching autonomy. These issues were found across the broad sample and within the in-depth cases. These three complex constructs were explored across the study and developed further in the following pages. There was a wide spectrum in how the teachers responded to and interpreted literacy curriculum and educational policies through their own sense of identity, agency, and autonomy. This was reflected in survey and interview responses as well as classroom observations and artifact analyses of instruction.

The Broad Sample of Teachers: Capturing a Snapshot of Literacy Teaching

The survey received responses from 161 participants, out of the 913 eligible participants. This yielded an approximately 18% response rate. The participants in the sample represented 66 out of the 72 K-5 elementary schools within this school district. At least one teacher responded from each elementary school, with several of the elementary schools having multiple respondents to the survey. The findings of the survey illustrate the similarities and differences of the teachers who teach literacy within this large metropolitan school district.

The teachers within this large metropolitan school district bring, on average, a wealth of teaching and coursework experiences as they lead their literacy teaching. Table 4 summarizes the teaching and experiential demographics of this sample. The mean grade level of the sample was 3.57. There were responses from all grade levels, though the mean response was from third and fourth grade teachers. It is important to note that the most commonly occurring grade level in the sample who responded was 1st grade teachers. The median of the sample was 4th grade teachers, which is interesting with a K-5th grade level span. The mean years of experience for this sample was 20.25 years of experience. The most common years of experience was 16 years of teaching, putting a majority of teachers in the "enthusiastic, engaged" spectrum of their teaching career in pedagogy and reflections as in Lynn's (2002) research on teacher development. When asked the question concerning serving as a mentor teacher, 102 of the 161 participants had served as mentor teachers. Additionally, 139 of the 161 participants in the sample had completed their Master's degree and the other 22 had completed Master's work. Overall, this sample demonstrated a wealth of teaching and experiential experiences in grades kindergarten to fifth grade.

A Spectrum of Literacy Teachers: In-Depth Cases of Literacy Teaching

From the broad sample, it was evident a spectrum of literacy teachers existed within this large metropolitan school district for elementary literacy teaching. It was important to capture this spectrum through the in-depth cases of this study. This would broaden not only the study's conceptions of elementary literacy instruction and students' learning around literacy, but also widely and narrowly provide findings for the research questions of interest. A specific research process, as mentioned in detail in Chapter 2, was followed to select the research sample of in-depth cases. Each teacher selected for in-depth case study reflects the diversity and range of

teaching expertise present within the school district. See Table 5 for a summary of six teachers followed through in-depth casework. The six teachers will be introduced here and presented throughout the examples of in-depth teaching across the commonplaces within the study. Each teacher brings unique perspectives and stories of literacy teaching and professional learning to this study. All of the teachers for the in-depth cases were female and White in ethnicity.

Maggie. Maggie has taught for 14 years in this large metropolitan school district. She had worked as a full-time substitute teacher before she was hired into the school district to work permanently. Her current school placement was a K-8 elementary school in the south suburbs of this school district. Maggie reported that she works in the "oldest, most historic school building in the district," which was 4-story building in a residential neighborhood (interview, November 2013). She is currently teaching in the second grade. Maggie defines her students as the "average to high-achieving group in the whole second grade—I got the good kids" (interview, November 2013). Her students were Caucasian predominantly.

Maggie had a bachelor's degree in childhood education with a grades kindergarten to eighth grade teacher certification and a Master's degree in reading education. When I asked her how her teacher certification and Master's degree coursework influenced her teaching, her response was, "Yes and no. I learned some things I could use in my classroom teaching. A lot of my teaching came from my experiences over the years" (interview, November 2013). She reports using the *Awards* series "to support my literacy teaching as I've not taught second grade before" (interview, November 2013). Her classroom teaching experiences included fifth grade and kindergarten, each for several years. This was her first time and year in second grade. She had previously taught at a school deemed "low achieving" and all teaching faculty was reassigned to different schools throughout the school district. During that time, she had worked as a

kindergarten teacher and used specific instructional methods, such as Orton-Gillingham scripted phonics intervention, to guide her instruction.

Tina. Tina has taught for 16 years in this large metropolitan school district. Her current placement was a K-8 elementary school in the inner city of this school district. This school was newly built under the district's improvement plan for student achievement and new infrastructures for learning. Tina is currently teaching in a second/third grade classroom. Her classroom was created because "there were 15 more kids in each grade level and, as the more veteran teacher with 16 years, I was given the 15 students from each grade level to make one classroom" (interview, November 2013). Her students were predominately African American and she commented she received "all of the struggling students" in her classroom (interview, November 2013).

Tina's educational background was an Education Doctorate from Capella University Online and a teacher certification for kindergarten through eighth grade. Her previous degrees were in childhood education and a Master's degree. She had teaching experiences in third grade and eighth grade. This is her first time teaching second grade. Tina reports enjoying teaching literacy as "I love to share books with my students" (interview, November 2013).

Suzanne. Suzanne has taught for 20 years in this large metropolitan school district. Her current placement was a K-8 elementary school in the inner city of this school district. Her school building was a school district improvement site for reducing school bullying and creating a safe school zone. Suzanne is currently teaching third grade. A majority of her students are African American.

Suzanne had previously worked as a District Literacy Coach across several K-8 elementary schools. She had also worked as an elementary school Reading Specialist. Her

educational background was a bachelor's degree in childhood education, with a teacher certification for grades kindergarten to eighth, and a Master's degree in Reading Education with a Reading Specialist endorsement. She reports her work as a District Literacy Coach "informs the way in which I think about teaching reading in my classroom as I know what my students need" (interview, November 2013).

Jennifer. Jennifer has taught for 29 years in this large metropolitan school district. Her current placement was in a K-8 elementary school in the inner city of this school district. Her school was deemed as needing improvement for several years of low achievement scores for the state standardized tests (Waldron, personal communication, October 2013). Jennifer is currently teaching fourth grade. A majority of her students are African American and Latino/a.

Jennifer had a childhood education degree with a grades kindergarten to eighth teacher certification. She also received a Reading certification as an undergraduate and holds a Master's degree in Special Education. This is her second year in fourth grade, having previously taught second and third grades. "I am enjoying fourth grade. It's a change, but not bad," as she stated during her interview (November 2013). Jennifer also commented on how she enjoys teaching and working with children because, as she stated, "If I ever get bored, I'll just go home. I haven't gotten bored yet and I love this job" (interview, November 2013).

Lisa. Lisa has taught for 30 years in this large metropolitan school district. Her current placement was in a K-8 elementary school in the suburbs of the district. Her school was identified as an "improvement school" for teaching excellence meaning additional financial and personnel resources were given to the school to improve students' achievement (interview, November 2013). Lisa is currently teaching first grade. Her class of students was equally balanced between students who were Caucasian, Latino/a, and African American.

Lisa had a childhood education degree with a kindergarten to eighth teacher certification. She does not hold a Master's degree, though she has taken several Master's courses. She stated, "I chose to be a mother so I did not get my Master's degree," but indicated that she "read all the time and keep informed about what best practices I should be using in my classroom" (interview, November 2013). Lisa has taught first grade for 19 years, along with second grade for one year and third grade for the first several years of her career.

Katie. Katie has taught for 37 years, with a majority of those years in this large metropolitan school district. Her current placement was in a K-8 bilingual elementary school in the inner city of the district. A majority of the students, more than half of the students according to Katie, speak Spanish as their first language and are acquiring English as their second language. Katie currently teaches second grade. The students in her classroom are Caucasian and Latino/a. Katie speaks some Spanish, though she is not fluent as she self-reported (interview, November 2013).

Katie has a childhood education degree, with a K-8 teacher certification, and a Master's degree in Reading Education. She was certified as a Reading Specialist and Reading Recovery Teacher, having previously worked in both roles within the school district. Before coming to this school district, Katie had worked in the Catholic school system of this city. Katie reports how "I love teaching second grade, working in the building that I do, and the network of great colleagues I have to learn from in the area" (interview, November 2013).

Collectively, these six teachers selected as in-depth cases for this study present a diverse array of years of experiences, school contexts, and educational backgrounds for teaching literacy in the elementary school classroom.

Complexities within and Beyond the Elementary Literacy Teacher: Identity, Agency, and Autonomy

In the next part of this chapter, I will show, using both surveys and case study examples, that each of the six teachers, in the pages and chapters to come, represents similar and diverse views and perspectives on how to plan and enact elementary literacy instruction. These views and perspectives, in turn, informed the opportunities for students' literacy learning. One of the key linkages found within the commonplace of the teachers was how influential a teacher's sense of identity was as a literacy teacher and how this identity informed a sense of agency and autonomy over their local decision-making in classroom literacy teaching.

The local decision-making with curriculum and how a teacher enacts it can be traced, in part, to his or her own identity formation as a teacher. "Identity," as a part of teacher learning, relates to the multiple contexts, emotions, relationships, meanings, and interactions that surround a teacher's formation across time (Rogers & Scott, 2008). Teachers' identity will be shaped by their teacher education, current contexts for teaching, own career goals as a teacher, prior experiences as a learner themselves, and their professional experiences with children (Olsen, 2008). The cultural tools and meditational systems found specifically in schools are factors such as the curriculum required or educational policies in place and may guide how teachers will enact agency over their students' literacy learning (Lasky, 2005; Wertsch, 1993; Wertsch et al., 1991). These acts, or sense of agency, are cultivated by "thoughtful opportunities [taken up by teachers] to respond to a myriad of forces" to realize new opportunities for students' learning (Fairbanks et al., 2010, p. 166). Teachers who understand their own knowledge and beliefs and use these beliefs to guide effective literacy instruction have a strong sense of identity and agency. Autonomy has been used by teachers through their sense of personal and professional authority,

as well as their own specialized knowledge of particular subject matter, in how judgments are made for effective teaching (Piaget, 1977; Lortie, 1969). These three factors of teachers' identity and their related senses of agency and autonomy have come to bear on the types of planning, teaching, and learning integrated by teachers and the opportunities afforded for students' literacy learning.

These factors have been shown in my own research and that of colleagues to affect a teachers' sense of self (Waldron, 2013; Fairbanks, et al., 2010; Rogers & Scott, 2008). Previous research has shown how elementary teachers are often impacted by top-down literacy program change and educational reform initiatives around literacy (e.g., Peaze-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). This research though has lacked specific ways in which teachers, both with broad and in-depth understandings, used their sense of self, including their identity, sense of agency, and sense of autonomy, to negotiate the needs of their local classroom teaching within the constraints of educational policies and the requirements of specific curriculum for their literacy teaching. This commonplace of teachers in elementary literacy examined the impacts of various educational reforms, required literacy curriculum, and the teachers' sense of identity, agency, and autonomy in how it influenced their work as elementary literacy teachers.

The Literacy Teachers' Identities in Their Teaching

The survey (see Appendix C for a copy of the survey) posed questions related to the teachers' sense of identities as well as their literacy teaching. It surveyed what constituted the context for literacy within their classroom, school, and school district. Previous research demonstrated the importance of surveying this context to better understand both their immediate environment as well as the instructional resources available for elementary literacy teaching and

learning (e.g., Waldron, 2013; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Highfield, Pardo, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). These questions looked at their opinions of how their beliefs, interests, and knowledge of literacy teaching influenced the literacy teaching in their classroom. The survey questions were generated from several pilot surveys, review of relevant research literature, and my previous research (e.g., Waldron, 2013; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013). Their beliefs, practices, and opinions of elementary literacy teaching and their identity were measured using a Likert Scale. The Likert Scale had a range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), along with a neutral choice. Figures 3 and 4 outline the questions from the survey, the Likert Scale used, and the responses. These questions around identity were important to see how teachers felt their localized contexts were supportive or limiting for their individual participation in literacy enactment, planning, and learning.

The teacher's identity was found to be a powerful component of the broad sample's local decision-making and enactment around literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). For example, one of the survey questions posed the following statement: "My beliefs, interests, and strengths influence how I teach literacy in my classroom." Figure 4 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Overwhelming, approximately 84% of the 161 teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed their beliefs, interests, and strengths influence their literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). Another question posed the following statement about identity and teaching in relation to academic standards for reading instruction: "Academic standards (e.g. state standards; the Common Core) inform my instruction in reading." Figure 5 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Approximately 89% of the 161 teachers who responded agreed or strongly agreed academic standards informed their reading instruction (survey, October 2013). This means that academic standards, as one of the contextualized factors, influence their

planning, interpretation, and enactment of literacy teaching. These questions demonstrate the importance of considering teachers' identity in relation to literacy. The teachers were influenced by their identities and it, in turn, shaped their literacy instruction.

The broad sample of teachers demonstrated, across beliefs, interests, and strengths, a strong sense of teacher identity (survey, October 2013). This identity was important to their work as literacy teachers. The teachers also agreed with the academic standards around literacy in how these standards informed how they teach and what they teach in literacy. Beyond the broad sample, in-depth cases examples were important in order to better understand the influence of a teacher's identity in literacy instruction. Lisa, one of the teachers followed in this study, allowed us to see how a teacher's identity could come to bear on her classroom literacy instruction.

Lisa's "Improvement School" and Her Identity At Work. A localized, more in-depth example of identity was Lisa's improvement school and her commitment to offering excellent literacy instruction to her first grade students. Lisa's school, a historically low-performing school on state achievement tests of reading, was selected in the previous academic year to become an "improvement school." This designation meant the school would receive additional financial, personnel, and professional development resources from the school district to improve all areas of teaching and instruction across the school in grades kindergarten through eighth. Lisa commented, "Many teachers chose to leave for other schools when we were selected as an improvement site" (interview, November 2013).

Lisa expressed how she felt this was a positive change for the school and for her development as a teacher. She said, "We have a new principal, a lot of new staff, lot more support staff in here to help the students grow. Now, we've already had an improvement in our test scores- up from 76.5 to 86.2% in third grade. I stayed here, signed a commitment letter- as

I'm committed to these kids and this school" (interview, November 2013). Lisa talked extensively about supporting her students, collaborating with her colleagues, and working with her administration team. She stressed, positively, how changes were being made to the school and how it was benefiting the students. She also commented, "I'm growing as a professional and it's wonderful" (interview, November 2013). There was a clear commitment to her students as evidenced in her comments as a teacher and in her observed literacy block, compromised of a mini-lesson, independent activity, small group reading instruction, and literacy centers (classroom observations, November 2013). All of these instructional activities used a wide variety of resources and were developmentally appropriate for first graders.

Lisa, in this improvement school and as a first grade teacher, talked about, throughout all of these examples previously given, how "it is just who I am as a teacher" (interview, November 2013). Her identity took in the requirements of her improvement school and put these requirements to work to support her teaching with her students and their achievement around literacy. Artifact analyses from Lisa's class demonstrated how she used her instructional planning and subsequent work with students, which was supported by her beliefs in improving student achievement and in her attitude towards change within her localized school setting. Her identity was an integral part to her work and capacity to teach within this improvement school. For example, Lisa took active roles in school leadership teams around curriculum development and school-wide student achievement (interview, November 2013). These roles allowed her to contribute to her school community with her personal beliefs and expertise as a teacher.

Her ability to allow herself to transform by these changes was linked closely to her identity, both formed from prior learning or contexts and being formed in these new experiences. Lisa realized, as she evidenced in her one interview (November 2013), that "my school was

struggling—we needed to change." This realization allowed Lisa to use her identity as a teacher and to work for change as a member of this school community seeking positive change. Lisa, as just one example, demonstrated how a teacher's identity could affect positive change in literacy instruction within her own classroom and across her school.

The Literacy Teachers' Use of Agency in Their Teaching

A teacher's identity, based on previous research, does not work in isolation for the decision- and sense-making that teachers must do for classroom instruction. The work of Lasky (2005) as well as Wertsch and colleagues (1993; 1991) stresses how teachers enact their sense of agency and autonomy over their classroom instruction and the opportunities for students' learning by using the tools available within their local contexts, their classrooms and schools. This sense of agency also deals with any teacher's capacity to respond to forces external to her classroom (Fairbanks et al., 2010). As previously examined, Lisa exerted not only her professional identity as a teacher to make the best of her improvement school setting, but also a clear sense of agency to respond to the changes and innovations brought about within her school. The interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analyses of Lisa's classrooms demonstrated a clear sense of agency, but also a sense of autonomy. The professional authority, as well as personal beliefs and subject matter knowledge, informs a teacher's sense of autonomy within her classroom to shape the literacy learning of her students (Piaget, 1977; Lortie, 1969). The teachers' use of agency, coupled with their identities and sense of autonomy, was essential to how literacy instruction was planned and enacted for students' literacy learning within these layered contexts of school and classroom.

Several questions in the survey attempted to get to the broad sample's understanding and use of agency within their classrooms. These questions also used a Likert Scale. For example,

one of the survey questions posed the following statement: "I make my own instructional choices and decisions in my literacy teaching." Figure 6 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Approximately 83% of the 161 teachers who responded felt they had agency over their literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). Some of the teachers, approximately 8%, felt neutral about their sense of agency. Another 9% of the teachers sampled disagreed or strongly disagreed with having a sense of agency in their literacy teaching (survey). This question means that a majority of the teachers felt a strong sense of agency in their instructional choices and decisions in literacy.

Another question around agency in the survey posed the following statement: "I make a majority of the instructional decisions, reflective of my students and their needs, in my classroom teaching in literacy." Figure 7 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Here again, 83% of the 161 teachers who responded felt they had agency in their instructional decision-making for their students, their needs, and in their classroom teaching (survey, October 2013). Again, 8% of the teachers were neutral and 9% of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed in their ability to make a majority of the instructional decisions in regards to students, needs, and in classroom teaching (survey). This question demonstrates how a sense of agency, once again, was very strong in the broad sample in how teachers interpreted their capacities to make instructional decisions, reflective of their students and their classrooms.

Referring both to the discussion in Chapter 4 and with the findings here, these teachers possess a sense of agency in how they plan and enact their classroom literacy instruction. Yet, as one can imagine, a sense of identity or agency from teacher to teacher is quite different and can be made unstable in times of change or reform (Fairbanks et al., 2010). This was important information as the in depth cases of teachers were interviewed and observed within the settings

of their local classrooms. It was important to understand how teacher agency was being using within the classroom setting and how it supported or negated students' learning around literacy. Teacher agency, across the six in depth teachers of the study, appeared as a strong lever in the localized decision-making by six teachers for literacy teaching and instruction. One example was Suzanne and how she used her teacher agency to modify her third grade literacy instruction. Her case served as an example of her agency was influenced by her identity as a teacher.

Suzanne's Use of Agency in Her Third Grade Literacy. Suzanne, a 20-year veteran of elementary teaching and having a Master's degree in reading education, provided a clear example of how teacher agency was used to inform classroom literacy instruction for students. Suzanne, in both interviews and in her observed classroom literacy teaching, seemed overwhelmed in her tone and mannerisms with planning, instruction, and enactment of literacy in her third grade classroom. She often times referred to "this requirement" or "that standard" when referring to why she taught or included certain content in her literacy teaching. Suzanne, during the interview (November 2013), stated the following:

> "Well, my building or my 3rd grade, we do things a little differently than other schools within the district. We did it to keep ourselves sane. My principal would prefer if I worked with the kids individually and I looked at her like she's crazy. It's not going to happen."

This quote demonstrated Suzanne's willingness to exercise her agency, in line with her identity as a teacher, in her literacy teaching, even with a differing opinion coming from her school's principal. Suzanne's classroom observations of literacy teaching resembled a middle-grades style instructional block where 45 minutes was spent in one literacy mini-lesson to the whole group, followed by one small-group instructional lesson while the rest of the students completed

worksheet activities at their seats or read independently (classroom observations, November 2013). Her students were then rotated, at the end of the 45-minute block, to their mathematics lesson. When asked in the interviews about additional literacy instructional time, Suzanne alluded to 30 minutes of additional literacy time given in the afternoons through computer-based interventions (interview, November 2013).

This sense of agency in literacy instruction, whether viewed positively or negatively for its appropriateness of instruction and subsequent impact on student achievement, demonstrated how Suzanne held certain instructional beliefs around literacy and took up what she interpreted as opportunities for students' learning within her contextual pressures (interview, November 2013; classroom observations, November 2013). It was interesting to see how this teacher, along with her three other colleagues in third grade, chose to attend to the policy demands and instructional requirements with modified scheduling. It is also important to note how this sense of agency was aligning or misaligning with the beliefs of the leadership within her school's context.

The Literacy Teachers' Sense of Autonomy over Their Teaching

The teachers' identities and their sense of agency have been seen as important factors contributing to the instructional contexts created by teachers for literacy teaching and learning. Another contextual consideration for literacy, enacted or not enacted across these school contexts, was the literacy teachers' sense of autonomy. Piaget (1977) wrote about autonomy in the individual as the highest attainment of development by acknowledging mutual reciprocity and regard while also placing certain ideals above others and subordinating other goals thought of as unchangeable. Teachers' sense of autonomy was drawn from this sense of personal autonomy and the professional authority, as well as their specialized knowledge of particular

subject matter, in how they can make judgments they view as essential to effective teaching (Lortie, 1969). This sense of autonomy works along a spectrum, taking into account the teacher's identity and sense of agency in teaching along with the needs of the learners within the classroom context. Teachers also view this professional autonomy as something they don't share with their administrators (Lortie, 1969). Teachers' sense of autonomy was important to understand within the broad sample and in depth cases of elementary literacy classrooms and teachers' enactment of literacy instruction within localized contexts. A teacher's autonomy, when accounting for their identities and sense of agency, may be influential in the instructional opportunities, offered or absent, for students' literacy learning.

Several questions in the survey attempted to get to the broad sample's autonomy within their classrooms. These questions used a Likert Scale as well. One survey question posed the following statement: "I have a great deal of autonomy in implementing the literacy curriculum in my classroom." Figure 8 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Approximately 63% of the 138 teachers who responded felt they had autonomy in making instructional choices and decisions around their literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). Approximately 12% of this broad sample disagreed they had autonomy, while another approximately 24% and less than 1% were neutral or selected "not applicable" on this statement (survey). This means that the 138 respondents to this question felt some sense of autonomy, but there was also a drop in respondents to this question and a 10% drop in agreement when compared to these same teachers' stronger sense of agency or identity (survey). While autonomy is present, it leaves one to wonder to what extent autonomy is or is not present.

Another question in the survey looked to explore teachers' autonomy in literacy teaching with the following statement: "I have no control over my classroom teaching in literacy." Figure

9 demonstrates the teachers' responses to this question. Approximately 83% of the 138 teachers who responded disagreed or strong disagreed to having no control over their classroom literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). This is contrast to approximately 7% who agreed or strongly agreed they had no control over their teaching. Another approximately 9% of the teachers who responded were neutral and less than 1% said this statement was not applicable (survey). This broader sample of teachers did feel they had autonomy over their literacy teaching and the types of instructional opportunities or local decision-making they could provide around literacy instruction and assessment for their students.

This sense of autonomy in the control over the instructional choices and decisions around literacy teaching and learning was linked closely to these teachers' sense of identity and agency, as seen across the previous data. This autonomy created opportunities for teachers to enact local sense making and decisions around the literacy instruction they offered to their students. This created spaced within the classrooms for teachers to use their prior knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, their knowledge of their learners, and other contextual considerations to create opportunities for authentic literacy learning. These spaces, of course, looked different from classroom to classroom, school to school. Several of the teachers within the in-depth cases demonstrated their capacity to enact autonomy over their literacy teaching and students' opportunities for literacy learning.

Tina's Autonomy over Literacy Instruction in Her 2nd/3rd Grade Classroom. A localized example of teacher autonomy in literacy instruction was Tina's decision-making around literacy in her 2nd/3rd grade classroom. Tina became a second/third grade split due to enrollment numbers across both grade levels. She stated, "There were 15 more kids in each grade level and, as the more veteran teacher with 16 years, I was given the 15 students from each grade

level to make one classroom. I have two curriculums, one for each grade level, and two sets of Common Core Standards" (interview, November 2013). Tina shared how these students were also the "struggling students" from each grade level (interview). The stakes for student achievement and literacy instruction were high in this classroom for Tina.

Tina opted to use theme-based units of study in order to address the diverse needs at both the student and the instructional levels. She used curriculum materials and common trade books to address curricular goals and *the Common Core State Standards* for the two grade level groups within her classroom. In the interview (November 2013), she stated her reasoning behind her instructional choices and design:

> "I use chapter books because eventually our kids are going to be reading. We want them to read a full book, read full chapter books. And they've been exposed to the picture books, the short reading books. Not as many chapter books. Even if there's some still reading at a pre-primer stage, it's not that they can't comprehend. They may not have that fluency piece or word identification. But if they hear it, I'm still providing that fluency. They still have that fluency of hearing and that comprehension. When I do the read-aloud, like I did with the *Cam Jansen* book, they are getting comprehension behind it. So that's why I do it that way, because of the different levels. Then, if we want to do some kind of skill set, let's say a strategy focus, I may introduce the whole strategy or the skill to the whole group, then I have to accommodate the different levels."

Her sense of autonomy and agency in choosing to plan and enact literacy instruction in this way was drawn from her professional experiences, her coursework, and knowledge of student learning (interviews, November 2013). Her identity related to her willingness not to follow the basal reading program as it was mandated. As examples, her classroom observations (November

2013) demonstrated how she organized her literacy block to try and accommodate the diversity of learners within her classroom setting. Her instructional lesson plans, as artifacts analyzed (December 2013) within the study, demonstrated how Tina linked to applicable academic standards, *The Common Core State Standards* for third grade, for her classroom of second and third grade students. Tina, with her sense of autonomy over her classroom literacy instruction, attempted to make the best possible instructional opportunities out of an imperfect situation of overlapping grade levels in one classroom. She used her instructional pedagogy in literacy to design units of study around texts and concepts versus one curriculum resource (classroom observations, November 2013; artifact analyses, December 2013). For example, her use of theme-based units, such as chapter books, created lessons in instructional skills and strategies for her students. She also incorporated themes and topics that were of interest to her students. Her autonomy was critically important to her capacity to cope with her diversity in students and instructional levels. It was also important in enabling her to design and enact literacy instruction for her students. This sense of autonomy was also supported, for Tina and other teachers within the study, by their sense of identity as professionals, as teachers, and in their ability to enact agency over their literacy teaching.

Concluding Thoughts

The teachers of literacy deliberate and make sense of their local literacy teaching, as evidenced by both a broad sample and in-depth case studies. This deliberation involved a teacher considering who she was and what she believed as a literacy teacher (her identity) and then using her local decision-making (her agency) around how she planned for and enacted literacy instruction within her classroom setting (her autonomy). The broad sample of 161 teachers demonstrated broad trends and practices occurring within one large metropolitan school in the

Midwest. The in-depth cases of six elementary literacy teachers zoomed in upon the school district of the study and elaborated various stories of elementary literacy teaching occurring across six diverse contexts. These stories will continue to expand in the forthcoming chapters.

A teacher's identity, coupled with her sense of agency and autonomy, were important in how each teacher came to understand, interpret, react, or follow the contextual pressures surrounding their teaching of literacy and their understanding of literacy learning with their students. The themes of teacher identity, agency, and autonomy influenced how teachers viewed and enacted their teaching of elementary literacy teaching. In turn, the curriculum for literacy learning, particularly what is used or ignored, was significantly influenced by each teacher's sense of self around literacy and literacy teaching.

CHAPTER 5:

THE CURRICULUM OF LITERACY

This school district and its schools had a curriculum of literacy. The curriculum was composed of a basal reading series- the *Awards Series*, various instructional programs selected by individual teachers, *The Common Core State Standards* as an instructional pacing guide, and a plethora of other resources used within the classroom. These components of the curriculum for literacy influenced the literacy instruction and assessment used with students. The experiences of these teachers, both broadly and in depth, problematize the contribution and challenges of literacy curriculum within classroom and school settings.

Schwab's (1973/1983) emphasized the importance of curriculum as both a commonplace of teachers' work within the classroom and at the heart of all translations into instruction. The curriculum of literacy was only one factor the elementary literacy teachers must consider within this study. Yet, it became a significant consideration for how teachers planned and enacted literacy with their students.

Awards: Creating Support and Constraints in Literacy Instruction and Assessment

This school district reported, in personal communications and in published district instructional resources available on the web and with personnel, using "a common literacy curriculum and a pacing guide based on *The Common Core State Standards*" (Waldron, personal communications, September 2013). It would be expected that any school district, particularly one with 72 schools covering grades kindergarten to eighth, would have a "common" literacy curriculum. Yet, it was quite unclear what the "common" elements of the curriculum were from a peripheral or outsider's view. As well, the term "pacing guide" elicits various ideas within the field of education and teaching. It can range from the concept of a guide, providing general

conceptualizations of instruction and assessment at a particular grade level, to the reality of a mandate, requiring certain components to instruction and controlling the types of assessment administered to students.

Use of a Basal Reading Program and Instructional Pacing Guide

The broad sample elaborated the details of the common literacy program and the pacing guide used within the district. Several questions within the survey were designed to better understand the literacy program and pacing guide. A series of instructional components, programmatic structures, and best practices in literacy instruction were provided across several questions within the survey for the broad sample. It was evident in the broad sample that a basal reading program was a part of the "common literacy curriculum" within this district. Figure 10 shows the components of the common literacy curriculum.

Approximately 85%, or about 137 of the 161 teachers in the sample, reported using a basal reading program to teach reading (survey, October 2013). This means that a vast majority of the teachers in the sample were using a basal reading program as a component of their classroom literacy instruction and speaks to the prevalence of a curriculum for literacy across the district. The open-ended responses in the survey that asked respondents for the name of the basal reading program consistently named the *Awards Series* as the literacy curriculum (survey, October 2013). This series, in artifact analyses (December 2013) for the study, included a student anthology edition with several stories or text contained in each book, a teacher's manual, supplemental worksheets around phonics and grammar, and additional materials such as leveled texts or resource guides for teachers. Approximately 73% of the 161 teachers used the teacher's manual with the basal reading program to plan and enact their literacy instruction (survey, October 2013). This means the scripted nature of the instructional questions and text for teacher

prompting of the teacher's manual, as discovered in the artifact analyses for this study, is being used across various classroom settings. For example, the artifact analyses discovered "teacher-specific" language in various colored fonts to guide the teachers in what to "say and do" with students when interacting around a text from the basal reading program (December 2013). Approximately 67% of the 161 teachers also used the weekly assessments from the basal reading program (survey, October 2013). Artifact analyses (December 2013) in the study showed these assessments to be structured and directly related to all content to be taught in the basal reading program. A variety of resources and texts were available to every teacher as they tried to use and incorporate the basal reading program into their classroom literacy instruction.

Teachers' Beliefs and Understanding of the Basal Reading Program

As important as it was to understand what instructional resources were present for literacy, it was also equally important to understand how teachers interpreted, viewed, and implemented the use of these instructional resources as part of their literacy planning and teaching for their students' literacy learning. The broad sample was given statements to respond to in relation to using a basal reading program and their instructional planning when using a required literacy curriculum. Each of the statements in the questions allowed the respondents to choose between "true" or "false." These questions were critically important to gain a better understanding how teachers were interpreting and using the basal reading program provided to them from the school district.

One of the survey questions posed the following statement: "My basal textbook program is the same as my literacy curriculum." Approximately 75% of the 161 teachers surveyed selected "false," meaning the basal textbook program was not the same as their literacy curriculum (survey, October 2013). These 121 teachers view their literacy program as more

comprehensive than the basal reading program. Yet, another approximately 25% of the teachers surveyed selected "true," meaning the basal reading program is the same as their literacy curriculum. It is interesting these 40 teachers view the basal reading program as their literacy curriculum because it leaves one to question what is happening in the localized classroom and school contexts for this interpretation (survey).

Another survey question posed the following statement: "My basal textbook program is only one part of my curriculum." Approximately 76% of the 161 teachers surveyed selected "true," meaning their literacy curriculum was more than just a basal reading program (survey, October 2013). These 122 teachers view their literacy program as far more comprehensive than one program or resource. Approximately 24% of the teachers surveyed selected "false," meaning their literacy curriculum was the basal reading program (survey, October 2013). These 39 teachers construct their literacy curriculum program for their students around one curriculum. These teachers leave one wondering why they rely on just one curriculum versus trying to differentiate the curriculum across multiple resources for their students' learning experiences in literacy.

The Common Core State Standards: The Instructional Pacing Guide

The curriculum for literacy is informed not only by the basal reading program and its presence or absence in a classroom setting, but also by the school district's instructional pacing guide. The district opted to use *The Common Core State Standards* (2011) to create an instructional pacing guide. In analyzing the pacing guide for this study, the *CCSSs* were taken and parsed down to four instructional quarters to match the academic year within the district. Each standard was linked to various instructional resources, such as the *Awards Series* and state model curriculum, in order to facilitate teachers at any grade level in teaching towards the

CCSSs. It is important to note *The Common Core State Standards* (2011) were designed to be end-of-year benchmarks for each grade level and guidelines for instruction in the best practices in the major content areas of the English-Language Arts and Mathematics across grades kindergarten to twelfth. The instructional pacing guide transformed the *CCSSs* into concrete, measurable instructional objectives for literacy and mathematics instruction. Approximately 91% of the 161 teachers in the broad sample reported they were following this as the pacing guide for literacy instruction (survey, October 2013). This instructional pacing was, as reflected by this survey question, a critical component to how these teachers plan and enact literacy instruction within their classrooms.

The Broad Sample's Perspective on *The Common Core State Standards*

It was important, after learning how the school district was approaching *The Common Core State Standards*, to learn how the broad sample of teachers were attending to issues of academic standards within their classroom literacy teaching. Several questions, both closed and open-ended, were posed to the teachers participating in the survey to gain a better understanding of their personal beliefs and instructional practices around academic standards as well as their perspectives on the use of the instructional pacing guide. These conceptualizations of academic standards and pacing guides are often separated in conversations around teacher learning, but are inherently merged within this school district's setting for instruction.

The following statement was posed to the broad sample around the instructional pacing guide of *The Common Core State Standards*: "I am required to follow our instructional pacing chart/guide as prescribed, without changes." This statement required a "true" or "false" response. Approximately 60% of the 161 teachers who responded selected "true" and another approximately 40% who responded selected "false" to this statement (survey, October 2013).

This means that well over half of the broad sample in this survey felt they must follow *The Common Core State Standards* as prescribed, without changes, as found in their instructional pacing guide. This is interesting in comparison to the 91% of the teachers in the broad sample that reported following an instructional pacing guide for their literacy instruction (survey, October 2013). Open-ended responses in the survey brought more clarity when over 120 individual responses were recorded indicating "the standards," "the Common Core," or "the standards for the test" when asked how academic standards guided their reading and writing instruction within their classroom. It is clear the instructional pacing guide, *The Common Core State Standards,* shapes literacy instruction across the sample.

Two statements specifically asked the broad sample about using academic standards to inform instruction in reading and writing. The specific example of *The Common Core State Standards* was given as academic standards. Both statements asked iterations of the following: "Academic standards (e.g. state standards; the Common Core) inform my instruction in…" (See Figures 5 and 11 for the responses.) Overwhelmingly, approximately 89% and 88% of the 161 teachers surveyed, in reading and writing respectively, "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the use of academic standards to inform instruction (survey, October 2013). These broad sample findings illuminate what was seen in the interviews and classroom observations of local classroom teaching across the six teachers.

Local Perspectives on *The Common Core State Standards*

Two local perspectives serve as examples of how the instructional pacing guide of *The Common Core State Standards* was being viewed by teachers at the local level. Specific questions in the interview aided in developing each perspective around this subject. Each perspective offered unique insights into the potential successes and challenges faced when trying

to navigate the *CCSSs*. The two teachers, Jennifer and Lisa, offered common tales of trying to learn the content of the standards, determining how to advocate for it, and then implementing it as a part of daily classroom instruction and students' literacy learning.

Jennifer, as our first perspective and a 29-year veteran teaching fourth grade in a continuous improvement school, talked about the broad nature of *The Common Core State Standards* and how she sought out resources to support her learning around them. She said, in one interview (November, 2013):

> "The scope and sequence is based on the Common Core [for reading and mathematics] and for science and social studies, it's based on the Department of Education—what they say. It's pretty broad. It's not very specific and that's why, if you go look at the model curriculum, you're like, oh, that's what that means."

Jennifer used the model curriculum, available online from the state's Department of Education, to guide her use of the *CCSSs* in literacy. She goes on to say, in her second interview (November 2013), about how she "wasn't sure what that meant until I looked it up and it linked into our *Award Series."* She needed the examples of something known to help her negotiate the unknown of these new standards. Jennifer also alluded to the fact that they were "handed the guide" and did not receive professional development around *The Common Core State Standards* (interview, November 2013). In her school context, this leaves much to group interpretation and individual teacher decision-making in how to use or navigate the standards to inform instruction and, subsequently, student achievement.

Lisa, a 37-year veteran teaching second grade in a bilingual school, has fully immersed herself and her classroom instruction in *The Common Core State Standards*. She believed these standards have allowed her to become more attentive to her students' needs, as well as allowing

her beliefs and agency as a teacher to be a part of her literacy instruction. She commented in her interview (November, 2013):

> "I love it. That's why I'm the Common Core advocate. I love it. It enables me to deepen their understanding of the standard. I don't feel like there's a constant timer going off and a clock and I have to hurry up and move to the next whether we're ready or not. That used to be the way."

Lisa, using her agency and identity as a teacher, has adopted the *CCSSs* and used it as a positive resource to help her shape the literacy instruction for her students. As an example, Lisa stated that she uses the standards as a "guide for my instruction and what my students need to learn" (interview, November 2013). The artifact analyses of her lesson plan demonstrated clear connections to the *Common Core State Standards* as Lisa clearly stated instructional objectives for each of her lessons and then linked each objective to the applicable *CCSSs* (December 2013). Both here and in Chapter 4, Lisa, rather than resisting or being confused by this newest educational policy, used her expertise in literacy and as a teacher to adopt the *CCSSs* as a part of her second grade classroom. She talked in the second interview (November 2013) about using "various instructional resources, not just the *Award Series* to help my students reach their full learning potential." Lisa's sense of identity as a teacher, along with her agency and autonomy within her literacy teaching, allowed her to plan cohesive literacy instruction for her students. Lisa has adopted and is using *The Common Core State Standards* in powerful ways to positively influence her literacy planning, instruction, and teaching for her students' benefit.

The Instructional Practices of Literacy in Reading and Writing

Educational research informs us that it is not just a curriculum, such as a basal reading program, or *The Common Core State Standards* (2011) that define a successful or unsuccessful

elementary literacy teacher or students' achievement in literacy. These components are part of a broad constellation of literacy strategies and skills that students must exposed to in their literacy learning within every classroom where literacy instruction occurs (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). Another component to this constellation are the instructional practices adopted by teachers in literacy instruction and assessment. It was important to analyze the skills and strategies used for literacy instruction by teachers within classrooms and across schools.

Top Five Instructional Practices of Reading in the Broad Sample

A series of instructional practices in reading were presented in the survey to the broad sample. The instructional practices, 25 practices in all, were listed in a checklist for each teacher to choose the practices used on a weekly basis within her/his classroom. Certain instructional practices in the list have been identified as best practices in literacy instruction for reading from educational research (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). Other instructional practices included in the list are commonly found in elementary school classrooms, but are not as effective or favorable, in terms of instructional impact from educational research findings, for students' literacy achievement.

The survey included the following question before the checklist: "What instructional practices or strategies below do you use in your reading lessons on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply.)" (See Figure 12 for the summary of the top five instructional practices in reading.) These top five instructional practices in reading were used by a majority, as evidenced by the following approximate percentages, of the 161 teachers in the sample: (a) teacher read aloud- 96%; (b) whole-group discussion- 90%; (c) small-group discussion- 90%; (d) small-group instruction- 89%; and (e) student oral reading- 88% (survey, October 2013). All of these instructional practices are recognized as best practices in literacy instruction to support students'

literacy achievement (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). This means that a majority of the teachers were self-reporting and attempting to integrate best practices in literacy instruction in reading on a weekly basis in their classrooms.

Top Five Instructional Practices of Writing in the Broad Sample

Likewise, a series of instructional practices in writing were also presented in the survey to the broad sample. Again, certain instructional practices in the list have been identified as best practices in literacy instruction for writing from educational research (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). Other, less favorable or not effective, educational practices in writing instruction were listed as well. The survey included the following question before the checklist: "What instructional practices or strategies below do you use in your writing lessons on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply.)" (See Figure 13 for the summary of the top five instructional practices in writing.)

This question received responses from 149 of the 161 teachers surveyed. The reading instructional practices had responses from all 161 teachers. As all questions in the survey were optional to complete, there is a question about whether or not writing instructional practices are present in all classrooms or if certain teachers did not feel comfortable in self-reporting their writing instructional practices. The open-ended questions about writing instructional practices were also more limited in response. The top five instructional practices in writing were used widely, as evidenced by the following approximate percentages: (a) illustrate what they write- 91%; (b) write creatively to prompts from a story we have read- 75%; (c) revise and publish what they write- 71%; and (d) prewriting- 69% (survey, October 2013). It is interesting to see this grouping of instructional practices in writing, but it reflects, to some degree, the mode of this sample—first grade teachers. It also reflects the emphasis of parts of the writing process, which

is part of the best practices in literacy instruction for writing (Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Malloy, 2011). These instructional practices in reading and writing demonstrated how a majority of the teachers within the broad sample were trying to orchestrate best practices in literacy instruction as a part of their weekly instruction.

A Plethora of Resources and Ways to Organize for Literacy

The curriculum of literacy has now accounted for the basal reading series as the part and parcel for the curriculum across classrooms, *The Common Core State Standards* to guide instructional objectives, and the top five instructional practices used on a weekly basis in reading and writing. It was also important to explore what other factors or instructional resources were considerations for these teachers in their curriculum planning around literacy. This could include additional curriculum resources, ways of organizing literacy instruction, and other aspects of designing literacy curriculum.

The Broad Sample's Resources in Literacy Curriculum

The broad sample used a variety of instructional resources and ways of organizing literacy curriculum. The questions were designed to get to the resources and organization of reading and writing instruction in literacy. One question in the survey asked: "Do you draw upon your own ideas and resources to design and plan the reading lesson and units that you teach in your classroom (e.g., custom created-theme units of study)?" Overwhelmingly, 98% of the 161 teachers reported using their ideas and resources to design reading lessons and units for students' literacy instruction (survey, October 2013). As well, approximately 95% of these same teachers surveyed also reported incorporating children's literature as a part of their instruction in reading, beyond what was included in the basal reading program (survey, October 2013). The open-ended responses in the survey for resources in reading instruction had teachers commonly reporting

"using the internet," "bringing in my own resources I've made," and "other resources I've found for reading instruction."

In writing, 97% of the 161 teachers reported using writing as a part of their literacy lessons regularly (survey, October 2013). Some of the common responses in the open-ended questions about the resources and organizations used for writing instruction included: 6+1 Traits of Writing, writing workshop, journal writing, and the writing process formula (survey). Additionally, approximately 84% of these same teachers reported incorporating children's literature as a part of their instruction in writing, beyond what was included in the basal reading program (survey). The broad sample of teachers strived to integrate a wide variety of instructional resources and organization methods, beyond the basal reading series, to support literacy instruction within their classrooms.

The Tale of Two Second Grades in One School District. Two of the second grade teachers within the study exemplify the diversity and development of the literacy curriculum across two school settings in this school district. Maggie and Lisa demonstrate how teachers can interpret, plan, and then enact a "common literacy program" in similar but different ways. It questions how "common" any instructional program in literacy can be when you account for the differences of context, resources, teacher expertise, and students.

Maggie, as an experienced 16-year classroom teacher, struggled with how to deliver the second grade literacy curriculum after such a long absence from the grade level. She had spent her last seven years in kindergarten and was still "trying to gain her footing", as she said in her interview (November 2013), in 2nd grade. She said the following when we talked about the literacy curriculum (interview, November 2013):

> "We use *Awards* series and it comes with a lot of resources, but it's also an old series. So, I don't have everything that they, you know, that's readily available or supposed to be readily available. I did teach second [grade] at the beginning of my career. I don't know everything that goes with it. I can't ask for it if I don't know."

Maggie used the basal reading program, even while incomplete on many levels, as her driving force behind her literacy instruction. The classroom observations (November 2013) saw Maggie draw her instructional objectives, teacher prompting language, all text for the students and related activities, and student questioning directly from the teacher's manual for the basal. What was fascinating about Maggie was not so much her reliance on the basal reading program, but her confusion with what to do as her lack of experiences with this grade, her identity as an effective teacher of literacy, or sense of agency over the literacy curriculum or a combination of these factors seemed constrained. The students, during both classroom observations, struggled to maintain their focus and engagement in the literacy lessons (November 2013).

Juxtaposed, as another 2nd grade teacher, Katie, who had 37 years in the classroom with both public and private school settings, showed confidence in her understanding of curriculum. When asked about her curriculum for literacy, she said in an interview (November 2013):

> "I do a lot in every literacy lesson. I will do vocabulary development, use an *Awards* story, [and] supplement with leveled readers. I do a great deal of leveled reader work with the children. They all have a bag of books in their desk for independent reading at their ZPD level. I'm constantly pulling extra materials. I have a milk crate for almost everything."

Katie was able to use the basal story as a "text", differentiate with a wide variety of theme related texts, and then supplement her instruction based on her students' needs. During our

interview and as evidenced in her classroom observation (November 2013), she skillfully drew upon informal and formal assessments to guide her instruction with her students, along with the recommendations of the Common Core. A particular curriculum for literacy did not constrain or support her literacy teaching. It was her sense of identity, agency, and pedagogical content knowledge as an effective literacy teacher, which she demonstrated during the classroom observations, guiding her literacy planning and enactment with her students. The students in this second grade classroom were highly engaged, motivated by a variety of literacy centers, and seemingly happy to be a part of all of the literacy activities observed (classroom observations, November 2013). This tale of two-second grades in one school district creates a common reflection of how literacy instruction can look so different, yet similar across one school district with different teachers who have a variety of instructional resources and methods for organizing instruction in literacy.

Concluding Thoughts

This commonplace of curriculum for literacy is diverse, varied, and complex. The factors of a required curriculum such as a basal reading program, academic standards such as *The Common Core State Standards*, a variety of instructional practices in reading and writing, and a plethora of resources and ways for organizing literacy instruction informs the curriculum of literacy instruction and student learning in literacy. We take this commonplace of curriculum and add it to the previous commonplace of teachers, who are the conduit here in how curriculum is interpreted, planned, and enacted for literacy learning in the classroom. These commonplaces are just two in a series of four, which are needed to fully understand how curriculum making occurs and subsequent learning opportunities are afforded. The teachers and the curriculum are

influenced by the other commonplaces in this study: the need for differentiation at the instructional and student levels, along with the milieus for literacy learning and teaching.

CHAPTER 6:

DIFFERENTIATION OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Differentiation was a common theme found across the teacher interviews and classroom observations. Differentiation, as defined in this study, are the instructional opportunities taken up by teachers to address the different needs of students within literacy instruction (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). It was an important component to literacy instruction and teaching. The need for differentiation was another commonplace for curriculum-making corresponding in my analysis to Schwab's "learner" commonplace. This commonplace is yet another concern of the practical for teachers as they plan and enact their work in elementary literacy. What Schwab called "the practical," or the commonplaces of curriculum development, account for the needs of their learners as a part of curriculum design (Schwab, 1973).

The differentiation teachers discussed involved two levels of differentiation in literacy instruction. There was a need to differentiate among and decide about using varied instructional resources for literacy teaching. For example, the teachers were responsible for choosing from a variety of instructional resources, including the district's required *Awards Series* basal reading program, to plan with and enact literacy instruction for their students. There was also a need to differentiate students' opportunities for literacy learning. Across the study's teachers, the need for differentiation was discussed widely and often.

The word "differentiation" was mentioned over 50 times within the teacher interviews and in the open-ended responses of the survey (survey, October 2013; interviews, November 2013). This word "differentiation" was used to account for individual and/or group differences in learning within the context of literacy instruction and assessment. It was the ways in which teachers used various literacy resources. For example, several of the teachers, like Jennifer or

Maggie, used instructional materials for literacy outside of the district's *Awards Series* basal reading program. The students, as individuals in their classrooms, were discussed as a part of differentiation. One teacher in the six in-depth cases spoke specifically about her students' needs in literacy, while all of the other teachers discussed differentiation in curriculum resources and in instructional opportunities for their students in general.

Schwab (1973) discussed the importance of "learners" as a commonplace for curriculum making. A teacher must be aware of the developmental needs of children within a grade level and they must be prepared to directly engage children in meaningful ways to promote learning (Schwab, 1973). The children, as the learners, were an intricate consideration within the process of curriculum making and planning. In this study, the commonplace of the learner was now viewed through the lens of needing to differentiate both the curriculum used for their learning and the instructional opportunities afforded to each learner.

This emphasis upon differentiation viewed the students in new ways. Today's climate of educational policies and required instructional materials around literacy instruction has made teachers more concerned with providing various levels of differentiation as evidenced by the broad sample's survey results (October 2013). The levels of differentiation created complex considerations for students' literacy learning and how the teaching of literacy was enacted across various classrooms as evidenced by the in depth cases of how teachers negotiated differentiating literacy instruction within each of their classrooms (interviews, November 2013). This is a greater concern than in the era in which Schwab (1973) wrote about the concern of the learners. Today's considerations around differentiation relate to the policy implications, such as *Response to Intervention*, and the diverse needs of students that requires more individualized instruction and assessment in literacy (e.g., Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). The need for

differentiation is relevant and necessary in today's elementary school classroom, far more than in Schwab's time.

A NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

Differentiation, across the classroom observations (November 2013) and teachers interviews (November 2013) of the six in-depth cases, involved teachers considering how to use instructional resources judiciously in their literacy teaching to create opportunities for students' learning. The curriculum resources for literacy were often different across the classroom and school contexts. For example, Jennifer, in the case below, elaborated on using *Seeds of Science, Roots of Learning* texts, which were "only available to some teachers" (interview, November 2013). The teachers were also essential to what was selected or neglected as the instructional opportunities for students as a part of the local decision-making for each classroom's literacy instruction. This related back to her sense of identity, agency, and autonomy as a teacher as well as the curriculum resources available and her knowledge of her learners. For example, Katie's decision-making, as elaborated in this chapter, for her second graders reflected more than the curriculum, but her knowledge of the learners and the academic standards necessary for her second grade learners.

The following cases were selected from the study to illustrate, by examples, teachers who show the benefits, challenges, and considerations of making local decisions about how to teach all students within the requirements of curriculum and context. In the first, Jennifer used integrated instructional materials in science and literacy contained in the program *Seeds of Science, Roots of Learning* as a way to engage and motivate her students in the instructional objectives of fourth grade literacy learning, often beyond the basal reading program. Next, Katie demonstrated how the use of multiple resources, including the basal reading program, and how

she went beyond the basal reading program to differentiate her second grade literacy instruction for the benefit of her students' learning. These case examples below elaborated the considerations and challenges of differentiating literacy instruction for all students.

Jennifer's Use of "Seeds of Science, Roots of Learning"

Jennifer, in the interviews, expressed how she wanted to create authentic opportunities in literacy learning for her students (November 2013). In *Seeds of Science, Roots of Learning*, she found these opportunities to connect her students to real world topics through scientific learning, yet also focused, as stated within the program materials, on building effective literacy strategies in all students (artifact analysis, December 2013). She commented about the texts of the program, "We were using these Gems books and they were great because it was just, go to the grocery store, you have all your stuff …[then] I did bubble festival, sinking, floating and other topics" (interview, November 2013). Jennifer talked about how her students were so engaged and motivated by these subjects in these texts and how it allowed her to achieve more instructional objectives in literacy. She commented, "When I saw how much better the kids did, first of all, the motivational level soars. That's all they seem to talk about and once you have them motivated, they want to know [more]" (interview, November 2013). She saw differences in her students and in their literacy achievement. Additionally, "the *Awards Series*, which I don't really like the stories, does not offer a lot of nonfiction and our research [as a school district] shows that our kids don't do well with nonfiction. There is a nice synergy with what you teach in reading and the topics of science so they kind of gel together for great lessons"(interview, November 2013).

Jennifer, as elaborated in this previous interview excerpt, viewed differentiation as both an act of providing different curriculum materials for students' learning, but also integrating

strategies and skills across literacy and science. Integration is different from differentiation, as it required Jennifer to think about how to weave science and literacy concepts together into her classroom instruction around literacy. It was not simply a mattering of choosing materials or thinking about students' needs in literacy.

One of Jennifer's classroom observations involved a *Gems* book, a small book designed for whole-group reading, about the production of jellybeans and the dissolving of mixtures to create the various flavors (November 2013). The students, in this 30-minute lesson, were highly engaged and active in participating in the discussion. The observed lesson began with a review of what vocabulary and key ideas they had learned previously about jellybeans (classroom observation, November 2013). Then, she proceeded to read aloud the next chapter of the Gem book on how mixtures were dissolved by jellybean scientists to create various flavors. The chapter was approximately 15 pages long. Using an anchor chart, Jennifer took notes, with the students' help, of what was essential to remember in this chapter (classroom observation). The students were easily able to use complex, scientific vocabulary words from the text and identify key details around the main idea of creating jellybean flavors. The students also made notes in their reading journal about jellybeans as Jennifer read aloud from the Gem text. At the end, she had the students complete a short multiple-choice activity to identity the key ideas and steps in the process of mixing and dissolving solutions to create jellybean flavors (field notes, November 2013). Later, Jennifer noted this lesson met *The Common Core State Standard* in fourth grade of students identifying the main idea(s) and supporting details in nonfiction texts. She said in this regard, "I had planned to work towards the *Common Core* standard that discusses students finding key ideas in informational texts" (interview, November 2013).

Jennifer also spoke about how it was important to teach her students to think creatively and how to use a variety of texts. She talked about herself as a reader first as an example she uses with her students: "In real life, when we grab a text, when I see birds in real life [and I don't what that bird is], I want to read a book and make a little note. I want to draw what I see and then I'll go to my reference book about birds. I will look to see where it matches. That's what I try to tell my kids. We don't know everything about everything" (interview, November 2013). Jennifer was trying to instill in her students the importance of reading multiple texts as a means to gain or expand their knowledge of various subject matters. She then spoke, in another interview (November 2013), about how she wants her students to think creatively in order to learn where things come from across the subjects:

> "I want to get them to create, to think creatively because they don't. They just think it's always there. It's like, no. As an example, to get them to go back in social studies, where do we get the milk? We're reading about milk right now. What did we learn there? Where do we get meat? They just know you go to the store. They're not, how do I say it, broadened enough to see the chain of events in life."

Jennifer realized the critical importance of teaching her students a life skill: to read with the ability to read critically. She wanted her students to fully comprehend a wide variety of texts. Her instructional goal, aligning with *The Common Core State Standards* and available instructional resources, was to offer a diverse instructional experience for her students.

Jennifer also mentioned the need to differentiate the trade books and other texts available to her students in her classroom during independent reading time. She shared her students were reading at various reading levels, or Zones of Proximal Development, based on a computer-based reading assessment from *Accelerated Reader*. This term "Zones of Proximal

Development," was defined by Jennifer as "Vygotsky's research on where kids can get their optimal instruction for their literacy learning [by their reading levels]" (interview, November 2103). This information told Jennifer that she needed more texts for her students' reading levels in her classroom. As her solution, she did the following:

> "When I was looking at their scores, it shows me their ZPDs or reading levels, I knew some needed to be reading at that lower end in order to move on and so I was like, you know what? Let me just go [to the public library] and I took a list that I had from the Accelerated Reader. I got quite a few books from the library, but they didn't have them all so then when I saw the Robert Munch books, I'm like I'm just going to take them all" (interview, November 2013).

Jennifer said and also demonstrated in her choices of materials that she thought her students needed multiple types of instructional materials, including various trade books in independent reading, to support their literacy growth. These examples of differentiation within her classroom demonstrate how she applied her pedagogical content knowledge and best practices in literacy instruction. Jennifer worked to provide differentiated instruction, at multiple levels and with diverse instructional resources, to support her students' literacy achievement in fourth grade.

Katie's Multiple Resources for Literacy Instruction

Katie, much like Jennifer, also worked to create differentiated instructional experiences for her students in second grade. Katie, as a 37 year veteran, had extensive literacy teaching preparation- a Master's degree in Reading Education with Reading Specialist certification, Reading Recovery teacher training, and teaching experience in the intervention and classroom setting (field notes, November 2013). These experiences were critically important to how she viewed literacy, as Katie alluded to across the interviews and as evidenced in classroom

observations of her literacy teaching. Her most salient comment, of this expertise, was, "I've been doing this a long time. This is my seventh year of 2nd grade. I taught 1st grade all of the other years. I know what they need before they get here and when they leave me" (interview, November 2013).

Knowing what the students needed before they arrived in Katie's classroom was one of the evident characteristics of her second grade literacy teaching. She had to map on to students' known knowledge and then create new learning opportunities for her students' literacy learning. She said, "Everyone is not in the same place. I have in a range from the reading test of middle of kindergarten to one child reading at the fifth grade level. The basal stories are not developmentally appropriate for everyone" (interview, November 2013). Here, Katie acknowledges the limitations of the basal reading program in meeting the needs of her students as the sole curriculum. Her classroom was full of instructional resources: "You'll notice that there's a tremendous amount of extra materials I use [in my literacy teaching]" as she pointed around her classroom (interview, November 2013). Across the classroom observations (November 2013), Katie demonstrated how she acknowledged the need to differentiate curriculum resources in order to meet varied instructional objectives and to meet the specific needs of her diverse students. In an earlier chapter, we were introduced to Katie's ways of using the *Awards Series* when she said:

> "So I will do vocabulary development, use an *Awards* story, supplement with leveled readers. I do a great deal of leveled reader work with the children. They all have a bag of books in their desk for independent reading at their ZPD level. I'm constantly pulling extra materials. I have a milk crate for almost everything" (interview, November 2013).

The classroom observations and interviews demonstrated how Katie pulled upon a "milk crate" to create a theme unit around tall tales. This "milk crate" was both literal and also a metaphor for her thinking and ability as a skillful literacy teacher to draw on her past experiences as a teacher, her pedagogical content knowledge about literacy, and her ability to move beyond one literacy curriculum in order to gain a sense of what each child needs and the resources she can mobilize to meet those needs. She decided to use the story from the *Awards Series* titled, "Hedgehog Bakes a Cake," to build the students' knowledge of sequencing of events and their vocabulary knowledge as second graders (classroom observation, November 2013). The artifact analyses showed how Katie strategically planned specific vocabulary activities and text questions to build her students' knowledge around *The Common Core State Standards* of story sequencing and vocabulary (December 2013). It is important to note that Katie generated all of the questions and vocabulary activities as appropriate for her students: "I don't use the basal stuff as it's not appropriate for my students most of the time" (interview, November 2013).

In addition to reading the whole story and the extension activities within the text, here is what Katie also planned as part of this weeklong theme unit, in her words (interview, November 2013):

> "The children are going to do a supplemental story on an easier reading level for my special education kids, but I found all my kids love these. This story has the same vocabulary. They get highlighters and they search for the vocabulary words. Then, they get to take this home to read. One of the centers will be a scavenger hunt. They have to look for the vocabulary words, a list of characters, do a little phonics, and the definitions of the vocabulary words are here. So, there's this group working on that. These are small group reading books we'll be working together with me. They're also going to have a

group that's working on a recipe and having to answer comprehension questions about this specific recipe. It will create a foldable book for the students. It has them practicing their writing in sequence writing."

Katie planned a diverse array of independent and small-group activities to support and scaffold her students' learning further through the use of learning centers and small-group instruction. She chose other developmentally appropriate texts, graphic organizers, and meaningful literacy activities to build upon and extend her students' learning around story sequencing and vocabulary use (artifact analyses, December 2013). She was diligent, as evidenced in the artifacts and her lesson plans, in choosing activities to support her instructional objectives and to support the needs of her students.

Katie made use of standardized assessments within her school and school district, along with informal assessments of learning she administered, to inform her knowledge of each student's strengthens and needs within literacy (artifact analyses, December 2013). We see how Katie was able to differentiate not only her instructional materials to support literacy learning, but also differentiate the instruction for her diverse audience of second graders (classroom observations, November 2013). Katie strategically thought about and used her knowledge of her students, both through instructional experiences and assessment results, to plan and enact literacy instruction.

A NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS

This is yet another consideration: the need to differentiate instruction for students. It was interesting, across the study, to encounter how all of the teachers within the study spoke of differentiating instruction as a benefit for the students. Differentiating instruction for students involved considerations of curriculum to best meet a diverse array of student instructional needs.

It was often the need to differentiate instruction for the benefit of students, but ultimately, the goal was the instruction offered.

The following case examples were selected as these teachers demonstrated the demands of differentiating instruction for a diverse classroom of students. These particular types of differentiation, in the cases below, not only consider the curriculum resources used, but also the instructional needs of students and the diversification of texts to motivate literacy learning. This requires multiple levels of consideration and challenge for the teacher. First, Tina discussed and demonstrated the challenges of planning for diverse students across second and third grade as a multi-age classroom. She also provides an example of the complexity involved in this type of instructional planning and enactment. The next example showed how Lisa navigated the complexities of her students' interests in informational texts, the requirement of *The Common Core State Standards* (2011) as her instructional pacing guide encouraging the use of informational texts, and how she creatively met the challenges of working within and beyond her basal reading program. Both case examples demonstrated how skilled a literacy teacher must be to plan differentiated instructional experiences for a diverse group of students.

Tina's Multi-Grade, Multiage Students and Literacy Learning

Tina, a 16-year veteran, was assigned to a split second and third grade classroom. As we recall in her introduction, she was given 15 students from each grade level in her classroom as the school had too many students. Tina was also given the "struggling students" as "those were the students who were reading below grade level or identified as behavioral problems" (interview, November 2013). Her classroom was composed of 30 students, all "ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade in their reading levels. In this classroom, it's multiage, there's multi-levels" as Tina reported (interview, November 2013). This is a feat for any teacher, particularly

with the number of students assigned to this one classroom. While Tina had weekly tutors, volunteer parents, to come in and assist with one-to-one work or small group tasks (interview, November 2013; artifact analyses, December 2013), they were not licensed teachers and this left the responsibility of students' learning upon Tina alone.

Tina recognized this feat and pointed out, "Now here's where my creativity has come in because when you're working with 3rd grade, you have the academic content standards that they're being tested on with the state test" (interview, November 2013). Tina was thinking about the external measures of her students' literacy progress and achievement, while also trying to prepare them as literacy learners. As an example of her creativity, she described how she selectively used *The Common Core State Standards* to teach the literacy skills and strategies needed across the two grade levels as an example of her creativity. From an interview (November 2013), she said the following:

> "So, for reading, it's a lot of the same standards. You may have, instead of identify, third grade might have to evaluate per se. I just take that extra step. Those second graders that are reading above grade level can go to that third grade level. It was a matter of identifying the differences required in higher-order thinking between second and third grade. I still have to adapt it."

Tina readily acknowledged the challenges of trying to differentiate literacy instruction for her diverse array of two grade levels of students. She acknowledged the need to teach towards the higher academic standards and to adapt the standards as necessary to meet the needs of her literacy learners. This was her example of how she tried to be creative within her literacy instruction for her multi-age classroom context.

Interviews with the case study teachers were analyzed to gain an understanding of how curriculum planning and teaching occurred within this diverse classroom context. Tina, for example, shared the following about the basal reading program and her approach to selecting instructional materials:

> "The *Awards Series*…I don't use that as much as maybe I should and it's really… You know, I think it's older, but it's fine if I have to use it. To me, they're short excerpts of stories. You're only getting a snapshot and I understand you're focusing on a skill. I will use it if I need help on a skill to teach it or something more concrete. Both levels of the series are also on-grade level reading so it's a little tough. I use chapter books as eventually our kids are going to be reading. We want them to read a full book, read full chapter books. They've been exposed to the picture books, the short reading books. Not as much chapter books" (interview, November 2013).

Her reflections on the types of text and literary experiences her students needed informed the types of instructional experiences Tina offered to her students. She exercised her identity, agency, and autonomy in her literacy planning and enactment by using chapter books, diverting often from the *Awards Series* unless she viewed it as necessary for skill, and using her own expertise of literacy to deliver instruction to her second and third grade students.

The classroom observations demonstrated her willingness to construct her own literacy program for her students. The students were engaged in a weeklong unit around a *Cam Jamsen* text, focused on the instructional objective of understanding story structure in narrative texts. During the observations, the students were following along in the chapter book as the teacher or other students were selected to read aloud (classroom observation, November 2013). Tina, in her post-observation interview, mentioned, however, the "difficulty of keeping all students with

me—some days they're on and some days they aren't. It just depends where they are" (interview, November 2013). As a strategy to keep students focused, she asked them to have their reading journals out to note specific parts of the story for a graphic organizer on story structure (artifact analyses, December 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). This graphic organizer was also displayed on the electronic whiteboard for the students' reference during the read aloud. Tina was trying to differentiate the literacy lesson in a variety of ways so that all students could fully participate. In the classroom observations, she was also involving them in figuring out the text structure although some students appeared to struggle to keep up (November 2013). A part of differentiation, in the example, involves the active engagement of all learners is a task even if they do not all complete the task in the same amount of time or with the same proficiency. This may be another approach to helping scaffold students development, even though it would not be possible to teach each and every student at his or her own individual level**.** In thinking about the students of Tina's classroom, 30 students in all at two different grade levels, and her instructional resources, the complexity of planning for and enacting literacy teaching across the second and third grade was difficult. There were salient structural and content challenges in trying to teach literacy within this classroom. Tina was trying to provide the best literacy experiences for her students within the parameters of her context. Overall, Tina demonstrated how complex and challenging it is to teach literacy across grade levels with a significant number of students whom had varying instructional needs.

Lisa's First Grade Classroom and the Students' Need for Informational Text

The next case example was Lisa's context for her first grade literacy teaching, which was quite different from Tina's context. Lisa, as a 29-year veteran of classroom teaching, had a school context in which she was required to follow the district's basal reading program, the

Awards Series. Her school was selected as a school district "improvement school", meaning additional funds and instructional resources, like the basal reading program, were supplied to her school (artifact analyses, December 2013). She also took opportunities to differentiate the instructional resources within the basal reading program by her decisions about how she used it with her students. She said the following about the basal reading series:

> "You know, I don't use a lot of the basal assessments. I make up my own. I don't use a lot of the basal resources. I make up my own because I believe I need that rigor and its not always there. I very seldom use the workbook pages and you can see they are very repetitive. I don't think it meets the needs of what I need to get my kids ready for and that's why I prefer to do other things, other skills" (interview, November 2013).

Lisa elaborated, in the interviews, the basal reading series program was designed before the district's implementation of *The Common Core State Standards* and that she had to differentiate her instructional resources to meet the expectations for students' learning within the standards. Her emphasis on "rigor" in the previous excerpt was interesting as it is a commonly used word in educational research and classroom teaching, yet it is something difficult to translate into student learning experiences within the classroom. "Rigor," a term commonly used across the *Common Core State Standards*, related to the demand or emphasis placed upon specific content for students' learning, often requiring increased efforts for mastery of learning (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011). Lisa used "rigor," as reflected above, to define her own ability to offer more rigorous instruction by her own designs of literacy instruction that went beyond the basal reading program.

Lisa's classroom observations demonstrated her attentiveness to "rigor," which she described and demonstrated as her high expectations for her first grade students' literacy

learning. In the observation, Lisa was working on text features, as both her instructional objective and a *Common Core State Standard*, using *National Geographic for Kids* (November 2013). Lisa decided to use these informational magazines, often written around science subjects, as a way to integrate more informational texts for her students "since the *Awards Series* has only a few stories and to get in my science instruction" (interview, November 2013). The first observed classroom lesson, occurring mid-week in the first week of a two-week unit around text features and how texts are written, centered on the students identifying features of the text, along with reading the text to comprehend the main ideas.

Lisa began the lesson by stating the kid-friendly objective of "Today, we will continue to work on our learning about the features of informational text as we read this *National Geographic for Kids*" (classroom observation, November 2013). First, Lisa began by reviewing the features of informational texts with students using an interactive PowerPoint with the students. The students were motivated and excited to participate, in moving and labeling parts of a sample text. They were using such high-leverage vocabulary as "headings," "index," and "bold-faced vocabulary" (classroom observation). It was amazing to see first grade students so engaged around the subject of informational text features. This *National Geographic for Kids* centered on the white wolves of Alaska and how humans are working to "preserve" where they live so they can come back as a "species." These words were stressed as Lisa introduced these key vocabulary words using the subheadings and introductory sentences to the text. The students were then partnered up, on the large carpet area, to read the text. She floated from group-to-group, scaffolding the students as they read the text (classroom observation). At the end, they talked about and shared examples with Lisa about different text features they had seen in the

text. The students assisted Lisa in completing an anchor chart where they talked about important things they had learned about white wolves (classroom observation).

The next observed literacy lesson was just as detailed and rigorous as the first. Several days later, the students were working, independently, on their own informational text about wolves. This independent task, after a whole-group mini lesson where they once again reviewed informational text features, involved the students cutting and pasting the features of the informational text, such as missing headings or vocabulary, into place within their copy of the text (classroom observation, November 2013; artifact analyses, December 2013). The students were observed reading quietly to themselves and strategically deciding where to place parts of the text (classroom observation). Lisa indicated the students had read a completed version of the text the day before as a read aloud text where they talked about the specific informational text features. Today, they had the responsibility of recreating the story and filling in the missing pieces. These first graders were actively involved in reading, cutting, and pasting their story together. They were also very excited at the end of their task to bring their story up to Lisa to read through with her (classroom observation, 2013).

Lisa's ability to create motivating, but challenging literacy instructional experiences for her first grade students was simply amazing. When Lisa was asked why she does things the way she does them, she commented, "That's what engages them so I need to continue to engage them because if they're engaged, they're going to like to come to school and they're going like to learn. When I plan, I think about them" (interview, November 2013). Her first grade students, most chronologically older than are typical for their grade, were highly motivated and engaged in the literacy lessons, across both observations. In the artifact analyses (December 2013) of Lisa's lesson plans, it was evident these instructional opportunities transcended time and space,

meaning this is the way she taught literacy. Her students were given enriched experiences, within and beyond the *Awards Series*, with outside instructional resources and topics of interest that motivated and engaged them. Lisa demonstrated her skillful knowledge of her students and her capacity to create, plan, and enact literacy learning environments, laden with expert scaffolding and various instructional activities.

Concluding Thoughts

Diversity in the elementary school classroom is ever increasing and changing the ways in which teachers think about their literacy teaching and students' achievement. Large student populations, cultural differences in education, and various spoken languages shape the diversity in schools and often the educational opportunities afforded to some or all students. These factors of diversity are critically important to instructional planning and supporting all students in their educational achievement. It is important and necessary, as elaborated through this chapter, to provide differentiated instruction in literacy. In this study, the teachers discussed differentiation along two dimensions: (1) curricular and instructional opportunities for their students, and (2) the varied needs of their learners as individuals and as members of a diverse classroom community. In doing this, they mentioned quality of curriculum (e.g., Lisa's focus on rigor). Although not explicitly tied to assessment in the interviews, the focus on differentiation that is of high quality and scaffolds all learners is consistent with an environment, or milieu, in which standardized assessment of students as also strong accountability of teachers are very important. This aspect of the context of teachers' work will be discussed in Chapter Seven. Taken together, Jennifer, Katie, Tina, and Lisa illuminated differentiation as a primary way in which teachers think about their students yet their words and work show the different ways in which teachers are addressing differentiation in their elementary literacy instruction and teaching.

This commonplace of differentiation demonstrated the successes and challenges of teaching in today's elementary school classroom. Coupled with the curriculum and the teachers, this commonplace places yet another consideration for elementary literacy teachers as they work to support students' literacy achievement. Our final commonplace, the milieu of literacy teaching, will bring light to the contexts of literacy teaching and how the work of these other commonplaces negotiates or is affected by the often external, but internalized, instructional pressures and educational policies that face elementary literacy teachers.

CHAPTER 7:

THE MILIEU OF LITERACY

The final commonplace, the milieu, brings light to the complexity found in today's elementary school classrooms and in literacy instruction. The milieu, or the contexts, of literacy instruction have been created by a variety of pressures: teacher evaluation systems, school administration, standardized assessments of student achievement, and the policy requirements surround classroom teaching such as *The Common Core State Standards*. These pressures have created contexts in which the teachers, both in the broad sample and the in-depth cases, feel successful or challenged by their work. This work, as we have learned, dealt with the requirements of the curriculum, their opportunities to enact effective teaching, and/or their students' success in literacy learning.

There were complexities from the milieu, experienced by both the broad sample of teachers and the six in-depth case teachers. The new teacher evaluation system, negotiating school administration and standardized assessment, and the requirements of classroom teaching were common themes across the study. These themes explore some of the prevalent contexts these elementary literacy teachers work within on a daily basis as they teach and support their students' literacy learning.

THE NEW TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM: FEAR OF THE KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

Teacher evaluation systems, as a school reform movement within the United States, has dominated public and research discussions of teacher quality and school improvement for more than a decade (e.g., Youngs, 2013) The latest push for more effective teacher evaluation systems came with the U.S. Department of Education's merit-based grant initiative of *Race to The Top*

(2009). In this climate, school systems are seeking ways in which to measure teacher performance, often linked to students' standardized achievement scores, to improve school- and district-wide achievement in literacy and mathematics. This large metropolitan school district was no exception to this trend. A state law, in the previous academic year, was passed requiring a value-added teacher evaluation system to be used in all school districts throughout the state. This meant that all school districts were adopting teacher evaluation systems that would link student performance and teachers' observed classroom teaching. Additional factors, such as a teacher's educational experience or contributions to the school community, would also be evaluated, "but in a lesser degree," according to Jennifer and Lisa in the study (interviews, November 2013).

This school district opted to create their own teacher evaluation system, rather than using one of the many pre-published, value-added teacher evaluation systems. Artifact analyses were not possible on this evaluation due to the "development stages of the instrument this academic year," in personal correspondences with the district (Waldron, personal communication, 2013). It is important to note that this study was occurring during the first year of its implementation. It was then even more essential to learn what teachers knew, were learning, or experiencing in regards to the new teacher evaluation system. Their opinions would speak to the known and unknown of the new teacher evaluation systems and better situate what the possible influence/s of such evaluations would have on their teaching of elementary literacy and students' learning.

The six teachers of the study all mentioned or discussed directly the new teacher evaluation system and how it was impacting their teaching or instruction within the classroom (interviews, November 2013). The study did not specifically ask questions about the new teacher evaluation system, but it came up as a part of the interviews with each teacher. The teachers had different insights into the evaluation system and each felt similarly about it. The interviews

(November 2013) across the six teachers showed a great degree of concern or level of confusion about the new teacher evaluation. For example, Jennifer was struggling with the impact of how her teaching and observed instructional lessons would define her as an elementary literacy teacher. She shared the following in one of the interviews (November 2013) about the evaluation system:

> "And it [the teacher evaluation system] puts us in buckets and if you're in this bucket, there's no way you're going to get laid off. But if you're in this bucket…you want be the higher bucket. I've been struggling this year with the number of kids, the number of special needs kids in the classroom and trying…and she keeps talking about rigor, rigor, you need more rigor. It's hard to do."

Her voice, in the interview, drifted off when she said the phrase, "But if you're in this bucket." You could see a look of concern cross her face at that moment and you could hear it audibly in the interview audio recording. Jennifer also elaborates on her confusion around her principal's expectation of "rigor." She articulated that "I'm not sure what else she wants me to do" as she felt, and as we've learned previously, she differentiates instruction in literacy (interview, November 2013). Jennifer strives to integrate rigorous experiences in literacy and scientific learning for her students. This concept of "rigor," as part of the new teacher evaluation system, was causing miscommunication between this administrator and her classroom teacher. It was not supporting Jennifer in improving her classroom instruction. Also, Jennifer's conceptualization of "buckets" and how teachers were defined as successful or unsuccessful in their teaching within those buckets, subsequently relating to their continuing employment, was a powerful visualization of the teacher sorting and the consequential impacts of the new teacher evaluation system.

Tina, as another example of the teachers' experiences with the evaluation system, shared her frustration of how points, on both student achievement tests and her observations, were used in the evaluation system and would not fully demonstrate their instructional progress as a class. She began first with talking about her students' achievement:

> "Therefore, [on the required assessments] it'll be, this is statistically what your kid's number is. This is what basically you need to expect. Well, okay. There's so much more to those numbers, those extraneous things that are out here. I have to build support. I have to build rapport, not only with the student but also with the family" (interview, November 2013).

Tina understood how her students' achievement was linked to more than just learning instructional content. Their academic success was determined by her ability as a teacher to build connections with her students to create meaningful opportunities for learning and by creating family-school connections for at-home and classroom support. This statement also reflected how she realized that there was so much more surrounding her students' achievements scores and how these numbers did not account for all the learning or contextual factors of her classroom. Tina also shared, during the interview (November 2013) and following the last statement about the teacher evaluation system:

> "So, therefore, it's going to affect me and my career of whether I move up two points, I go back two points or I move five points [within the teacher evaluation system]. So, whether I moved two, I may be still developing or I may be a proficient teacher. I move four, I still may be proficient, but I'll never reach accomplished because the dynamics in the classroom and if I go two [points], I'm definitely not, I'm not good."

Tina realized the impact of her students' achievement scores upon her own evaluation as an effective or ineffective elementary school teacher. She could see how "points", added or taken away, would shift how she was viewed as part of this teacher evaluation system (interview, November 2013).

Katie supported the concerns expressed by Tina. She specifically talked about how the new teacher evaluation system was linked to state education law and how it would impact the pay salary of each teacher. As a 37-year veteran, Katie was concerned about the impact that the teacher evaluation system would have upon her as a teacher and her work with future teachers. She shared the pressures about the new teacher evaluation system:

> "Our evaluations are tied in by state law to our salaries. I was asked yesterday by a local university- how many teachers no longer want a student teacher because if you get a great student teacher, that's wonderful but if you don't get a great student teacher, your pay and your test scores are going to be impacted. What kind of a teacher am I, based on one single number? There's a lot of pressure" (interview, November 2013).

Katie articulated the new pressures faced by teachers under the new teacher evaluation system. She was receiving questions from external audiences, like the local university she worked with as a mentor teacher, as to whether she would take on preservice teachers in the future. Katie also clearly understands the potential financial implications of her performance on the teacher evaluation system. The impacts of this new teacher evaluation system were now expanding beyond the boundaries of the school district itself. Local universities and colleges who seek placements for their preservice teachers may not receive willing mentor teachers as various teacher evaluation systems are fully implemented across this Midwestern state.

Across the teachers, one could see the potential or realized impact of the new teacher evaluation system upon each teacher's feeling of success or struggle within their role as elementary school teachers. For example, Suzanne plainly said, "This evaluation system is going to be the death of us. You know, I'll see what happens. I'll see how far I can go with this because I'm getting old and decrepit here" (interview, November 2013). Suzanne, as a 20-year veteran of elementary school teaching, was clearly questioning her capacity to be deemed "effective" on this new teacher evaluation system. She also questioned her willingness and capacity to remain as a teacher in this school within the pressures of this teacher evaluation system. Her comments were representative in the six teachers' types of worries and concerns around the known and unknown of these evaluations. Yet, this new teacher evaluation system is only one milieu for these elementary school teachers to consider in their literacy instruction. It was balanced with consideration to other milieus.

NEGOTIATING PRESSURES WITH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION AND STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENTS

The pressures felt from school administration and standardized assessments of students' learning are other contexts weighing heavily upon the elementary literacy teacher. These pressures also influence the planning and enactment of literacy instruction within her classroom. The influence of school administration and standardized assessments were not specific questions within the survey of the broad sample. One question within the survey, at the end, asked the participants the following open-ended question: "Is there anything that this survey did not ask you about your elementary literacy teaching that you would like to share as part of this study?" Several of the responses elaborated on negotiating these pressures within the milieu of literacy teaching. For example, one teacher talked about the type of discourse she or he hears within their

school context: “I’ve been told our students have the scores in the state. I’ve also heard my school has the lowest scores in our districts” (survey, October 2013). This message of failure does not create a supportive context in which to improve students’ achievement and teaching practices. One is left to assume these messages of “failure” are coming from school administration.

Another teacher made the following comment to this same question: “ Because all we are told to do is summative assessments, so we can bring the results to meetings, the art of teaching is gone” (survey, October, 2013). This teacher expressed frustration over the use of data and meetings surrounding the data in regards to the instructional opportunities she or she is able to offer within the classroom. The teacher indicated a narrowing of instructional experiences to be linked solely to the summative test results that were presented. Others, as demonstrated beyond the two examples provided, also echoed these concerns in the response to the question. These comments indicated an evident need to explore how teachers, particularly within the in-depth cases, were negotiating pressures from school administration and standardized assessments within their localized school contexts.

Suzanne, as our first example, spoke specifically about her concerns with standardized assessments and school administration. It was evident, from her previous comments about the teacher evaluations, that she was experiencing several pressures within her school context around students’ achievement and her own success as an effective elementary school teacher. Suzanne mentioned the pressures of getting students to achieve on the state standardized assessment of literacy:

> “If the child, if the child does not get a specific score on the test [in third grade], they will be failed automatically. If they meet this score range, they’re passed to 4th grade with

> interventions outside of the reading block. The state rechecks and they retake the third grade test in October. If they pass it, it's all good. If they don't pass it, I don't know the ramifications [for the student]. The school has to pay $1,000 per student [to the state] who has been identified at risk by failing the test. Instead of giving us money to help with these interventions, we lose money as a punishment, as a consequence for not having better achieving kids" (interview, November 2013).

Her voice and body language, during the interview (November 2013) in this discussion about students' achievement, expressed frustration over the pressures faced in helping students to pass the state achievement assessment in literacy. Suzanne indicated how a "specific score" indicated whether or not a child would be able to go on to fourth grade and how a school's budget would be impacted by their achievement. This high-stakes assessment has created both instructional and financial implications for the teacher, the school, and the school district.

Lisa and her school context, as a designated "improvement school," had a much different take on the pressures of school administration and standardized assessments. She discussed how performance indicators, or PIs, on the state's school achievement report card, which were consistently low for student achievement and progress, provided the leverage for the new context in which she now worked. She explained this in one of the interviews (November 2013):

> "Our performance index and the number of indicators that we get on the state report card were low for my school. We were not meeting that level [of proficiency for the state]. So, our superintendent came in and he changed the principal. The teachers were allowed to stay here, but we had to sign a commitment letter. If you chose not to sign the commitment letter, then you had to leave the building. So, there's a lot of new staff here. He [the superintendent] identified schools that he thought needed improvement in two

> different categories—readiness to teach, readiness to learn. Ours is readiness to teach, which means given a little extra support. We're going to meet our PI scores. We're going to meet our AYP. We're going meet all that."

In this explanation, Lisa's confidence about her school, their performance as teachers, and the capacity to improve students' achievement came through in her words and in her body language. She was positive and supportive of the changes being created within her school contexts. She also went on to say how "supportive the new administration was" of her teaching and other teachers within the school building. She used the phrase, "They are here to help us be successful" (interview, November 2013). In this example, the influence of school administration, both within and beyond the school building, and the need to improve students' achievement, as measured by state achievement assessments, were positive changes for the context, at least in Lisa's perspective.

These perspectives, both broadly and in our two in-depth case examples, show the range of emotions, feelings, and attitudes towards the supportive or negating forces of school administration and standardized achievement assessments. Broadly, there were several concerns within the sample of how administration and students' achievement were influencing literacy instruction, often negatively on how these factors were impacting classroom instruction. In-depth, Suzanne and Lisa were having quite different experiences with these factors under the umbrella of the same school district, but with different localized school contexts (interviews, November 2013). This milieu of school administration and standard achievement assessments was another consideration as teachers tried to negotiate the milieu of literacy instruction.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING: THE *AWARDS SERIES* AND *THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS*

The instructional resources required for classroom teaching were yet another milieu for teachers to consider in their literacy instruction. These resources include the *Awards Series* as the basal reading program and *The Common Core State Standards* as the instructional pacing guide within the school district. As we learned in the commonplace of curriculum, how these tools are used was different from school to school, teacher to teacher. There was great diversity in the commonplace of curriculum. The perception of the requirements regarding the literacy curriculum was a common discussion within the broad sample and the teachers followed as in-depth cases.

The broad sample discussed the requirements of classroom teaching in literacy, such as the *Award Series* and *The Common Core State Standards*, in their open-ended responses within the survey. In regards to the *Award* Series, some of the comments were, "We do not always have the resources that we are supposed to be using" and "I try to use as much of my own materials and ideas as possible because our literacy curriculum is so old and dated" (survey, October 2013). These comments are also consistent with the concerns expressed by Maggie, when she discussed trying to use the *Award Series*, as her required literacy curriculum in second grade and how she was missing components of the program, but was unsure of what to ask for since she had not taught second grade (interview, November 2013). Also, Suzanne, in third grade, talked about, in one of the interviews, how "*Awards* is an old series so I pick and choose the stories I want to use to teach with [in my classroom]" (interview, November 2013). As well, one teacher in the broad sample was quite insightful about the challenge of linking the basal reading program with the standards found in *The Common Core State Standards*. This teacher wrote, "Common

Core allows for teachers to teach using whatever curriculum they wish. Common Core is just a tool. I use a variety of materials everyday. I supplement a lot as materials we currently have for reading are not aligned with the Common Core" (survey, October 2013). There was a mismatch between their existing reading curriculum and its resources with the requirements of what teachers should be teaching as part helping students to achieve the instructional learning goals of *The Common Core State Standards*.

There was a diverse understanding, across the broad sample and with the in-depth case teachers, of what *The Common Core State Standards* were and how these instructional standards informed planning and teaching in elementary literacy. The broad sample had varying understanding of *The Common Core State Standards*. The teacher, in the previous example, talked about how these standards "allows for teachers to teach using whatever curriculum they wish," meaning the teacher interpreted the *CCSSs* to have flexibility and allow for teacher choice and autonomy in literacy teaching (survey, October 2013). As a counter example, two teachers described the *CCSSs* as "not easily permitting differentiation needed for my students" and as "stifling creativity in teaching and the decisions I make about teaching reading" (survey, October 2013). These interpretations, across the same school district, show different ways in which the standards could be implemented or ignored at the classroom level.

There were evident similarities and differences in the interpretation and use of *The Common Core State Standards* across the six teachers followed in-depth in the study. For example, Suzanne viewed the *CCSSs* in the following way: "Math made a huge difference. Reading- reading is reading. You still have to teach the basic stuff" (interview, November 2013). She discussed further how you still needed to teach the basics of reading, even at the third grade level, and that the *CCSSs* were "not really a change in standards" for her teaching (interview).

Suzanne's interpretation of *The Common Core State Standards* was that it required no substantial changes to her teaching and that she already met the requirements of teaching towards these academic standards. Another example was Maggie's use of the *CCSSs* in second grade. She commented, when asked about these standards, "We have our scope and sequence, which is based on the Common Core. They also give us posters. It helps the kids to see them and we write our learning objectives from them" (interview, November 2013). She described how she used these academic standards to inform the topics, skills, and strategies she taught to her second grade students. *The Common Core State Standards* were used as an instructional guide to her second grade planning and enactment of literacy instruction. These six teachers, along with the broader sample's views, had various perceptions of *The Common Core State Standards* and how these standards were used to inform literacy instruction.

Concluding Thoughts

This commonplace of the milieu of literacy instruction, adding to the commonplaces of the teachers, the curriculum, and the need for differentiation, expanded the purview of the various contexts that an elementary school teacher must account for as she or he plans literacy instruction. The pressures of a new teacher evaluation system, along with the demands of school administration and standardized achievement assessments, created supports or challenges for various teachers within the sample. The integration of *The Common Core State Standards* has created different perspectives on how the standards are used and what bearing these standards have upon classroom instruction and students' achievement.

The four commonplaces of the teacher of literacy, the curriculum of literacy, the differentiation of literacy, and the milieus for literacy instruction have demonstrated the complexity and considerations for elementary literacy instruction. These commonplaces created

separate, often competing, considerations and/or challenges for the teacher as she worked to plan and enact elementary literacy instruction. Across the commonplaces, the curriculum making of elementary literacy teaching and instruction was formed and reformed by the complex factors within each commonplace. These factors, in turn, impact the ways in which these elementary school teachers teach literacy within their classroom for students' literacy learning.

Chapter 8:

REFORMING THE COMMONPLACES

The purpose of the research reported here was to investigate elementary in-service teachers' literacy teaching as influenced by contexts including required curriculum, the needs of their students, the educational milieu in which they work, and their own prior knowledge and beliefs as professionals. In answering the research questions (see chapter 2), the study was guided by the concept of the "practical," as laid out by Joseph Schwab, especially his "commonplaces" of the development of curriculum (Schwab, 1973; Schwab, 1983).

Revisiting the Research Questions

The research questions of interest within the study helped to answer the broad question: *How do elementary in-service teachers teach within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies.* Elementary in-service teachers, within the context of a large metropolitan school district with a common literacy program, constituted primarily by a required a basal reading series, learned to navigate and negotiate local sense making and decision-making for their students' literacy learning within the complexities of four contemporary commonplaces for curriculum design and enactment. This work, reflective of teachers' sense of agency and autonomy within the normative context of the district mandates, was intended to make teaching and learning of content coherent, flexible, and rigorous for their students. Table 6 (see Appendix A) provides a brief synthesis of the research questions in relation to the findings of the study. Here, I will summarize its contents to show how the research questions expanded a sense of how the teachers used these commonplaces to make sense of and teach within the required literacy curriculum and educational policies in place.

The everyday activity settings in which elementary teachers were teaching literacy were complex. Reflecting considerations for teachers' teaching and students' learning, the settings could not be reduced simply to methods and materials. These settings also concerned students' diverse needs, teacher identity, the richness of oral and written literacy, and institutional resources and limitations. Teachers, within the broad sample, responded these complexities and concerns within the open-ended questions of the survey. Several teachers responded to how their creativity in teaching was limited, how the district curriculum limited their flexibility in regards to instructional planning in literacy, and how they coped with often insufficient resources for literacy instruction within their classrooms (survey, October 2013). These responses indicated the multitude of settings, in various iterations across this school district, in which teachers were working to plan and enact literacy instruction.

Within the in-depth cases, Lisa exemplified how working within the particular context of an "improvement school" was beneficial to how she planned and enacted literacy as she was supported in her teaching and with her students (interview, November 2013). Additionally, teachers had to consider the pressures of reforms such as *The Common Core State Standards* and had to struggle with supporting students' achievement, often with little support (survey, October 2013). Different teachers and schools perceived these pressures in different ways. For example, Suzanne viewed the *CCSSs* as "not really a change in the standards" and explained how these standards was something she was already doing in her classroom instruction (interview, November 2013). The classroom observations revealed these standards were evident and limited at best within her literacy instruction (November 2013). These activity settings, both broadly and for Suzanne as an example, created challenges for the teachers.

Suzanne, like so many others within the study, also grappled with the contextual factors within these activity settings. These factors included educational policies, curriculum resources, the requirements for curriculum, differentiating broadly for students, and planning with insufficient resources. These settings often supported or limited the teachers' practices, both broadly and narrowly, across the study. The broad sample of teachers grappled with the contextualized factors of differentiating for their students within their classrooms as well as using outdated curriculum resources to meet the new academic challenges within *The Common Core State Standards* (survey, October 2013). For example, Maggie had to negotiate how to best teach second grade, as she had not taught the grade in quite some time, so she opted to use and adhere closely to the *Awards Series* basal reading program (interview, November 2013). Classroom observations demonstrated how contextual factors, the basal reading program, limited her ability to differentiate curriculum resources and instructional opportunities for her second grade (November 2013). These contextual factors, as demonstrated here, shaped how teachers planned and enacted literacy instruction for their students.

For literacy instruction, teachers within the broad sample used a variety of resources both within and beyond the *Awards Series* basal reading program to support their planning and subsequent teaching (survey, October 2013). Several teachers reported using the resources of the basal, as evidenced in the summary of how the teachers broadly used the common literacy program (see Figure 9). Additionally, teachers commented within the survey (October 2013) about needing to use additional curriculum materials to meet *The Common Core State Standards*. Lisa, as one in-depth case example, used informational texts in her first grade classroom to help her students meet these standards and expose them to more nonfiction texts, not afforded to them in the *Awards Series* (interview, November 2013). Lisa also acknowledged how she would use

the stories of the basal reading program to support her students' literacy learning as appropriate. Lisa, like so many of her colleagues, was using her local decision-making in literacy to plan and enact a variety of curriculum and resources for literacy instruction.

The local decision-making of teachers was evident throughout the study. Teachers were asked Likert scale and true/false questions within the broad sample that demonstrated their willingness to include their beliefs, interests, and strengths within their literacy teaching as well as their own decision-making and instructional resources for their students' literacy learning (survey, October 2013). Their identity as teacher, manifested through their agency and autonomy over their classroom literacy teaching, was present within the broad sample. In-depth case examples like Katie's second grade literacy instruction that employed a variety of instructional materials, along with her strong pedagogical content knowledge, or Tina's instructional planning around chapter books versus the basal reading program for her multi-grade second/third grade classroom exemplified the identities, agency, and autonomy of the teachers (interview, November 2013). Their local decision-making and efforts to make sense of curriculum were important to their students' literacy learning. They worked across several commonplaces for curriculum making to achieve some sense of coherence within their classroom instruction and teaching. However, as we shall see below, the autonomy teachers used to make decisions about how to use the district's literacy curriculum is tempered by a strong climate of evaluation, both of students in the form of standardized tests and of teachers in the evaluation of their practice by a system still in development (see Chapter 7).

The Work of Schwab and the Four Commonplaces of Curriculum Making

According to Schwab, there are several commonplaces elementary literacy teachers must consider as they plan for and enact elementary literacy instruction. These commonplaces reflect

the everyday activity settings and contextual factors in which elementary teachers must enact their local decision-making within their classroom contexts. These commonplaces were also essential to the types of curriculum and instructional opportunities offered for students' literacy learning.

The current study found that teachers, both on the broad survey and in the interviews and observations, tended to show and talk about their practice in terms of commonplaces, too—however, these were somewhat different from those defined by Schwab, reflecting the current climate with its emphasis on educational policies and school-based reform. The broad sample survey and the in-depth cases of six teachers within this large metropolitan school district stand in as illustrative examples of today's elementary school classroom and literacy instruction across diverse contexts. The teachers' responses to the survey of the broad sample demonstrated trends in the characteristics of their literacy instruction. They demonstrated diverse classroom contexts with often at varying interpretations and degrees of elementary literacy instruction as related to the questions of activity settings and contextual factors within the research of this study. The six teachers selected for in-depth case study were examples, within this study, selected for their years of teaching experience, strong pedagogical content knowledge, and having served as a mentor teacher. These teachers shared their personal experiences, beliefs, and practices around elementary literacy instruction, allowing for classroom observations, interviews, and artifact analyses around these attributes in their teaching. These teachers helped, as rich case examples, to describe how a teacher planned and enacted literacy instruction within localized classroom contexts, along with the opportunities taken up for local decisions and sense-making.

In the analyses of the study's data and cases, an evident pattern emerged which Schwab's work (1973/1983) on the four commonplaces of curriculum making and planning, which

considered the teacher, the subject matter, the learner, and the milieu. While each commonplace was similar to the original, this study generated four contemporary commonplaces in which the elementary literacy teacher had to consider, as the local curriculum maker at the classroom level, as she worked to design and enact literacy instruction. Her four commonplaces for curriculum design included: (a) the milieu for literacy instruction, represented primarily by administrative decisions related to the basal reading program and assessments influencing the local decision-making of the teachers; (b) the curriculum (the content) of literacy itself was not the exclusive province of the teacher, but it was also not a topic of broad, district-wide deliberation, (c) the teacher with her identity and sense of agency and autonomy of literacy, as noted above, as a negotiator in the context of policy and predetermined boundaries for content, and (d) in an evaluation and curricular milieu where one text and one assessment are presumed to serve all, the commonplace of the students tends to be described, addressed, and acted upon in terms of meeting individual students' needs.

Within and across these contemporary commonplaces, the literacy curriculum distributed in required textbooks or websites of in-service workshops was a commodity to be received and delivered (Au, 2005). Yet teachers expended effort, as noted previously, to transform the curriculum of literacy to meet the needs of their own students and reflect their professional knowledge and values. These teachers were strategic, tactical thinkers who acted in creative and authentic ways to make the curriculum their own for their students (deCerteau, 1984; Erickson 2004). As well, teachers considered their students most often in terms of "differentiation" of literacy instruction and curriculum in terms of what the students, both individually and collectively, needed to learn about literacy as part of a community of learners preparing to participate in a democratic society.

Figure 14 (see Appendix B) shows the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment. These commonplaces shaped the instructional practices and local decision-making by the teachers in literacy at the local level of the classroom, subsequently shaping opportunities for students' achievement (deCerteau, 1984; Erickson 2004). These contemporary commonplaces will be briefly described below as I summarize the major findings and synthesize across them.

The New Commonplaces: A Closer Look

The teacher was at the heart of the four commonplaces in curriculum design and enactment for literacy instruction. Schwab's four commonplaces provided a heuristic with which to make sense of the findings of this study. These commonplaces, upon analyzing the data, were consistent with today's teachers and teaching within this sample, yet they were transformed in relation to changes in the contemporary educational policies, reforms, contexts, norms, and instructional practices of elementary literacy education in the post-NCLB period. These educational policies and reforms came to bear on the curriculum design and enactment of elementary literacy instruction. Table 7 (See Appendix A) provides a brief synthesis of this and how the four contemporary commonplaces compare to Schwab's (1973/1983) commonplaces of curriculum making. These transformed commonplaces became factors and forces in what instruction and interactions occurred within the local setting of a teacher's classroom and in the elementary literacy teaching of her students.

One of the commonplaces was the teacher with her sense of identity as related to her beliefs, backgrounds, and preparation for teaching elementary literacy and students within her classroom (see Figure 14 and Table 7). Originally, Schwab's (1973/1983) work on the commonplaces referred to the "teacher" and how experienced she was in subject matter and child

development. As well, teachers had to be flexible in their knowledge to learn new ways and new materials for teaching. Within the contemporary commonplace, the teacher was solidified in her role of needing strong pedagogical content knowledge, including subject matter, and understanding children's development. This commonplace included these factors of old, yet moves beyond them into the deeper, more complex issues of a teacher's identity and how they enact their agency and/or autonomy over their teaching. This sense of identity shaped the way in which teachers thought about elementary literacy for their students. Recalling a previous example, Lisa, as a first grade teacher, believed strongly in using informational text, such as *National Geographic for Kids*, to expand her students' exposure to real-life concepts (interview, November 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). She also integrated the informational texts into units of study around the stories found in the basal reading program. Lisa used her beliefs and interests as a teacher (her identity) to enact agency over the types of instructional opportunities that she would offer her first grade students.

Teachers, broadly from the survey, used their identity as teachers as a tool to inform the instructional choices they could make and then enact their agency, or those contextualized opportunities for new instructional experiences for their students. As an example, Suzanne, in third grade, used her agency to create a shortened, middle school style literacy block without the support of her principal, who wanted her to work with students more and in one-to-one contexts (interview, November 2013). Her agency was used to create instructional opportunities for her students, different from the beliefs of her principal. This sense of agency, which can be viewed as transformative or reproductive in nature, used by Suzanne represented how teachers had to integrate not only their identities and agency over their teaching, but also a clear sense of being autonomous within their individual classroom settings.

Autonomy, yet another consideration for the teacher within this commonplace, allowed for personal knowledge, professional authority, and subject-matter expertise to be brought to bear on how she adhered to or deviated from the established literacy curriculum. Previously in Chapter 4, Tina's experience in a 2nd/3rd grade split classroom required her to use her teacher autonomy to decide what literacy curriculum and learning opportunities were appropriate for her students when and how she would plan or enact these opportunities for her diverse students' needs (interview, November 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). Her multiage classroom, covering two grade levels, required Tina to think differently about her instructional planning for literacy and about the various needs of her students. She had to account for more than just curriculum resources and academic standards, often the baseline of instruction for others teachers within the study. Across these examples, the importance of the teacher, with these three considerations linked intrinsically to the individual and also extrinsically to contextual factors. This commonplace of the teachers with the considerations of a teacher's identity and how it maps on or disconnects from her/his sense of agency and autonomy over literacy instruction is but one commonplace for curriculum design and enactment.

The curriculum of literacy presents another commonplace for consideration by the elementary literacy teacher (see Figure 14 and Table 7). This commonplace involved the way in which the common reading curriculum of the district, the basal reading program present, and how the Common Core was emphasized or changed based on the individual context of each school and the particular teacher. Schwab's (1973/1983) presented this commonplace as curriculum as well, but referred to it as subject matter and how it related to the materials of that subject, often historical in nature. Today, Schwab's work was reflected in the form of the literacy curriculum and the materials used for literacy learning, historically representative of the

traditions of literacy within the U.S. The contemporary commonplace of curriculum though expanded this notion of curriculum to include the conceptualizations of a common literacy programs, required literacy curriculum, and educational reform.

The idea of "common" in the literacy curriculum of this school district and across classroom settings for this study was more general in a sense of presence, rather than its explicit use for literacy instruction and assessment. In Chapter 5, Maggie and Katie provided two examples of how the common literacy curriculum of the basal reading program was used or not used across two-second grade classrooms. Maggie, with her lack of experience for that grade level, stuck closely to the basal reading program in second grade (interview, November 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). It was shackled to her through the two classroom observations and interviews for her literacy teaching. Maggie could not step away from the required literacy program of the district to invent or include other curriculum or instructional resources for her students. Katie, as a counter example, used the basal reading program as a scaffold, employing it as a tool when needed, but planning differentiated literacy instruction, using a plethora of various instructional resources beyond the basal reading program, to enact literacy instruction with her students (interview, November 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). Her students within her second grade classroom experienced a wealth of literacy experiences different from those of Maggie's second graders. In addition to the curriculum used or ignored, both teachers across second grade were negotiating how to use *The Common Core State Standards* as part of their literacy instruction in different ways.

The use or confusion with *The Common Core State Standards* created an array of curriculum experiences for the elementary literacy teachers within the study. Returning to Katie, in second grade, who served as a school-based advocate for *Common Core* and leveraged it for

differentiated literacy instruction with her students. She employed the *CCSSs* to provide a variety of instructional experiences for her students that took them within and beyond the basal reading program. Jennifer, in fourth grade, was unsure of some standards within the *Common Core* and had to rely upon model curriculum for her grade to understand how to best plan and enact instruction to meet these academic content standards in literacy (interview, November 2013). She shared how she had to use the basal reading program or other recommended curriculum resources in order to meet and make sense of the academic standards with her students (interview, November 2013). The curriculum of literacy, within the broad sample and the in-depth cases, was similar and different in how each teacher, across various grade levels, chose to take up or leave the instructional resources and the *Common Core State Standards* for their classroom literacy instruction with their students. "Curriculum," as defined in Schwab's (1973/1983) work, has become so much more than just subject matter knowledge for teachers These choices lead to a variety of instructional opportunities for these students and their subsequent literacy learning.

Differentiation in literacy was the way teachers addressed their students in relation to curriculum, the third commonplace for curriculum design and enactment which involved elementary literacy teachers differentiating for the student and with curriculum resources for literacy teaching (see Figure 14 and Table 7). This contemporary commonplace transforms Schwab's (1973/1983) commonplace of the "learners." In his original work, Schwab discussed how teachers must be familiar with children, including a general knowledge of particular age groups at large and their particular group of children within their classroom. In today's contemporary commonplace, there was a need for differentiation for both the students and in the curriculum resources, which expands beyond the level of the learner. Differentiation, within the

broad sample, was communicated through open-ended responses where several teachers spoke of choosing curriculum resources and selecting appropriate *CCSSs* to align with their diverse students' needs (survey, October 2013). This need for differentiation attends to both a broad set of learners as well as the curriculum resources used for literacy learning.

Within the in-depth cases, Jennifer used *Seeds of Science, Roots of Learning* trade books to support her fourth grade students' literacy learning across informational texts and to attend to the missing components of the *Awards Series* within that grade (interview, November 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). She opted to use these texts as a means to engage her students as well as to meet the academic standards for literacy around informational texts in fourth grade. Katie also used a variety of instructional resources to create her thematic unit of study around tall tales by using the basal reading text, trade books, and instructional activities such as vocabulary searches (artifact analyses, December 2013). This allowed her to build a coherent, thematic unit for her second grade students, not afforded to her in the *Awards Series* (interview, November 2013). Both teachers differentiated curriculum resources in order to plan opportunities for students' literacy learning.

In supporting the needs of differentiation at the student level, Tina planned her literacy instruction, in her 2nd/3rd grade split classroom, around chapter books and attempted to create units of skills/strategies for her students (artifact analyses, December 2013; classroom observation, November 2013). The previously discussed demands of her multi-grade classroom required her to think differently about instruction in order to meet the wide-ranging needs of her diverse students. Lisa used informational texts, as previously mentioned, to support her students in learning informational text features, a skill not found extensively within the basal reading program (interview, November 2013). Her instructional activities extended and went beyond the

common literacy program to offer her students opportunities in informational texts, which were not extensively present in the *Awards Series* (artifact analyses, November 2013). Differentiation in literacy, in curriculum resources used and for the students' diverse learning needs, expanded the vista of Schwab's (1973/1983) original commonplace by having teachers consider factors within and beyond the learner as they worked to scaffold their literacy learning. It required both knowledge of curriculum as well as knowledge of the learners in order to get to the level of planning and enacting instruction for the student/s. It affects what teachers must know and consider within their curriculum enactment. This was a commonplace in which the teachers deliberated how to use literacy instruction within the local context of their classroom for their particular students. This was different as it was a localized deliberation, completed by teachers for their classrooms and their students, in comparison to the, more common, macro deliberation that occurs externally for educational policies and implemented subsequently by school administrators.

The milieu for literacy instruction as experienced by the teachers within this study, both broadly in the sample and narrowly in the cases, was administration. The teachers spoke in terms of teacher evaluations, assessments, and requirements surrounding the *Common Core State Standards* and students' achievement on state literacy achievement assessments. This commonplace was similar and different to the original commonplace of milieu. Schwab (1973/1983) defined the milieu as the experiences offered within the contexts in which a child learned, often nested in nature and including the school, the classroom, and the home. The nested nature of learning opportunities, both broadly and within the in-depth cases, was still present for the students and teachers within this study. However, in this contemporary commonplace of the milieu, the teachers also grappled with evaluations of their teaching, assessments of their

students' learning, and requirements for literacy learning as they worked to plan and enact literacy instruction. These complex additions to this commonplace are part and parcel of the past 15 or more years of educational reforms and policies, as evidenced by the broad sample and in-depth cases within this study, and these additions have transformed this commonplace in which teachers teach and students learn literacy.

Broadly, several of the teachers reported such concerns as "I've been told our students have the lowest scores in the state" in regards to state achievement tests and "the art of teaching is gone" from the focus on students' external, measured data growth rather than instructional change within the classroom (survey, October 2013). These comments were not unlike at least 15 other comments written in the survey. These concerns echoed issues around administration and the pressures of students' achievement weighing heavily upon the teachers within the sample. Returning to a previous example, Katie and Tina talked about one of the pressures being the new teacher evaluation system and the uncertainties of how they would be evaluated as literacy teachers within the milieu of their observed teaching and students' measured achievement (interviews, November 2013). This uncertainty created a sense of the unknown for these teachers and made these teachers question their teaching, along with the instructional opportunities offered to their students.

Another milieu of literacy teaching for the teachers' consideration was the students' achievement on standardized achievement assessments and how their school-based administration viewed or used these achievement measures to inform how they viewed the proficiency of the teachers and their literacy instruction with students. Broadly, the previously mentioned comments echoed the teachers' concerns for student achievement. Within the cases, Tina discussed her concerns for her students' achievement scores and how her students and their

achievement were "more than just a number" (interview, November 2013). As well, the *Common Core State Standards* and the *Awards Series* basal reading program were implemented or ignored across school and classroom contexts, in varying degrees. Broadly, the survey (October 2013) reported that approximately 85% of the 161 teachers used the *Awards Series*, along with another approximately 89% and 88% using *The Common Core State Standards* in reading and writing to guide their instruction within literacy (survey, October 2013). Yet, within the in-depth case examples, there was much more diversity in how the six teachers used the *Awards Series* and *The Common Core State Standards*. As previously examined and as one example, Suzanne viewed *The Common Core State Standards* as academic standards she was already teaching towards, yet her instructional lesson plans did not have these standards and she appeared to not be aligning to these standards within the observed classroom instruction (artifact analyses, December 2013; classroom observations, November 2013). With the *Awards Series*, several case examples, such as Lisa and Katie, went beyond the basal reading program to use additional curriculum resources to meet their instructional objectives, while others, like Maggie, stuck closely to the basal reading program. Across the case examples, different interpretations to the milieu of literacy instruction created different outcomes for teachers' planning and teaching as well as students' instructional experiences around literacy.

Among the teachers, the milieu created clarity or confusion how they were to plan and enact literacy teaching and learning. The milieu of teaching, situated locally within the context of a particular school and the classroom of a teacher, created different scenarios of how each factor contributed to or pressured the elementary literacy teacher and their subsequent instruction in literacy. As an example, Suzanne's interpretation of her autonomy and what her third grade students needed was in response to the "pressures of this teacher evaluation system" (interview,

November 2013). She made her decisions, reflective of how she perceived her evaluations would go and what she perceived she needed as a part of her literacy teaching. The milieu of literacy instruction became contexts and a commonplace in which teachers interpreted and made local decision-making around their literacy instruction, the resources used, and what instructional opportunities would be given to their students.

Taken together, these four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment stay true to and go beyond the work of Schwab's (1973/1983) four commonplaces in curriculum making. These contemporary commonplaces echoed the complexities and considerations taken up by teachers as a reflection of the educational policies and reforms dating back 15 years or more within the United States. Additionally, the needs of students within today's elementary classroom weighed heavily upon teacher, more than in Schwab's work, as they worked to differentiate instruction for these students within varying, often complex, contexts for literacy teaching and learning. These contexts are often without the curriculum resources or tools for teachers to effectively deliver and enact instruction, leaving teachers to make local decisions around what to include or ignore as a relevant literacy instruction.

Learning How to "Negotiate" in the New Commonplaces

Like in Schwab's (1973) research on the commonplaces of curriculum making, these elementary teachers were successful or struggled to attain the idea of "coordination" across the four contemporary commonplaces. Schwab's (1983) work stressed how disequilibrium could occur in curriculum planning if teachers overemphasized one commonplace over the others. Coordination by the teacher was critical to avoid disequilibrium. The idea of coordination was used as a means to achieve a balance across the four commonplaces (the teacher, the learner, the milieu, and the subject matter) in designing and planning curriculum (Schwab, 1973/1983). In

today's classroom, the elementary literacy teacher had to negotiate between the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment.

While this struggle concerned the curriculum, much of it took the form of negotiating coherence among a required literacy curriculum, a milieu of administration, and the diverse needs of students. To do such negotiation required professional qualities such as the exercise of agency by teachers who called on their personal and professional resources for literacy teaching with a sense of autonomy. As an example of this negotiation, Lisa developed a unit of study around wolves within her first grade classroom. She used not only the required basal reading program story about wolves, a fictional piece, but extended this story to include informational text about wolves from *National Geographic for Kids*, small group reading lessons around trade books about wolves, and center-based learning activities to extend the texts read (classroom observations, November 2013; artifact analyses, November 2013). She wove together her instructional planning in a way that reflected her students, the instructional needs at hand, and the curriculum resources available within and beyond her school district's curriculum. Lisa used a variety of instructional resources to expand her students' access to literacy learning across a variety of texts (interviews, November 2013). Taken together, Lisa constructed a unit of study for her students about wolves that reflected her negotiation of required curriculum and the *Common Core* as the instructional pacing guide while accounting for and infusing her identity, agency, and autonomy into the literacy instruction offered to her students. Lisa aptly negotiated her improvement school context to offer her students motivating, but highly effective literacy instruction. This style of negotiation demonstrated a careful, systematic orchestration of the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment.

Another example of negotiation but different in its instructional form and experience was Suzanne's middle school style literacy block in third grade. Suzanne, in her interviews (November 2013), articulated how she had a principal who wanted her to work in more small group or one-to-one instructional settings with her students, but firmly stated, "It's not going to happen." Suzanne planned her lessons for literacy around her 45-minute block for literacy, which included a whole-group lesson around a story from the *Awards Series* and one small group instructional time each day (artifact analyses, December 2013). She was swift in her instruction within the whole-group setting moving quickly through the story and its questions during the first 30 minutes of the observation, leaving little time for extended discussions or activities around the text (classroom observations, November 2013). Suzanne moved her six students for each day quickly into the small group setting for reading the next excerpt of the story they were reading, while the other students independently read or worked at computer stations (classroom observations, November 2013; field notes, November 2013). She often described her instructional planning for literacy as trying "to keep myself sane" as well as "doing what I know works for kids" when she was asked to reflect upon her observed lessons of literacy teaching. Suzanne, in this example, demonstrated how she negotiated her literacy instruction and her students' literacy learning to fit within her perceived constraints of the curriculum, the milieu, and the need for differentiation. She also demonstrates how her identity—the beliefs she holds about literacy instruction and assessment—came to bear on the agency and autonomy, even with disagreement (e.g., her building principal), she enacted over the literacy learning and teaching within her third grade classroom. This style of negotiation could be what Schwab (1983) would refer to as "disequilibrium" across the four commonplaces. Yet, this negotiation demonstrated

how one teacher was working to enact local decision-making within the perceived and real constraints of her local context for literacy within the four contemporary commonplaces.

However, this agency was exercised at the local or micro level of the educational process, a level not of minor importance because of its localness, but rather the level of most direct and authentic engagement of the teacher, the learner/s, and the subject matter (Erickson, 2004). This aspect of teaching and teacher knowledge can be neglected if educational policies or professional education (pre- or in-service) focuses exclusively on the implementation of instructional practices derived and defined outside of direct understanding of the local, practical work of teachers in literacy (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011; Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). Across the teachers within the broad sample and the in-depth cases, negotiation was taken up in varying degrees as means to not only coordinate the four commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment, but as an act to generate local sense making and decisions for literacy instruction and and assessment for students' learning at the classroom level.

Extending from the Old to the New Commonplaces

This study extended the four commonplaces in how these considerations for curriculum design and enactment are translated and realized in today's elementary classroom contexts. These contexts have faced several educational reforms, from the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) to the current integration of the *Common Core State Standards* (2011), and these reforms have transformed the landscape for elementary teaching, literacy learning, and how teachers support students' achievement across subject matter.

In the broad sample, many of the open-ended responses, as shared across the previous chapters, indicated successes, confusions, or frustrations with external requirements and curriculum impacting classroom literacy instruction across the elementary school settings. The

in-depth cases also demonstrated these successes and struggles. For example, Lisa indicated the positive outcomes of her school becoming an "improvement school," while fellow teacher Jennifer, at a separate school within the school district, struggled with her administrator's desire to see rigor within her fourth grade literacy lessons (interviews, November 2013). In the first instance, Lisa used the opportunities of extra instructional resources and personnel to achieve coordination of her literacy curriculum within her first grade classroom. Jennifer, as our second instance, struggled to coordinate two commonplaces: the milieu of teacher evaluation and with planning curriculum deemed as rigorous by her school-based administrator for her fourth grade literacy students. In these instances, Schwab's (1973/1983) previous writings on the four commonplaces indicated how coordination was so crucial for to achieve equilibrium and avoid disequilibrium in the curriculum students receive for their learning. Across the broad sample and with the in-depth cases, the teachers worked across the four contemporary commonplaces to achieve equilibrium as much as possible within their contexts of local decision-making and teaching for literacy.

Implications of the Findings

Theoretical Implications. There are several implications drawn from the findings of this study. In theory building, Schwab's (1973/1983) conception of the four commonplaces presumes "freedom" or autonomy to make the decisions that occur within the local classrooms by individual teachers. This conception, in this era of reform-minded educational policies and required literacy curriculum, does not accurately address the benefits and challenges of teaching in today's elementary school classroom. The local classroom and the individual teacher are not autonomous. The teachers in this study had degrees of teacher autonomy as represented in the study by our examples of Suzanne's third grade literacy block or Lisa's use of informational

texts beyond the basal reading program (classroom observations, November 2013). Yet, all of these teachers, even Suzanne and Lisa, had limited degrees of freedom, or autonomy. This sense of freedom, or autonomy, varied from limited and to optimal across the local schools in this study. It is important to realize, through the analyses of this study, how theory must shift around the four commonplaces of curriculum design to reflect the contemporary challenges of teaching and enacting elementary literacy instruction within the complexities of educational requirements and policies.

The theoretical framework of this study employed, among others, Cole's (1996) theory of cultural activity systems, deCerteau's (1984) theory of schools with highly institutionalized norms with specific rules and functions, and Erickson's (2004) theory of the importance of localized contexts and local decision-making for schools, classrooms, and opportunities for learning. These theories came to bear in significant ways across the analyses and findings of the study. The findings are particularly linked to these theories in the ways in which the examples of this study built upon and expanded the key linkages within each theory. As an example, Cole's (1996) theorizing of cultural activity systems involved participants within any particular community using meditational tools to make sense of their contexts. In this study, the commonplaces of the curriculum, the teacher's sense of identity, and the differentiation of literacy became tools in how the teachers mediated the milieu of literacy instruction.

As well, the milieu of literacy instruction, or those considerations and constraints placed upon a teacher's local decision-making in literacy, became a tool and localized context for literacy teaching and learning (Erickson, 2004). deCerteau's (1984) theorizing of highly institutionalized contexts was evident in the commonplaces of the curriculum and the milieu for literacy. The basal reading program, as an example, served as an institutionalized practice used,

differentiated, or ignored by teachers across the study. As well, the *Common Core State Standards* became highly institutionalized as a norm for students' academic achievement in the form of an instructional pacing guide for the school. The four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment of elementary literacy instruction become common ground in which the theories of Cole, deCerteau, and Erickson were renewed again in the practices of teacher and their work in teaching.

This research contributed to sociocultural and cognitive theories used by building and expanding the conceptualizations of teachers, schooling, and localized contexts for learning. It formed further narratives examples of how teachers are working within their classroom and school settings as they account for a diversity of students and relevant policies or required curricula. As examples previously mentioned, Tina had to renegotiate her contexts of literacy instruction and her classroom setting to accommodate the diversity of two grade levels or how Maggie accommodated, as a teacher, teaching second grade for the first time in several years by following closely to the basal reading program (interviews, November 2013). This was important to understand further the social and cultural effects experienced by today's elementary schoolteachers (MacGillivray et al., 2004). The research questions in this study asked particular questions about the teachers' localized contexts, activity systems, and decision-making for teaching and enacting elementary literacy instruction. These activity systems, laden with social and cultural norms, are important to understand the various contexts that shape "schooling" (Cole, 1996). This research also built new theories about school and how learning was enacted in today's reform-mandated classroom context. This study also followed in-depth the localized contexts for learning, building upon previous research in highly-institutionalized contexts and their impact upon teachers' decision-making within these contexts (e.g., deCerteau, 1984;

Erickson, 2004; Fairbanks et al., 2010). The six in-depth cases within this study provided similar but different portraits of literacy instruction occurring under the umbrella of one large metropolitan school district.

Research and Practical Implications. There are valuable research and practical implications taken from this study. In the area of research, the findings of this research detail the need to consider complexity in regards to teaching elementary literacy and how teachers are supported in this work. These four commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment are complex translations, using Schwab's (1973) word, for any teacher, even with years of teaching experience and pedagogical content knowledge around literacy teaching and learning. While the more veteran teachers, with more years of teaching experience, were successful within specific commonplaces, some of the teachers, such as Suzanne, struggled with the translations of commonplaces into curriculum design and enactment for literacy learning. These commonplaces, while an essential place to start in understanding today's classrooms where elementary literacy teaching occurs, are not sufficient without considering the broader settings and climate of the educational contexts, as done in this study.

Recent research (e.g., Roskos & Neumann, 2013) has attempted to remap Schwab's (1973/1983) commonplaces on to the recent educational reform of *The Common Core State Standards*. This research, while interesting, did not attend to the complexities of translations and transactions within the elementary school classroom of today, which has experienced waves of curriculum and policies around literacy. Suzanne serves as one example of the struggle by many teachers to make sense of various policies, such as the *Common Core State Standards*, and then use the same literacy curriculum as a response to "keep sane" in these times of change and reform (interview, November 2013). It is difficult to place new wine in old bottles: a metaphor

relating to how this research used complacent theory "as is," rather than allowing theory to change as it acknowledges the contemporary problems of educational practice. To attend to these problems, researchers must assist in these difficulties of translating complex educational practices, policies, and theories in order to utilize this research into practical applications for teachers and students.

A contemporary look at the commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment based on Schwab's (1973/1983) work shares what has endured and what is changing as representative of the history of U.S. education in the late 20th century and early 21st century. These contemporary commonplaces offer a heuristic, with proper discussion and discourse around it, to aid elementary literacy teachers in understanding and negotiating the planning, resources, and enactment of instruction. The teacher, at the center of the commonplaces, can be taught how to pull strategically upon her commonplaces to develop effective literacy instruction. Previous research has documented the difficulties that teachers face in top-down literacy program implementations (Peaze-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). These four commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment provide opportunities for teachers to dialogue within and beyond these commonplaces to better understand their work and to shape opportunities for their students' learning.

The differing milieu, or contexts, of literacy instruction in which elementary teachers taught shaped how they used or ignored their own beliefs, strengths, and local decision-making around literacy instruction and assessment. The commonplace of the milieu in literacy instruction was one of the most complex commonplaces for the teacher to coordinate in relation to the other commonplaces. These complexities related often in the teachers trying to use best practices in literacy instruction within their classroom (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael,

2012). As they attempted to enact these practices, the pressures of educational policies or required literacy curriculum would challenge this effort. Maggie, as an example and so unfamiliar with second grade, followed the basal reading program as required and did not integrate other instructional resources as she wasn't "sure of what was missing or what was needed," along with the pressures of a new teacher evaluation system and *The Common Core State Standards* to respond to as a classroom teacher (interview, November 2013). This had potential implications for her second graders' achievement in literacy. Previous research in top-down literacy program implementations also found these challenges for teachers and how instructional disconnects for teachers and their students would often occur within classrooms (Peaze-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). The milieu of literacy instruction determined how the broad sample or individual teachers would utilize or struggle with educational policies and literacy curriculum. The diversity of the milieu must be researched further and understood to examine how these contexts impact literacy instruction with students and teachers' observed instructional practices around literacy at the elementary school level.

Chapter 9:

CONCLUSION

This study, by surveying a broad sample of experienced K-5 elementary literacy teachers and conducting case studies of six experienced teachers from the same large metropolitan school district, attempted to build understandings of how elementary school teachers develop and implement their literacy teaching under reform-based educational policies and required literacy curriculum. The study found that the teachers' decisions about how and what to teach are influenced not only by their local contexts, their teacher identity, their sense of agency, and autonomy in teaching literacy along with their pedagogical content knowledge, but also by their use of curriculum resources, the use of best practices in literacy instruction, and the expectation that they will teach all learners. They worked in settings, of milieu impacted by educational policies, past and present. These policies influenced their teaching goals and materials as well as the standards they and their students are expected to meet. These teachers reported working in a climate of assessment, often with insufficient resources.

Teachers experienced a lack of coordination across the commonplaces for comprehensive literacy instruction, for both students and teachers alike. It is, for example, unlikely that a teacher will achieve her goal of teaching all learners if she must stay on pace using required textbook and timetable that make differentiation of instruction very difficult. Working in a climate of high-stakes assessments of both students and teachers adds to the difficulty of management the competing needs and demands of such a situation. How to proceed to reconcile tensions, problems, and conflicts varies with the teacher. When teachers attempt this, instruction and curriculum are shaped by the teacher's local decision-making. This is a common process among experienced teachers who, as part of their identity, feel a sense of professional agency and

sufficient autonomy to modify what is taught, to whom, and how within the structure of the district's policy. This research builds upon previous research in understanding the efforts of elementary pre- and in-service teachers as they try to negotiate required literacy curriculum and educational reforms under NCLB (e.g., Kersten, 2006; Kersten and Pardo, 2007; Pardo, Highfield, & Florio-Ruane, 2012). However, it extends this line of work in several ways: (1) by looking at instructional practice post-NCLB and at the onset of the new policies being developed to guide teaching under *The Common Core State Standards* and (2) by attempting to link survey and case studies of experienced elementary teachers to identify patterns of experience but also develop grounded theory based in close analysis of cases. As such, the study captures a broader scope of instructional practices, curriculum resources, and educational requirements faced by elementary in-service teachers within their localized contexts of their classrooms, schools, and district.

The broad sample survey provides new perspectives, trends, and issues in how a large metropolitan school district has worked to reform and support student achievement around literacy. This broad sample is not unlike results from a survey of preservice teachers across another state where previous research (e.g., Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013; Waldron, 2013) demonstrated similar issues around literacy instruction and assessment. Preservice teachers within those studies struggled to make local sense of and decisions around required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies. Similarly, this broad sample of elementary in-service teachers struggled with many similar issues within their local decision-making for literacy instruction with their students. The in-depth examples used as a part of this mixed methods, descriptive study provide new research evidence in linking broad quantitative findings to localized qualitative examples. These examples provide a broad sample from one large

metropolitan school district, not unlike other school districts through the U.S. The cases of these teachers, both individually and collectively, provide richly descriptive vignettes of localized teacher decision-making and instruction for students' literacy learning. Taken together, the broad sample and the in-depth cases tell a fascinating story of how elementary in-service teachers are negotiating and enacting elementary literacy instruction, within the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design, to scaffold their students' literacy learning.

The research questions in this study hoped to unpack and discover how policies and resources, required for use in the literacy classroom, impact the localized contexts of literacy teaching and learning in which our nation's next generation of citizens are learning to read and write. It was essential to understand how experienced teachers were making sense of reforms in light of their existing pedagogical content knowledge for literacy, their sense of identity, agency, and autonomy as a professional, and their experiences working with the diverse students served by their schools. This knowledge is also important for stakeholders in K-12 public education as it provides a picture, both broad and in-depth, of the experiences and opportunities in literacy teaching and learning occurring at the elementary school level in these times of instructional change and reform.

The four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment for elementary literacy teachers provides a way to conceptualize the domains in which teacher learning and teacher education can support teachers in making sense and negotiating the complexities and contributions of their local contexts for elementary literacy learning and students' literacy achievement. This research provides these programs with access to the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum enactment and design to use as a heuristic to use in planning conversations around curriculum and teaching with their candidates for literacy

instruction. Teacher candidates, as an example, can then in turn consider these factors, knowingly, as they plan and enact local literacy instruction with their students. Additionally, experienced elementary teachers can conceptualize these domains, through the heuristic of the four contemporary commonplaces, for deliberating and creating coherence around their literacy instruction, while considering their students and their need for differentiation, within their local classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, there were limitations in this study's research design, methods, and data collected. One limitation to the study was the nature of the sample for the survey. This sample reflected a large metropolitan school district with urban and suburban school settings. Rural school settings were not a part of this study's sample.

It is also important to note that the study was limited to one large metropolitan school district, and thus it is not possible to generalize from this district to others. Another limitation of this study is was that it was only possible to analyze the surveys by means of descriptive statistics. Because the community studied was a widely diverse metropolitan one and the sample of respondents was relatively small (n = 161), the pattern of variables based on the responses was not normally distributed. Therefore, inferential statistics, which might have yielded more sophisticated analyses of response patterns, could not be used. Yet, as a descriptive, mixed methods study, the statistics were appropriate to and supportive of the research design.

Another limitation to the study was its scope and its mixed method design as these impacted data collection and analysis. This mixed methods study captured, as designed, large quantities of data and information. This data was selectively and purposefully used to answer the research questions posed. Particular theoretical frameworks were also used in this study. More

data was collected than can be attended to within this one study with its particular research questions. Future publications from this research will attend to other research questions of interest found during the study. Financial costs and time commitments are also a limitation in most research studies as well as within this study. In this study, the time commitments were related to scheduling convenience in visiting participants' classrooms. Though, substantial knowledge was gained through the broad sample and in-depth cases of this study around the local contexts and considerations in which elementary teachers teach literacy.

Future Directions

This knowledge is important to teacher education as it can inform how researchers and teacher educators can best help both K-5 elementary school teachers, whom they work with as mentor teachers, and their role in teacher preparation programs to ensure that all teachers are supported in developing and teaching effectively in elementary literacy. It is also important to build an understanding of reform-based educational policies and the requirements surrounding the use of curriculum.

Teacher preparation programs must engage their teacher candidates in conversations and modeling around literacy curriculum and educational policies. This research and the previous work of Valencia and colleagues (2006) as well as my previous work and my mutual work with my colleague Susan Florio-Ruane has demonstrated how literacy curriculum, particularly basal reading programs, could become shackles or scaffolds for teachers' teaching and students' learning in literacy. Maggie, as an example within this study and like teachers within previous research, was shackled to the basal reading program by lack of knowledge for the grade level and not knowing the curriculum. Katie, as another example within this study and also within second grade, used the curriculum as a scaffold for her students' learning.

These examples, along with the previous research aforementioned, demonstrate a clear need to model to preservice teachers the opportunities, affordances, and disadvantages of using required literacy curriculum. Providing opportunities to preservice teachers is critically important in helping teachers to understand the requirements of curriculum. For example, teacher education coursework, along with teaching best practices in literacy instruction, could expand its influence on teacher development and learning by allowing preservice teachers to engage with samples of literacy curriculum and giving them scenarios on how this curriculum may or may not be used within a classroom or school contexts. These real-life scenarios will build opportunities for preservice teachers to use their pedagogical content knowledge to negotiate instances of mandated curriculum for literacy (Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013). These opportunities will also call upon preservice teachers to think through the other commonplaces, beyond curriculum, to account for the needs of students and what they have learned as the best practices of literacy instruction from their previous coursework and clinical field experiences.

This research informs professional development by demonstrating what teachers "know and can do" within their elementary classroom in literacy versus an assumption of what teachers "are doing" from tacit knowledge. Our field has long known what is needed for effective, comprehensive literacy instruction for all students (e.g., Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). Professional development can make explicit a variety of kinds of knowledge of the for contemporary commonplaces so that these commonplaces are available for teachers to use as part of exercising professional agency in a situation where policies overwhelm practice and often cause incoherence in the curriculum. Sustained, continuous professional development is needed to guide and support elementary teachers in the classroom. This research demonstrated, particularly within the in-depth cases, opportunities for needed professional development.

Returning to previous examples, Maggie needed professional development around her second grade literacy curriculum and Jennifer needed professional development around teaching towards *The Common Core State Standards* in fourth grade. These opportunities present themselves as fertile ground for timely professional development to support teachers' learning and students' achievement in literacy.

Extensive research has demonstrated how effective sustained, continuous professional development can be in helping teachers to make sense of educational reforms or instructional practice (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Youngs, 2013). The four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment for elementary literacy teachers would be a valuable discourse for practicing teachers to learn and use in their teaching and around analyzing students' learning. As an example, a semester- or year-long professional development, with classroom coaching, could occur to support teachers in thinking through all of the considerations and complexities, the four contemporary commonplaces, for literacy learning and teaching. This professional development would extend into the classroom through instructional coaching to assist the teachers in gaining new insights into their curriculum planning and students' learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Continuous, sustained professional development in such topics will support their literacy teaching as they negotiate curriculum, requirements of the classroom, and educational policies at large. Teachers would be able systematically and coherently take up the commonplaces in their work of teaching and with students. These instances of professional development would acknowledge, particularly with the four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design, teachers' identity, agency, and autonomy as part of the conversation about classroom instruction and students' achievement.

Further understanding of the instructional changes being experienced around *The Common Core State* Standards and the new teacher evaluation systems is needed in relation to elementary literacy instruction. This study, in the broad sample and through the in-depth cases, elaborated instances of concern or confusion around these topics. For example, there was a range within the in-depth cases of how the *CCSSs* were interpreted: Suzanne felt it was the same academic standards as before, requiring no change, and Katie was an advocate for the *CCSSs* as means to provide a variety of meaningful instructional opportunities for her students. The new teacher evaluation systems, across the broad sample's responses and in the cases, was providing concern about how they, the teachers, would be evaluated and how their instruction would impact students' achievement, which was a part of their evaluated success in teaching.

To date, research is limited on these new reforms and how teacher education or teacher learning can support teachers as they encounter these changes, often through new policies and curriculum (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Florio-Ruane & Waldron, 2013). The research on teacher evaluation systems is still under development and has not been fully studied for their advantages or disadvantages in regards to students' achievement (Youngs, 2013). There is research to suggest *The Common Core State Standards* could be misinterpreted or maligned as efforts are made to take up them up within schools and by teachers (Shannon, Whitney, & Wilson, 2014; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Large- and small-scale studies around teacher evaluation systems and *The Common Core State Standards* are necessary to explore these reforms and their influence upon students' achievement as well as teachers' teaching.

The field of literacy research will gain new knowledge and understanding of elementary literacy teaching and learning in these times of educational reform that has been absent from the research literature to date (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011).

The four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment shed new light on the seminal work of Schwab (1973/1983) as well as expand into the contemporary complexities of the elementary school classroom. Literacy researchers can use the heuristic, shaped by the analyses and findings of this study, to inform their own research work, along with the practical work of engaging with teachers within their classrooms and their schools. This work can be overlaid into the particulars of those local contexts for local decision-making around literacy instruction. Literacy research is primed for additional findings that can expand how the use of best practices in literacy instruction can support or conflict with the reform-mandated policies and required curriculum within the classroom setting. This study demonstrated a variety of ways in which best practices in literacy instruction were used or neglected as evidenced in both the broad sample and the in-depth cases of teachers. Previous research has stressed the importance of these practices (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011), but it is now necessary to map these practices into the constellation of contemporary commonplaces that teachers must consider as they design and enact literacy teaching.

The field of literacy has also lacked descriptive, mixed methods studies to date. Duke and Mallette (2011) stressed the need for studies that adopt a synergistic approach across research methodologies. This study, by using research of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, has attempted to answer important research questions by using that synergistic approach. The rich descriptions used throughout this study worked across these two research types to systematically and cohesively weave together the analyses as well as the findings. The individual and collective analyses, using both bodies of research, were conducted in ways that expanded and triangulated the findings within this study as it built theory (Merriam, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study, as called for by Duke and Mallette (2011), is relevant not only for its research questions

answered, but for its methodologies and analyses employed around elementary literacy teachers and their localized contexts for literacy teaching.

Synopsis

This research study set out to understand, both broadly through a large sample survey and with in-depth cases of teachers, how elementary in-service teachers were teaching literacy within complex educational policies and required literacy curriculum. This study, across its analyses and findings, demonstrated how teachers navigated, negotiated, or neglected four contemporary commonplaces of curriculum design and enactment for elementary literacy instruction. These commonplaces were the teacher, her curriculum, her need for differentiation of both resources and for students' learning, and her milieu for teaching literacy. These commonplaces, taken together, provide opportunities to create a coherent, coordinated literacy curriculum for all students and for the use of best practices in literacy.

This research has demonstrated the importance of considering educational policies, the teachers, the curriculum, the contexts, and the best practices around literacy instruction when working with teachers. In today's reform-minded education, we must consider all of the factors that support or hinder the work of teachers and students as they mutually work for improved literacy achievement. This research has helped to inform the directions and progress we have made and need to make so every child and teacher becomes 21st century literacy learners.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1

Sources of Data Collection for Subordinate Research Questions

Study Research Question	**Primary Source of Data**	**Secondary Source of Data**	**Tertiary Source of Data**	**Quaternary Source of Data**
1. What are the everyday activity settings in which elementary in-service teachers are teaching literacy?	Interviews	Artifact Analysis	Classroom Observation	Survey
2. What contextual factors within these local activity systems do teachers see as supportive or limiting of their practices in teaching literacy?	Survey	Interview	Classroom Observation	Artifact Analyses
3. How does the elementary in-service teacher plan and enact (negotiate) literacy within the contexts of his/her classroom instruction and the curriculum mandates within that environment?	Classroom Observation	Interview	Survey	Artifact Analyses
4. How is their local decision-making reflected in their planning and enactment of literacy education?	Classroom Observation	Artifact Analyses	Interview	Survey

Table 2

Data Sources and Subsequent Analyses

Data Source	**Quantitative Analyses**	**Qualitative Analyses**
Survey	• *Descriptive statistical analysis: frequencies* • *Factor analyses: exploratory; confirmatory*	• *Open/axial coding* • *Constant comparative method* • *Grounded theory*
Clinical Semi-Structured Interviews	• *Open/axial coding: numeration of codes*	• *Open/axial coding* • *Constant comparative method* • *Grounded theory*
Classroom Observations	• *Open/axial coding: numeration of codes*	• *Open/axial coding* • *Constant comparative method* • *Grounded theory*
Artifact Analyses	• *Open/axial coding: numeration of codes*	• *Open/axial coding* • *Constant comparative method* • *Grounded theory*

Note. Analyses, quantitatively and qualitatively, were guided by the findings in relation to the research questions.

Table 3

Examples of Open Coding Themes and Axial Codes

Open Coding Themes	**Axial Coding Relationships**
Pacing guide Basal Common Core Resources	Curriculum
Teacher background Teacher history Teacher preparation Teacher agency Teacher identity	Teachers
Administration NCLB Common Core	Contexts
1-1 Instruction Small group instruction Whole group instruction Intervention	Differentiation

Note. These open and axial coding themes were aided the analysis tools of Dedoose Qualitative Software.

Table 4

Demographics of the Broad Sample of Teachers

	Gr. Level	Years of Experience	Served As Mentor Teacher	Completed Master's Coursework	Completed Master's Degree
Mean	3.76	20.25	1.37	.14	.86
Median	4	20	1	0	0
Mode	1	16	1	0	0
n	161	161	102	22	139

Table 5

Summary of the Six In-Depth Case Study Teachers

Maggie	Tina	Suzanne
• 14 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's & Master's degree • Suburban school • Second grade	• 16 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's, Master's, & Doctorate degree • Urban school • Second/third grade split	• 20 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's & Master's degree • Urban school • Third grade
Jennifer	**Lisa**	**Katie**
• 29 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's & Master's degree • Urban school • Fourth grade	• 30 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's degree and Master's coursework • Suburban school-improvement school • First grade	• 37 years of teaching experience • Bachelor's & Master's degree • Urban school- bilingual • Second grade

Table 6

Synthesis of Research Questions within the Findings

	Examples from the Broad Sample	Examples from the In-Depth Case Teachers
Overarching RQ: *How do elementary in-service teachers teach literacy within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies?*		
RQ1: *What are the everyday activity settings in which elementary in-service teachers are teaching literacy?*	○ Teachers, within the broad sample, responded to open-ended questions with issues of limited teaching creativity, limited flexibility in instructional planning, insufficient resources, various perceptions around *The Common Core State Standards*, and the struggle in supporting students' achievement	○ Suzanne viewed the *CCSSs* as "not really a change in the standards" ○ Lisa and the positive changes she has seen as an "improvement school" ○ Tina's struggle with her students being more than an achievement score
RQ2: *What contextual factors within these local activity systems do teachers see as supportive or limiting of their practices in teaching literacy?*	○ Teachers, within the broad sample, responded to open-ended questions with issues of differentiation and using curriculum resources to meet *The Common Core State Standards*	○ Jennifer's understanding of the Common Core is limited and has to be expanded by using model curriculum from the state as her professional development ○ Maggie's second grade teaching assignment and not being sure of what she needs to teach as she hasn't taught the grade recently so she adheres to the basal reading program

Table 6 (cont'd.)

RQ3: *How does the elementary in-service teacher plan and enact (negotiate) literacy within the contexts of his/her classroom instruction and the curriculum mandates within that environment?*	○ Teachers used a variety of resources within and beyond the basal reading program for the district, including resources of the basal and several best practices in literacy instruction ○ Teachers planned using academic standards (e.g., Common Core) to support their students' literacy learning	○ Suzanne's decision-making for a middle-school style, abbreviated literacy block in third grade ○ Tina's multi-grade classroom and using texts beyond the basal reading program to try and attend to all literacy learners
RQ4: *How is their local decision-making reflected in their planning and enactment of literacy education?*	○ Teacher identity was present across the sample; clear evidence of a sense of agency and autonomy broadly	○ Lisa's differentiated literacy instruction in first grade with informational texts ○ Katie's second grade literacy instruction through a variety of instructional resources

Table 7

Synthesizing Schwab's (1973/1983) Four Commonplaces of Curriculum Making and the Four Contemporary Commonplaces of Curriculum Design and Enactment within the Study

	Schwab's Commonplace	Contemporary Commonplace
Teachers of Literacy	Experienced in subject matter and in child development (Schwab, 1973) Teachers had to be flexible in their knowledge to learn new ways of teaching and new materials for teaching (Schwab, 1973)	Solidifies Schwab's work of a teacher must possess strong pedagogical content knowledge, including subject matter and ways in which to appropriately teach children Includes and moves beyond being flexible: A teacher's sense of identity shaped the ways in which each teacher shaped her literacy instruction (survey, October 2013; interviews, November 2013). Identity mapped on or disconnected from her sense of agency and autonomy over the enacted literacy instruction (survey, October 2013; interviews, November 2013).

Table 7 (cont'd.)

Curriculum of Literacy	Referred to as "subject matter"- related to the materials of the discipline, often historical (Schwab, 1973)	The materials of the discipline, as Schwab's (1973/1983) work would refer to them, were present in the form of literacy curriculum and the materials used for literacy learning Although, this contemporary curriculum though involved the themes of a common literacy program for all students across the district, the use of a required literacy curriculum- a basal reading program, and how the *CCSSs* were emphasized in classroom instruction (survey, October 2013; interviews/classroom observations, November 2013).
Differentiation of Literacy	Referred to as the "learners"- someone who was familiar with children, including a general knowledge of particular age groups (Schwab, 1973) Included the intimate knowledge of any particular group of children gained through direct involvement in their learning (Schwab, 1973)	Schwab's (1973/1983) work was still related in this commonplace to the "learner." In the contemporary times, teachers must account for the learner by differentiating elementary literacy instruction for the students and with the curriculum resources for literacy teaching (classroom observations, November 2013; survey, October 2013). This need for differentiation expands the reach of the original commonplace in what teachers must know and consider in curriculum.

Table 7 (cont'd.)

Milieu of Literacy Instruction	Experiences of the contexts in which the child was learning, including how these contexts nest within one another for learning opportunities (Schwab, 1973) Included the school, the classroom, and the home environment (Schwab, 1973)	The milieu, or nested nature of learning opportunities, are still present for students as defined by Schwab's (1973/1983) work. There are also other complex parts of the milieu outside of the times of Schwab from today's contexts: administration. This resent instance occurred over the last 15 years or more of educational policies and reforms, including such issues as teacher evaluations, assessments, and requirements around educational reforms (survey, October 2013; interviews, November 2013).

APPENDIX B

FIGURES

1. **Application of research questions, themes from survey responses, previous research, and review of relevant literature derived open code themes for the interview transcripts across six case studies.**
2. **Code the transcripts according to these open codes (initial codes: teachers' identity, teachers' agency, basal reading program, policies, teachers' experiences/backgrounds).**
3. **Identify categorical patterns (e.g. which categories tended to occur together or in sequence within and across the three transcripts**
4. **Return to the open code themes and reducing them to a smaller set of axial coding relationships to use for triangulation (e.g. to analyze other data collected for each case such as the interviews and artifacts)**
5. **Triangulate, cross-check, and elaborate interpretations of these key relationships as themes for vignettes you would draft about each individual case as providing answers to the research questions**
6. **Analyze inductively and deductively using theory to form the vignettes**
7. **Develop grounded theory based on steps 1-6 above explaining the features that you found involved, how, and what was learned from the broad sample and in-depth cases for the elementary literacy teachers.**
8. **Develop your theoretical model, based on within and cross-case analysis, of the teachers' local decisions and how they related to their context, literacy teaching, and curriculum as well as policies.**

Figure 1. Step-by-step procedure for research question analyses.

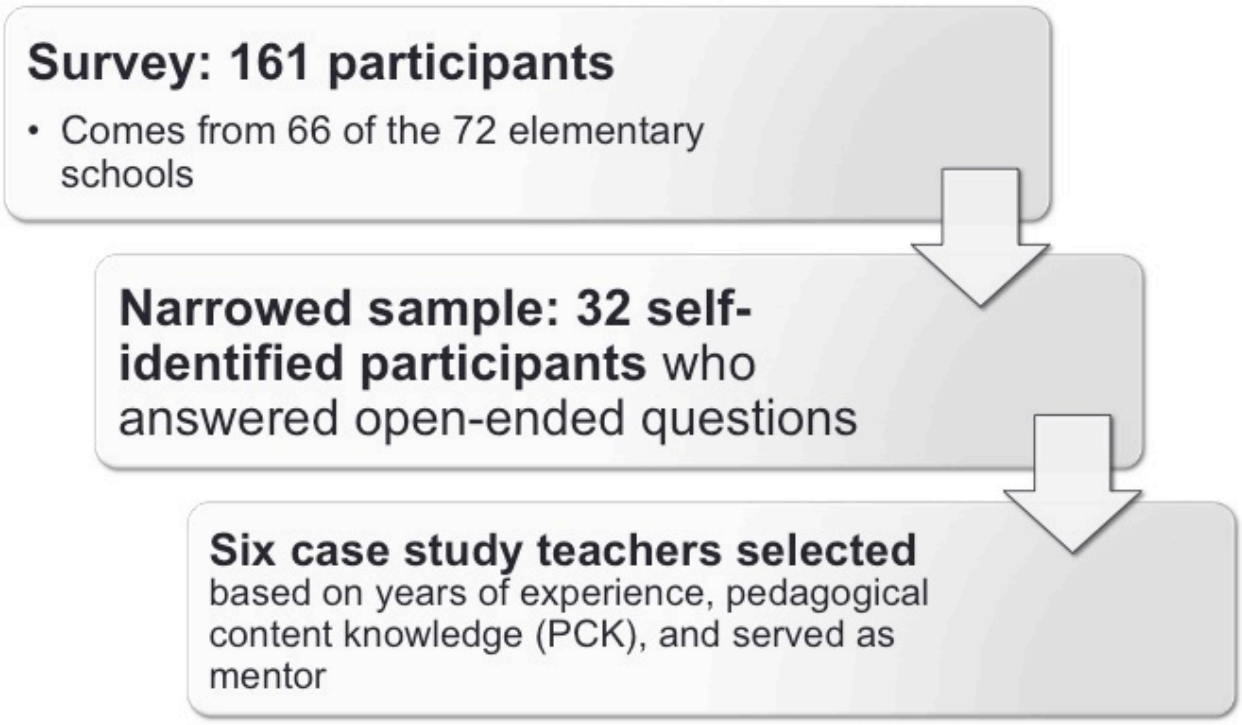

Figure 2. Research Sample Process.

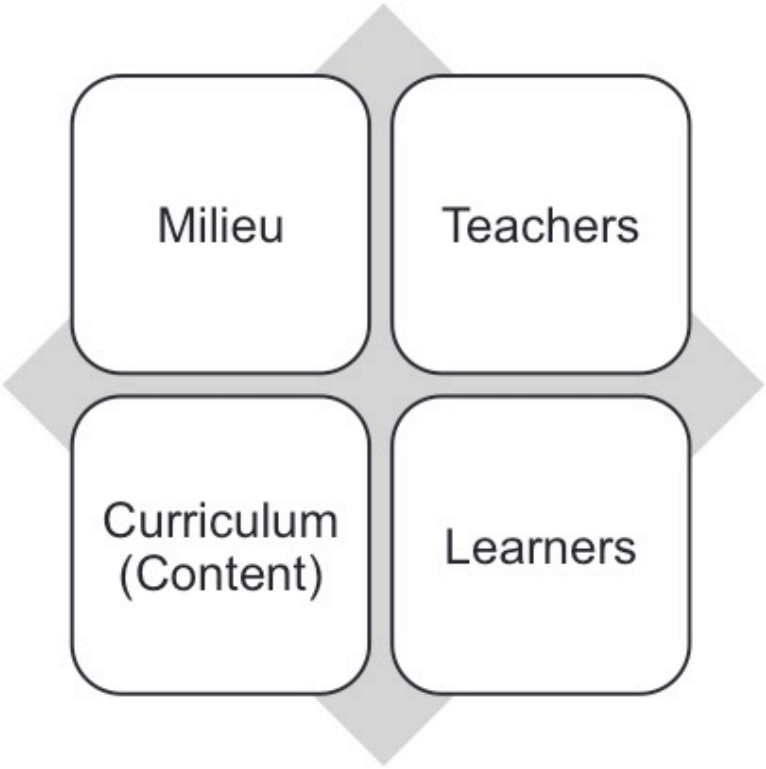

Figure 3. Schwab's (1973/1983) Four Commonplaces of Curriculum-Making. Adapted from Schwab, J.J. (1973). The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review, 81*(4), 501-522.

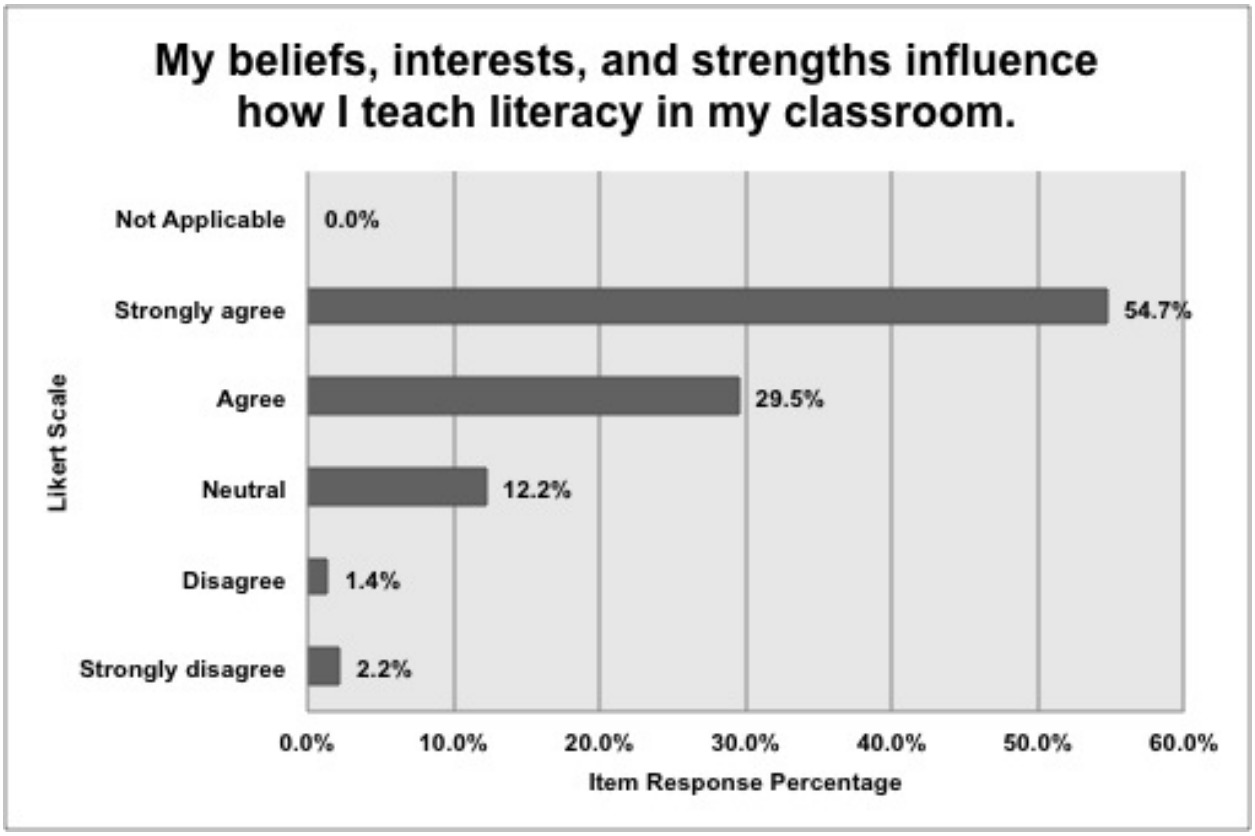

Figure 4. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Identity: Beliefs, Interests, and Strengths.

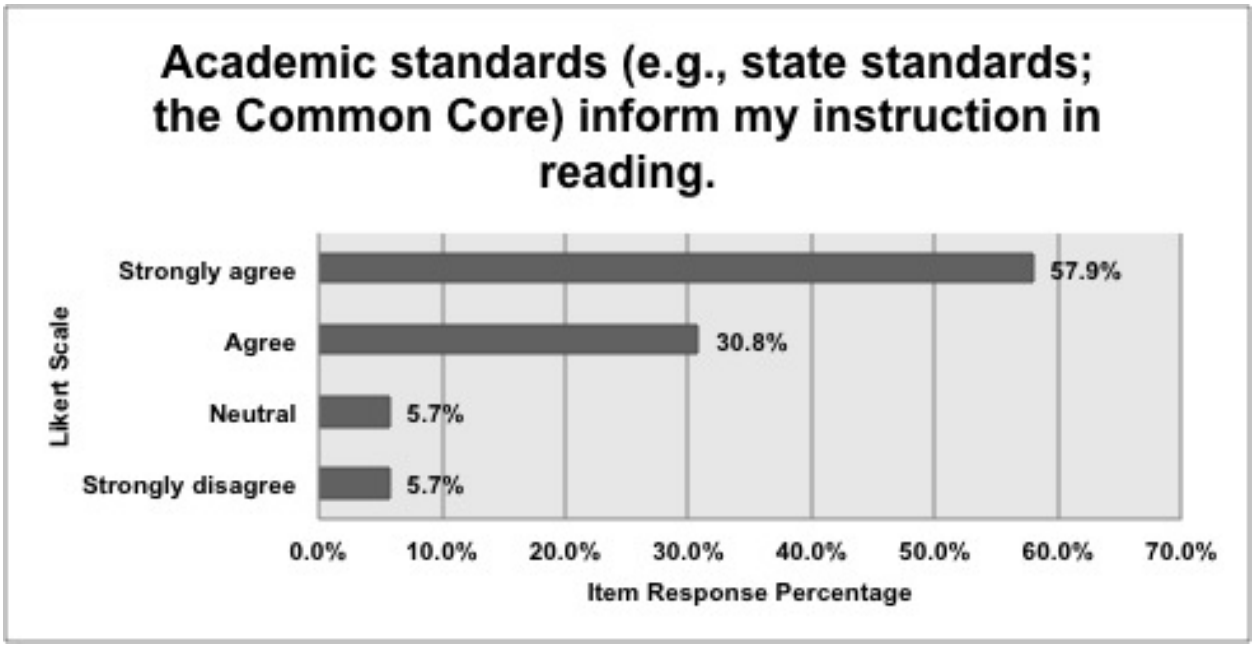

Figure 5. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Identity: Academic Standards, Reading.

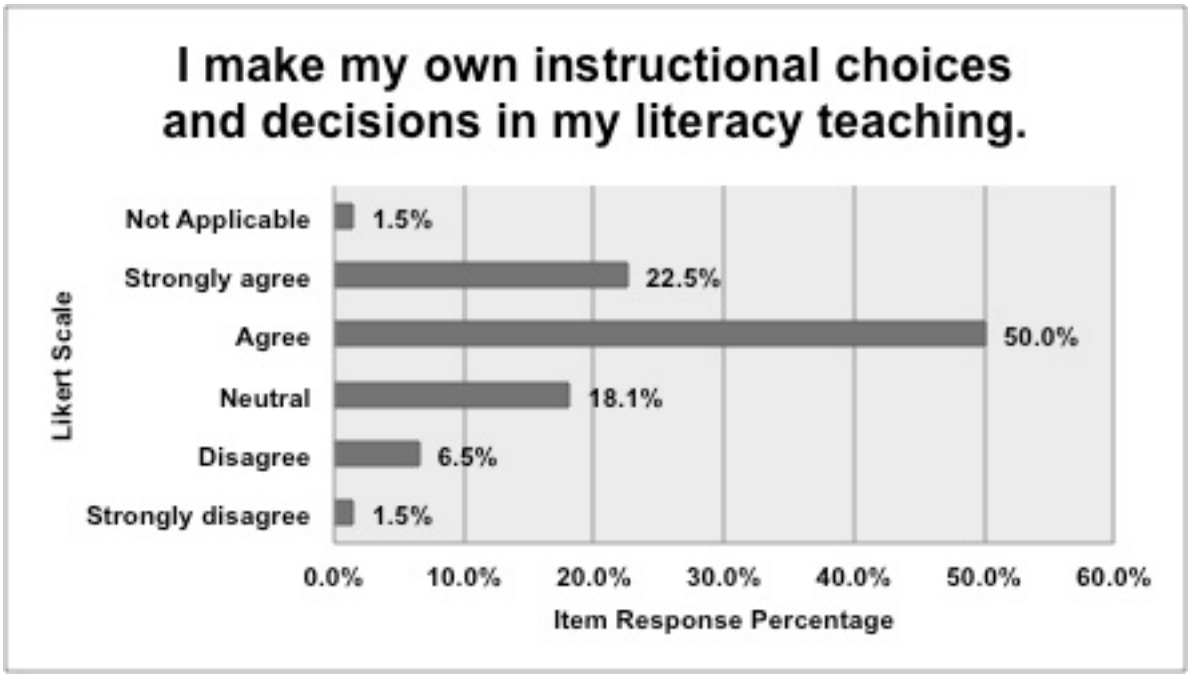

Figure 6. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Agency: Instructional Choices and Decisions, Reading.

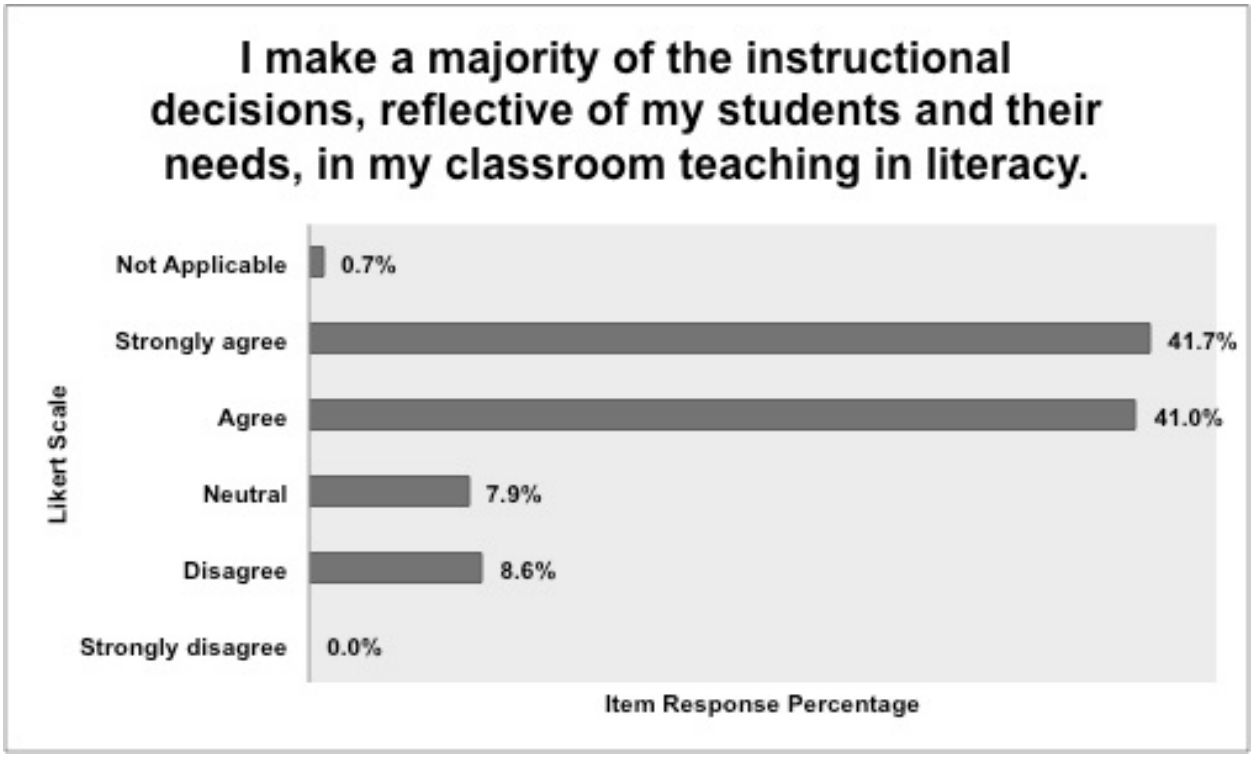

Figure 7. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Agency: Instructional Decisions Reflective of Students' Needs, Reading.

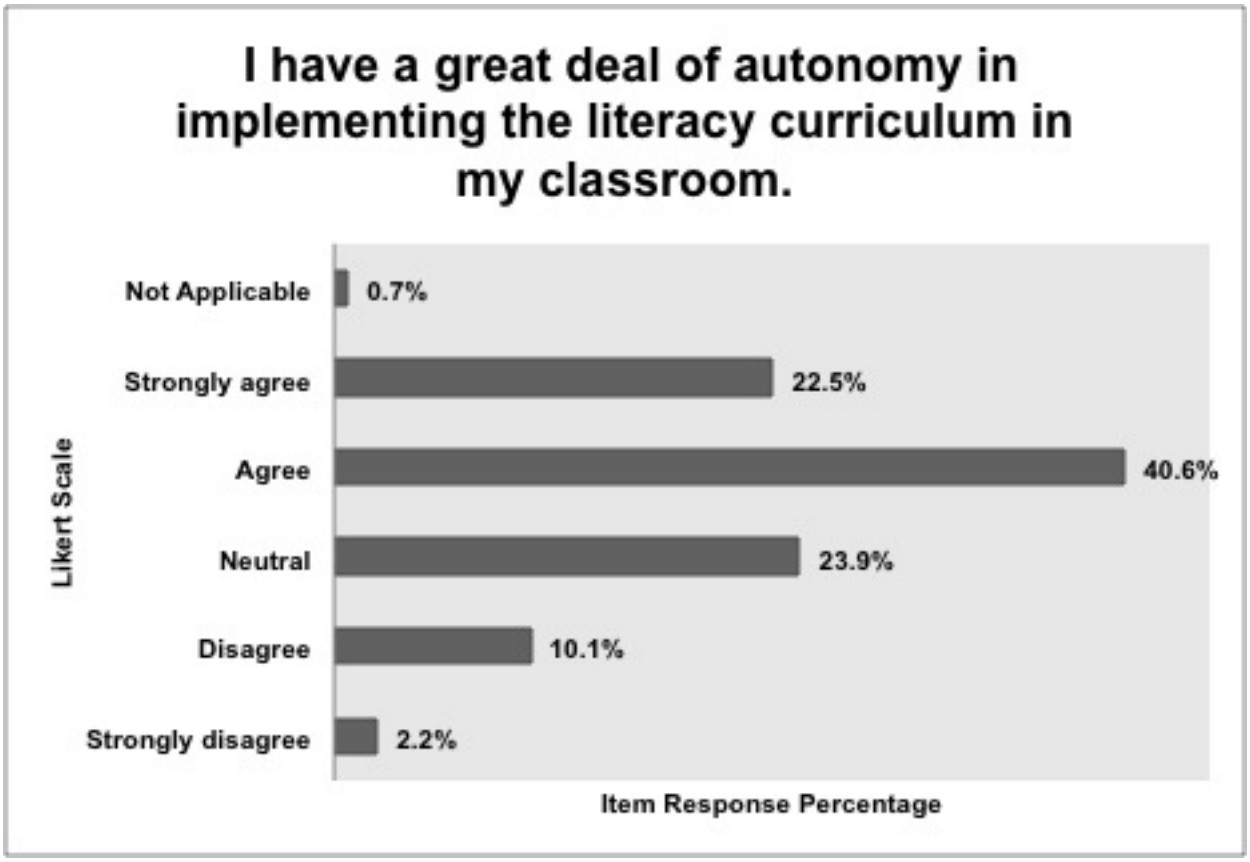

Figure 8. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Autonomy: Literacy Curriculum in Classroom.

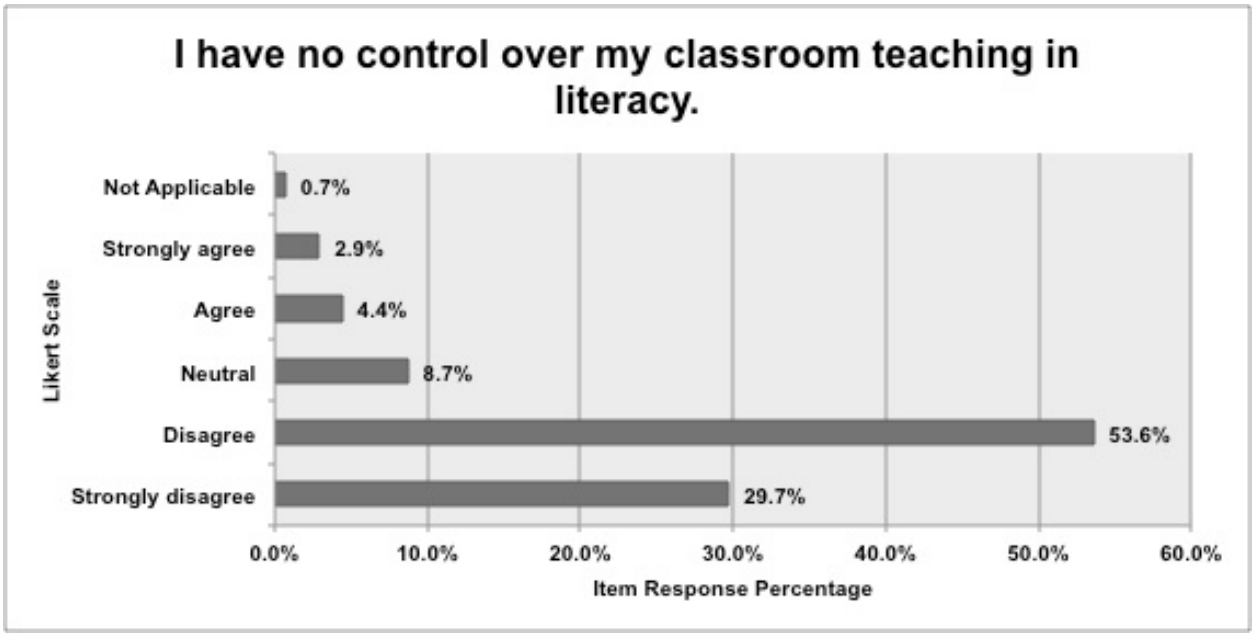

Figure 9. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Autonomy: No Control over Literacy Teaching.

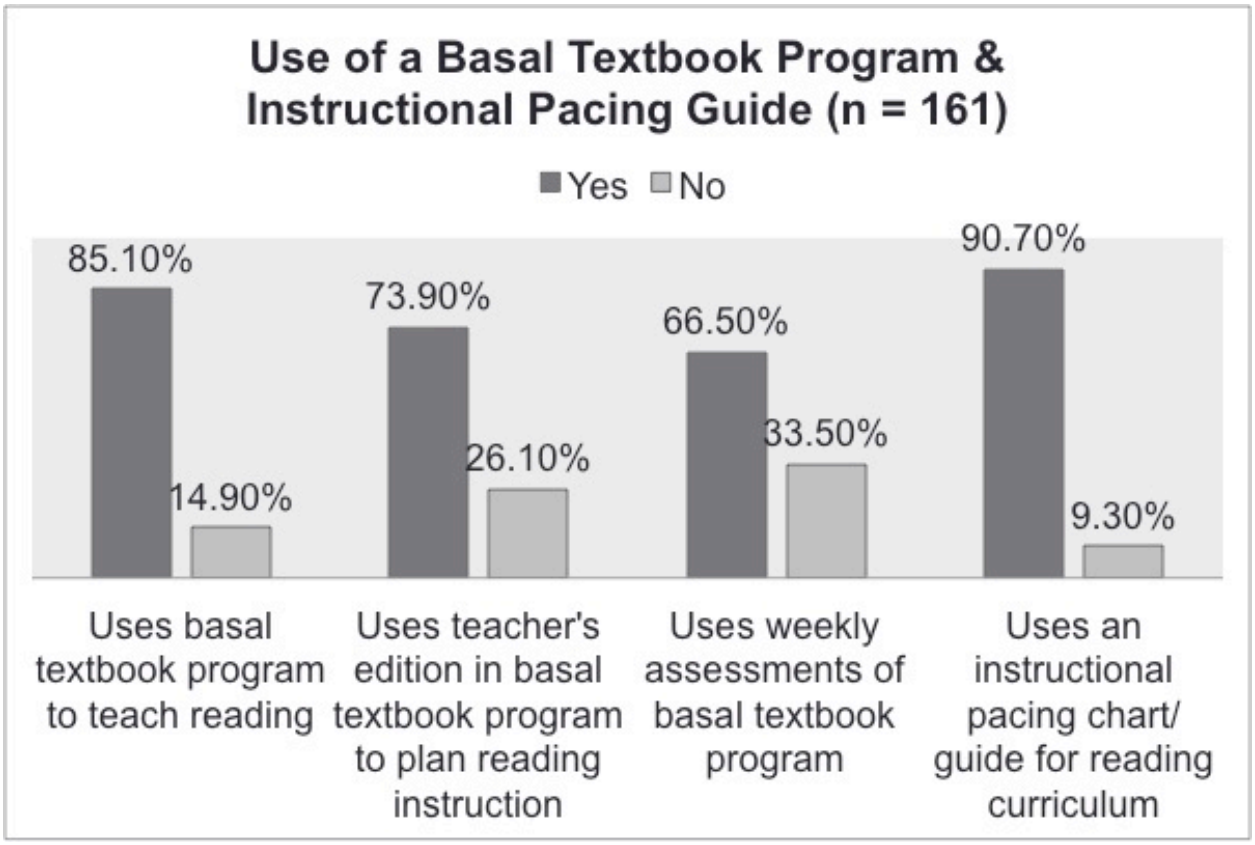

Figure 10. Components of Common Literacy Program in School District.

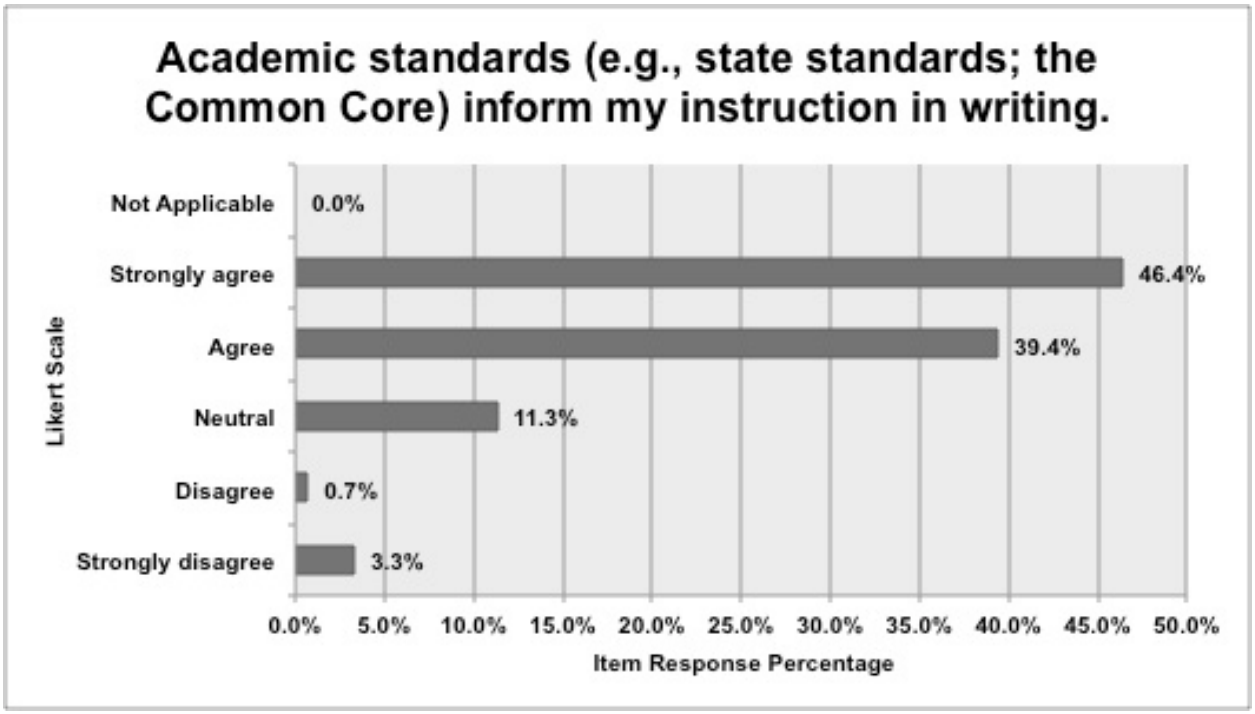

Figure 11. Responses to Question Related to Teacher Identity: Academic Standards, Writing.

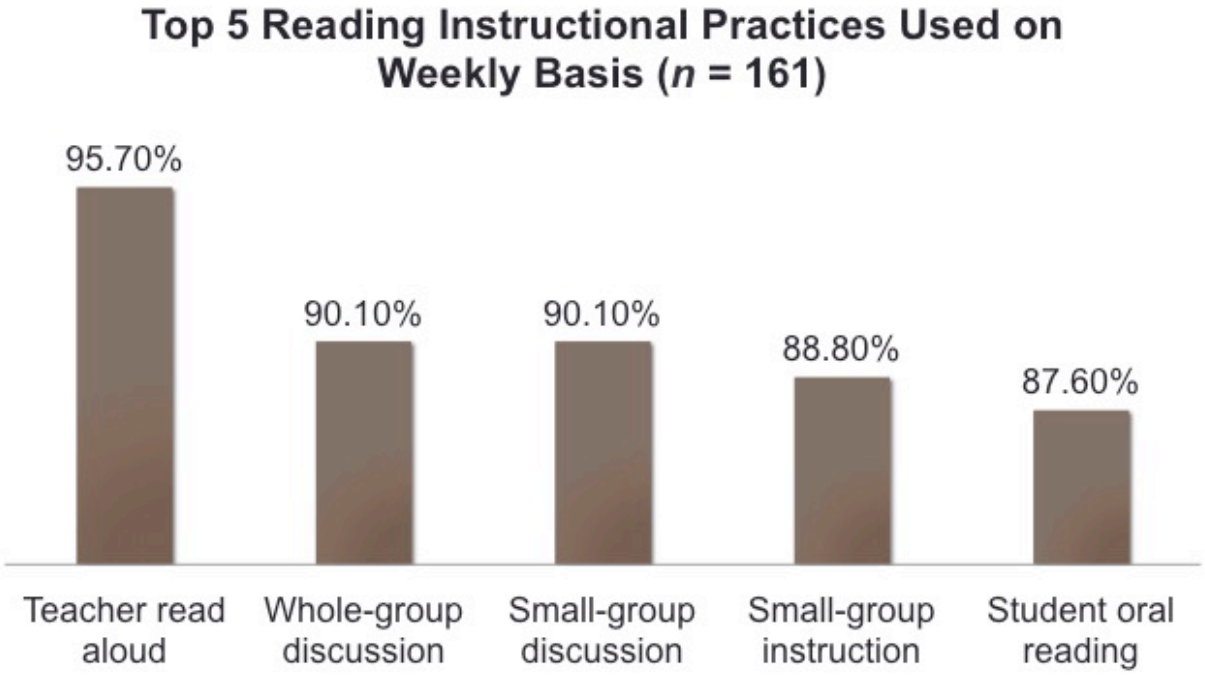

Figure 12. Top Five Instructional Practices in Reading.

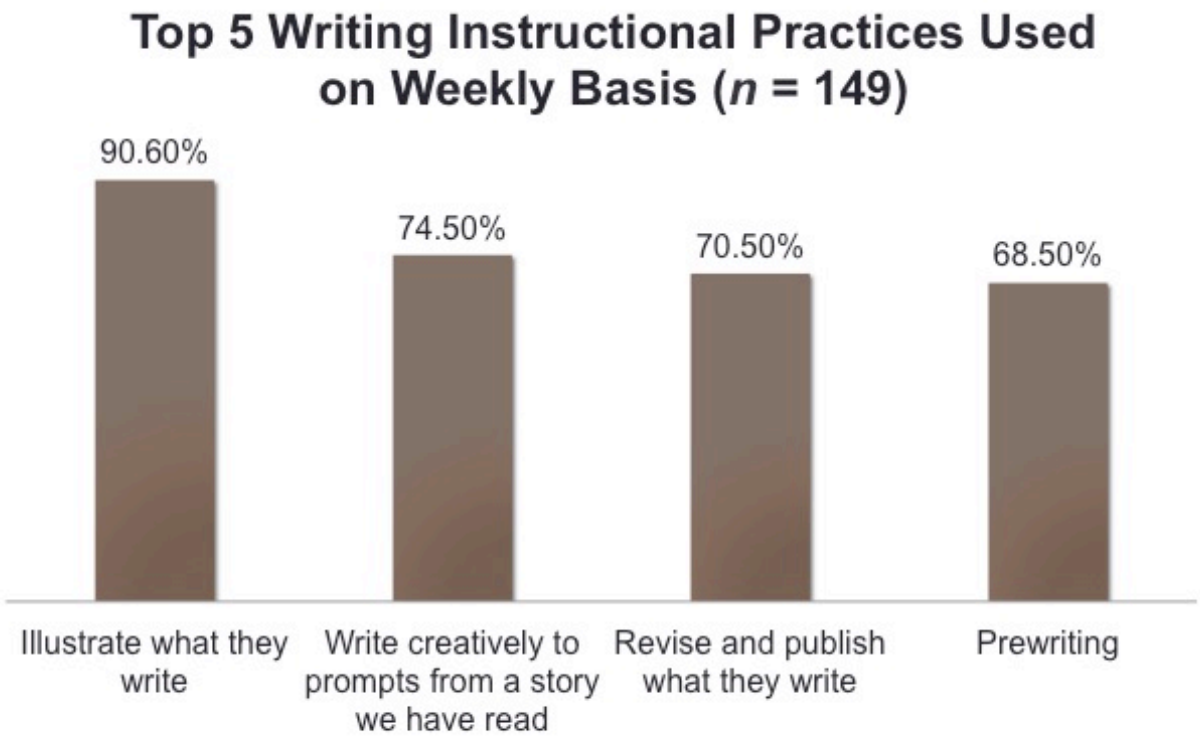

Figure 13. Top Five Instructional Practices in Writing.

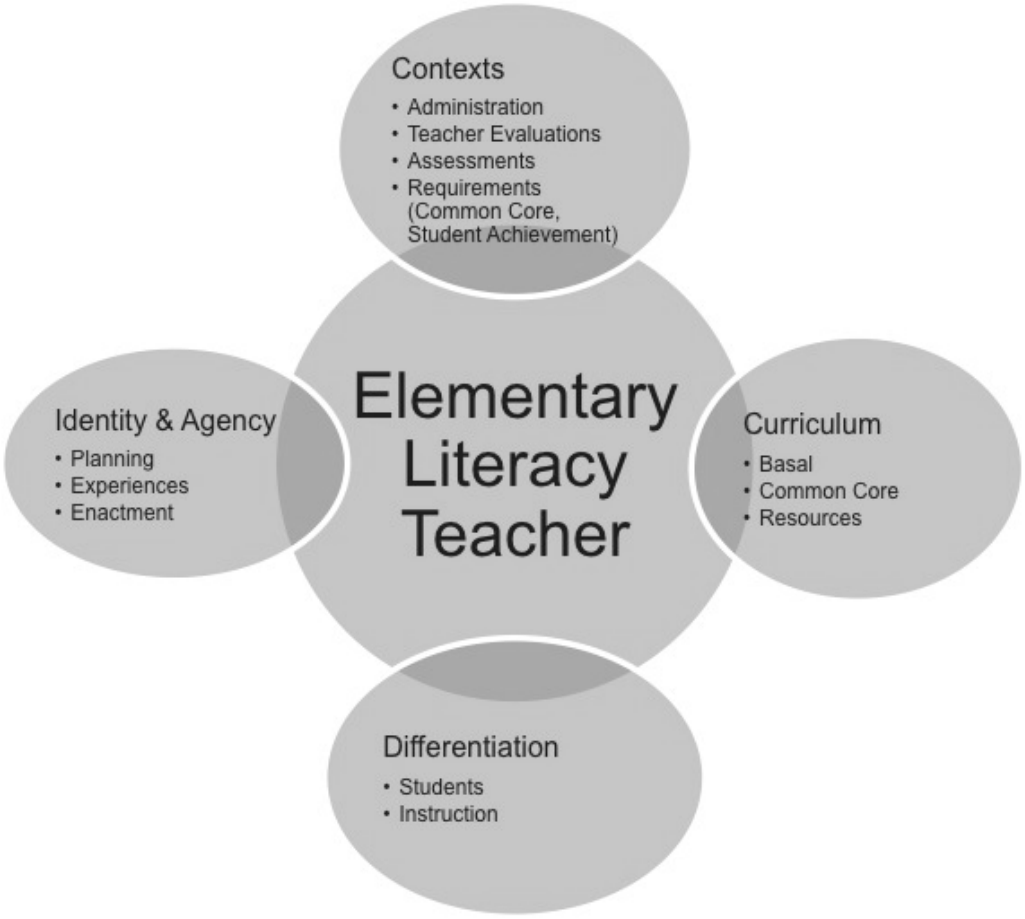

Figure 14. The Four Contemporary Commonplaces of Curriculum Design and Enactment.

APPENDIX C

LITERACY RESOURCES SURVEY

Literacy Resources Survey: Inservice Teachers (Fall 2013)

Informed Consent to Participate

1) You are being invited to participate in a research study about elementary literacy teachers' use of required literacy curricula in literacy teaching. If you agree to participate, you will complete the following survey by answering a series of questions about your classroom literacy instruction and resources. Your participation is entirely voluntary and your identity will be kept anonymous. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits for choosing not to participate or for withdrawing from the study at any time. You may also refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions .

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All data that we collect from you will be kept confidential. This data will be stored electronically and securely for up to a period of five years, then it will be destroyed. Results of this study may be used to inform future research, presented at professional conferences, in journal articles, or in a book. However, pseudonyms will be used so no person or place can be identified. Filling out this survey constitutes your informed consent to have your answers voluntarily compiled into a data set in which you will be an anonymous participant.

The purpose of gathering this survey data is to study the range, variety, and patterns in literacy resources available for your use within your classroom during the 2013-2014 academic year. This survey received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Michigan State University in July 2013 and is recognized by IRB # X13-658e.*

( ) Yes, I grant permission for my responses in this survey to be included in this research study and referenced in future research.

( ) No, I do not grant permission for my responses in this survey to be included in this research study or referenced in future research.

Informed Consent to Participate: Disclosure

All data pertain to this study will be stored on the computer electronically using a secure, password-protected file management system that can only be opened by the investigators. All material will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project. Pseudonyms will always be used in transcribing the date as well as in speaking or writing about the data analysis for professional conferences. This study is not being conducted to evaluate you in any way. Additionally, if you choose not to participate, you will not be included in any analysis.

If you have questions about the study, such as scientific issues, your role in this study, or how do any part of the study; or would like to obtain more information or offer input, please contact the lead researcher, Dr. Susan Florio Ruane, 305 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, 248-761-7912 (cell); susanfr@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, register a complaint about this study, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

2) Enter Today's Date (using the format MM/DD/YYYY). This date acknowledgment confirms your willingness and agreement to participate in this anonymous, voluntary research study as outlined previously:*

_____

Survey Directions

The survey will now begin. It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey.

Please make sure to answer all questions, including "yes" or "no" questions, contained within this survey. Please respond to the short answer questions to the best of your ability or recollection. There are no right or wrong answers.

Please note that this research, the questions asked, and the content of this survey do not reflect the views or opinions of your particular school entity or school district.

Thank you for your expertise and input. Please answer the following question and the survey will begin:

3) This survey is designed to be completed by classroom teachers of literacy in grades kindergarten to fifth grade who have at least three years of classroom teaching experience. Are you a K-5 classroom teacher who is responsible for literacy teaching within a particular grade level/s, with at least three years of teaching experience?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

4) Please enter your total years of teaching experience:*

_____

5) Please select your applicable graduate school experiences:

[ ] Completed Master's coursework

[ ] Completed Master's degree

[ ] Completed Master's degree + additional coursework

6) Have you served as a mentor teacher to a preservice teacher candidate (e.g., field experience student; student teacher; interning teacher)?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

QUESTIONS

7) Your Grade Level (presented as a letter or numeric code):*

( ) Grade K

( ) Grade 1

( ) Grade 2

( ) Grade 3

( ) Grade 4

( ) Grade 5

( ) Multi-grade/Multi-age classroom (grades K-5)

8) Do you use a basal textbook program to teaching literacy?*

A basal reading textbook program is defined in this study as a commercially published system used for the teaching of literacy (i.e. reading; writing; spelling). This program includes such materials as a student anthology, a teacher's manual, assessments, and supplemental materials.

( ) Yes

( ) No

9) How many years has your school/school district used a basal textbook program to teach reading/literacy?

_____

10) Do you use the teacher edition of the basal textbook program to plan your instructional lessons in reading?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

11) Do you use the weekly assessments/unit tests of the basal textbook program to assess your students' learning in reading?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

12) Please select your response to the following statement:
My basal textbook program is the same as my literacy curriculum.*

( ) True

( ) False

If you answered "false" to the previous question, please explain briefly what else you include in your curriculum which does not come from the basal textbook program:

13) Please select your response to the following statement:
My basal textbook program is only one part of my curriculum.*

( ) True

( ) False

If you answered "true" to the previous question, please explain briefly where else you teach literacy:

QUESTIONS

14) Do you follow an instructional pacing chart/guide for your school/school district's reading curriculum?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

15) Please select your response to the following statement:
I am required to follow our instructional pacing chart/guide as prescribed, without changes.*

( ) True

( ) False

16) What is the name and publisher of the reading curriculum you use?*

_____

17) Please select your response to the following statement:
I have been told to follow our published reading curricula "with fidelity" (i.e. I am supposed to follow it without making changes or deletions).*

( ) True

( ) False

18) Do you use a district-developed curriculum (i.e. units of study, theme units) to teach reading?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

19) Do you draw upon your own ideas and resources to design and plan the reading lesson and units that you teach in your classroom (e.g., custom-created theme units of study)?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

QUESTIONS

20) What instructional practices or strategies below do you use in your reading lessons on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply. Only include those instructional practices you use with your students on a weekly basis.)*

[ ] teacher read aloud

[ ] student oral reading

[ ] silent reading

[ ] whole group discussion

[ ] small group discussion

[ ] reading mini-lessons

[ ] lecture/recitation

[ ] conferencing/conferring

[ ] comprehension questions from reading curriculum/textbook (written or oral)

[ ] book clubs

[ ] literature circles

[ ] reading workshop

[ ] reading conferences

[ ] literacy centers/workstations

[ ] guided reading

[ ] phonics instruction

[ ] word study

[ ] vocabulary instruction

[ ] whole-class instruction

[ ] small-group instruction

[ ] ability grouping

[ ] computers/technology

[ ] worksheets

[ ] graphic organizers

[ ] writing to answer comprehension questions in sentence form

21) Other instructional practices or strategies, not listed above, used in your reading lessons on a weekly basis:

22) Do you incorporate children's or young adult literature, in addition to what is included in your published literacy program, in your reading instruction?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

23) Do you teach reading in the context of other content areas (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies)?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

Academic Standards: Reading

24) Please select your response to the following statement:

Academic standards (e.g., state standards; the Common Core) inform my instruction in reading.*

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

25) How are academic standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards) used in your reading instruction? Please describe below.

26) How are academic standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards) for reading instruction assessed in your classroom? Please describe below.

QUESTIONS

27) Do your literacy lessons/units include writing activities or assignments for your students?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

28) If you answered "yes" to your literacy lessons/units include student writing, check all uses that apply below.

[ ] Students write sentences or paragraphs I assign from the reading textbook

[ ] Students write sentences or paragraphs I assign to practice reading skills such as vocabulary and spelling; handwriting

[ ] Students write primarily on worksheets I assign

[ ] Students sometimes illustrate what they write

[ ] Students write creatively to prompts I assign, often from a story we have read

[ ] Students write for real-life purposes in various genres (e.g., research reports, narrative)

[ ] Students write expressively on topics of their own choosing

[ ] Students have an opportunity to revise and publish what they write

[ ] Students prewrite to brainstorm ideas and to organize their thoughts

29) Do you use a textbook or other published materials/programs for teaching writing?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

30) If yes, please include the program title/author/publisher below:

_____

31) What instructional practices or strategies below do you use in your writing lessons on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply. Only include those instructional practices you use with your students on a weekly basis.)*

[ ] teacher read aloud

[ ] student oral reading

[ ] whole group discussion of writing

[ ] small group discussion of writing

[ ] writing conferring/conferencing

[ ] writing mini-lessons

[ ] writing workshop

[ ] writing centers/workstations

[ ] whole-class writing instruction

[ ] small-group writing instruction

[ ] ability grouping

[ ] computers/technology

[ ] writing worksheets

[ ] graphic organizers

32) Other instructional strategies or practices, not listed above, used in your writing lessons on a weekly basis:

33) Do you incorporate children's or young adult literature, in addition to your published program, in your writing instruction?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

34) Do you teach writing in the context of other content areas (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies)?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

Academic Standards: Writing

35) Please select your response to the following statement:

Academic standards (e.g., state standards; the Common Core) inform my instruction in writing.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

36) How are academic standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards) used in your writing instruction? Please describe below.

37) How are academic standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards) for writing instruction assessed in your classroom? Please describe below.

School and School District Information

38) Please respond with your school district name, your school building name, and the numeric grade level (e.g., "1" for first grade or "K" for kindergarten).

District and school names are requested to allow us to determine Title I and free/reduced lunch status only and will be deleted after this information is gathered by the researchers. The information shared will never be shared with anyone outside the research team.

The state location of your school district/school:: _____

Your School District's Name (please type full name):: _____

Your School Building's Name (please type full name):: _____

Concluding Questions

39) Who selects the literacy curricula that you use in your classroom setting? (Check all that apply.)*

[ ] Your school's central/district leadership

[ ] Your school's administrators (e.g., principal)

[ ] Teachers within your school/school district

[ ] You

[ ] I don't know

40) Who selects the writing curricula that you use in your classroom setting? (Check all that apply.)*

[ ] Your school's central/district leadership

[ ] Your school's administrators (e.g., principal)

[ ] Teachers within your school/school district

[ ] You

[ ] I don't know

41) Please select your response to the following statement:

My beliefs, interests, and strengths influence how I teach literacy in my classroom.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

Please select your response to the following statement:

I make my own instructional choices and decisions in my literacy teaching.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

Please select your response to the following statement:

I have a great deal of autonomy in implementing the literacy curriculum in my classroom.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

Please select your response to the following statement:

I make a majority of the instructional decisions, reflective of my students and their needs, in my classroom teaching in literacy.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

Please select your response to the following statement:

I have no control over my classroom teaching in literacy.

( ) Strongly disagree

( ) Disagree

( ) Neutral

( ) Agree

( ) Strongly agree

( ) Not Applicable

42) Is there anything that this survey did not ask you about your elementary literacy teaching that you would like to share as a part of this study?

43) Would you be interested in participating further in this research study through interviewing and talking with the researcher/s about your classroom literacy practices?*

( ) Yes

( ) No

44) If you clicked "Yes", please complete the following information at the following link:

http://edu.surveygizmo.com/s3/1362233/Follow-Up-Contact-Form-for-Research-Study

The form will open in a new window. This is to protect your anonymity within this survey.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking this survey. Your response is very important to us for our research study and it has now been recorded.

If you have any further questions about this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigators: Chad Waldron at chw@msu.edu or Susan Florio-Ruane, Ed.D. at susanfr@msu.edu.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

a) Introduction to the Case Study and the Purpose of the Protocol

a. Main Research Question: *How do elementary in-service teachers teach literacy within the contexts of required literacy curriculum and complex educational policies?*
b. Subordinate Research Questions:
    i. What are the everyday activity settings in which elementary in-service teachers are teaching literacy?
    ii. What contextual factors within these local activity systems do teachers see as supportive or limiting of their practices in teaching literacy?
    iii. How does the elementary in-service teacher plan and enact (negotiate) literacy within the contexts of his/her classroom instruction and the curriculum mandates within that environment? How is their local decision-making as teachers reflected within their planning and their enactment of literacy teaching?
c. This protocol is designed to create a semi-structured interview with each participant in the study for the purpose of examining the following research questions of (a) how does the elementary school teacher implement literacy instruction and assessment and (b) what factors (e.g., literacy curriculum material, cultural contexts, professional development opportunities) seems to influence his/her curriculumr decision-making.

b) Data collection procedures

a. Names of sites to be visited, including contact persons
    i. School sites- various locations (protected for anonymity)
b. Data collection plan
    i. Request permission to audiotape interview: *Do you grant permission for this interview to be audiotaped? Please respond "yes" or "no".*
c. Expected preparation prior to site visits
    i. Researchers: contact participants and provide list of items to bring prepare audio backup; prepare protocol for each participant with questions/probes; prepare snacks for participants
    ii. Participants: literacy unit lesson plans; literacy unit planning materials (i.e. teachers' manuals; student books); resources used to extend the literacy lessons (i.e. worksheets; student work samples- blinded for anonymity); laptop to access additional materials for unit (if needed/applicable).

c) Interview Questions: PLANNING

a. **Do you consent to be audiotaped and interviewed? If so, please state: I agree to this interview and audio recording.**
b. **Please tell me your name, what grade level you work in, and your school name-location.**
c. **Have you always taught in this school/school district?**
d. **How many years have you been an elementary classroom teacher?**

d) **Standardized introductory prompt to questioning: In today's interview, we are going to talk about your classroom resources, teacher practices, and your thoughts about teaching elementary literacy.**

a. **Tell me about your classroom.**
    i. Describe the materials you use with students for literacy instruction in your classroom.

ii. Describe the assessments you use with students for assessing literacy instruction in your classroom.
iii. What documents/resources do you use to inform your literacy instruction in your classroom?

b. **Let's talk about your unit planning for literacy teaching.**
c. **Talk to me about how you plan a unit of study in literacy.**
    i. How did you develop your topic for your unit plan in literacy?
    ii. What did you use as resources to support your unit planning?
    iii. What are you "trying out" as a part of your unit plan?
        1. What is new/novel for the students/you?
    iv. What are you "using" as a part of your unit plan?
        1. What have you done before?
    v. Who were you able to talk to for help
    vi. What made you choose this resource versus another resource?
    vii. What experiences helped you with your unit planning? What experiences affected you with your unit planning?
d. **Let's talk about your lesson planning for the unit plan.**
    i. Tell me about your two of your plans for this unit.
    ii. What are the focuses of your lesson plans?
    iii. How did you develop these lesson plan objectives?
e. **Let's talk about your teaching experiences overall.**
    i. Describe your experiences, thus far, in learning and in teaching about literacy instruction and assessment.
    ii. Do you get to choose what you teach in literacy? If so, how/why?
    iii. Do you have a required literacy curriculum that you have to use? If so, what are your thoughts about that?
    iv. How do you make decisions about your classroom literacy teaching? What influences those decisions?
    v. What experiences have helped you in learning about literacy instruction and assessment? What have not been helpful?
f. **Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences or literacy instruction/assessment that I didn't ask you or it didn't come up?**

e) **Interview Questions: POST OBSERVATION**
    a. **Do you consent to be audiotaped and interviewed again? If so, please state: I agree to this interview and audio recording.**
    b. **Please tell me your name, what grade level you work in, and your school name-location.**
f) **<u>Standardized introductory prompt to questioning</u>: In today's interview, we are going to talk about the literacy lesson/block of time that I had a chance to observe. I want to talk about the resources, practices, and your thoughts about the lesson and your elementary literacy teaching.**
    a. **Let's talk about the literacy lesson I observed. What did you have planned?**
        i. What did you "write down" or plan as your lesson?
        ii. What resources did you plan to use as a part of this lesson?
        iii. How did these resources figure in/not figure in to your lesson; planning?
    b. **What was the objective/s for this lesson?**

c. **Who choose the materials/resources for this lesson?**
    i. Were the materials school/district curriculums?
    ii. Did you bring in your own materials/resources for this lesson? How did you locate these materials/resources?
    iii. Was the resources/materials well matched to the students' learning needs?
    iv. Did you have to adhere to these resources/materials? If so, how strictly?
    v. Did you make changes to match students' needs or did you use them "as is"?
d. **Did the lesson go as you planned- why or why not?**
    i. Why did it go as planned?
    ii. Why didn't go as planned?
    iii. Where would you with the next lesson?
    iv. Do you have the appropriate resources/materials for that next lesson?
    v. Do you have the time to do what you need to do within your classroom/this context?
e. **What would you change about that lesson, if anything, if you could?**
    i. Why would you change that? How would it have made that lesson better- for your students, for you as the teacher?
    ii. Do you feel constraints in your teaching?
f. **In an ideal world, if you could do anything you wanted to teach this concept/skill/topic to your students, what would that lesson look like?**
    i. What are the benefits of this lesson?
    ii. What are the constraints causing you not to teach that lesson?
g. **I noticed _____in the lesson. Can you tell more about why you did that or where you learned to do that?**
    i. Did you learn that in your teacher preparation? Professional development? Your own work?
    ii. Why was this appropriate for your students?
h. **What were the academic standards you used to plan this lesson, if any?**
    i. Why did you choose those standards for this lesson?
    ii. Why were these standards used as the focus?
    iii. Are the standards well matched to your current students' need?
    iv. How strictly are you expected to follow the academic standards/pacing guides, etc. as you plan and teach?
i. **Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this lesson or literacy instruction/assessment**

Thank you for participating in this interview with me. Please feel free to contact me for any other questions or comments you may have about your participation in this study.

APPENDIX E

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Classroom Rubric (Adapted from Valencia, 1990; Lipson & Wixson, 1991)

Attributes of Classroom Setting

Organization

___ grouping patterns
___ management efficiency
___ literacy environment

Expectations

___ teacher
___ student
___ provisions for success

Field Notes:

Attributes of Instruction

Focus of Instruction

___ content
___ materials
___ balance

Method/approach being used

___ salient features to lesson
___ congruence in instructional phases of lesson

Field Notes:

Attributes of instructional materials and tasks

Texts

___ general nature of materials (e.g., basal, trade book, workbook, etc.)
___ genre and variety
___ salient features of text(s) used (e.g., length, vocabulary, organization)

Tasks

___ purpose of the lesson linked to tasks
___ content clear in the tasks used
___ relationship to objectives, instruction, and assessment
___ variety and duration of tasks

Field Notes:

APPENDIX F

CODEBOOK

CODEBOOK

special education Description: provided to students in need of additional, intensive instruction in literacy

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 39986-40170

and I try to help someone, like the little boy, Davon, that just sat there. And he'll just sit there. I mean, I have, out of the special needs kids, five or six are cognitively delayed

paperwork Description: all related documentation to literacy teaching

Excerpt - Document: Katie's Interview.docx, Position: 14576-14937

I had a student assaulted and we had to deal with the police and the assault forms and those are things you need to learn about and watch how quickly the lesson we had planned, no matter how wonderful it was, had to take a backseat to safety and the issue. You know, and we've had large numbers of social services and counseling and all of those things as well

student behavior Description

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 25462-26214

One of my students in here, too, we've been talking about some SEL, socio-emotional stuff and we were talking two weeks about what it is to be kind, how do you be kind, what does it look like, what does it feel like, you know, and he is one, you know, one that has some challenges behaviorally and one day, I think it was after two weeks we'd talked about this, he received two prizes and he saw one student was highly upset that he didn't get it and he actually demonstrated. He goes, I know you're upset. Why don't you have this? It was, it was one of those moments. You actually, and I called his mom. I was like he demonstrated it. He understood it. He acted on it. And I said that to me is… no test can ever measure. No test can ever measure so…

teacher evaluation Description: measuring performance and knowledge of teachers

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 23058-23665

It is and so therefore, it's gonna affect me and my career of whether I moved two points, I go back two points or I move five points. So whether I moved two, I may be still developing or I may be a proficient teacher. I move four, I still may be proficient but I'll never reach accomplished because the dynamics in the classroom and if I go -2, I'm definitely not, I'm not good. But again, there's so much more to those numbers, those extraneous things that are out here. I have to build support. I have to build rapport, not only with the student but with the family. And that takes a good half year to do.

student motivation engagement Description

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 9527-9720

I could be better at the paper/pencil test and graphic organizers. They kinda get bogged down with a graphic organizer for whatever book they're reading. I don't wanta kill the joy of reading.

technology Description

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 11723-11833

Now, they think the computers know everything and so we really haven't talked about is it a good source or not

requirement Description

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 17745-17827

We have to give the STAR reading test, it's a requirement and AR is a requirement

whole group instruction Description

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 20870-20966

but it's normally, they do a whole group thing and then when I give them some type of assessment

pressures Description: relates to instructional pressures, real or perceived, in literacy as reported by teacher

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 22276-22630

Would you say, would you say you feel pressures of policies?

P: yes

I: in the classroom?

P: I do

I: What particular policies would you say the most are pressuring right now?

P: Numbers. Data. I'm not saying data is not important. Data is a good measuring growth but to, but to say, turn around this number labels a child, what they can and can't do

small group instruction Description

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 1467-2108

o once that's done, I always introduce a skill large group and then we'll work with students according to ability level or integrate, depending on what the skill is. It's not always a quiet classroom. If it's constructive conversation, I will let them talk but they know the rule is when I'm working in small groups, they know they have to be quiet at that time. I do a lot of group working, too, you know, putting them together and sometimes I'll just say you're number one, two, three, one, two and they work together. Sometimes I'll just mix it up. Sometimes I'll just let them pick their friends, sometimes I strategically group them.

teacher reflection on lesson Description

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 17417-18182

I think, I think beginning wise, it went okay. The reading part, I was really shocked because they usually, like I said, they usually follow along and they usually were like so eager to read. But today they just couldn't, you know, when they wanted, they were eager to read and they raised their hand, when I got to them, they were like, I don't think, I'm not even watching where I'm at. But you know, I think it's the time of day. You know, the time of day, too.

I: yeah, and that's probably a large part of it. And what would you change about the lesson, if anything?

P: I think, let's see. I think I would, you know, this being like the first time that they've really done a wheel on their own because we've actually worked on a lot of things, organizers

sense of community Description

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 12477-13087

because I want that mutual respect. You know, you respect me and I'm gonna respect you back and this is how it works. We're a family here. We learn. And I think that's something that they might not be getting as much at home. You know, and so I try to really work on that with them. But I once had a teacher say to me, oh, my god, my kids come in and wanta tell me everything. I don't have time for that and I said but you know what? Give them that time and it's gonna make their day smoother. They have to tell you this stuff, you know. It's what's on their mind, they're not gonna focus on anything else.

1-1 instruction Description: working directly with a child for instruction

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 21009-21087

But the best way I know what a kid needs to know is just to listen to him read

accountability for teachers Description: policies, procedures, and other requirements (often external) for teachers

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 26206-26793

P: We have to, yeah, we have to turn in our grade level notes and all that kinda stuff and it makes a difference because we know we're accountable to it cuz we have to turn this in. And you know, it's part of our evaluation and all that kinda stuff. So you know, we make sure it's done. That's how it is

I: Which helps tremendously

P: well, it does and again, because not everybody's accountable but the people that came in and the people that stayed, it's a good mix of people

I: which is great

P: And it's a good mix of work, work ethics and styles and things like that, I think

achievement Description: related students' achievement in literacy--particularly standardized measures of achievement

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 21414-22272

there are several, you know, that have their own issues that we have to sort through that socio-emotional part, even to get to understanding the importance of reading or just academics. So that's a struggle there. I think outside is all the paperwork that's going with this. You know, nobody, you know, we want numbers, numbers, numbers, numbers, numbers, numbers, numbers. Well, in order for me to get that first number, this is what I had to do to get to this first number. If I go to, if I move the kid two points, that was a lot of work. Yeah, it's only two points. Statistically, it may not be good but in order for me to get there, I had to build trust. I had to build acceptance. I had to build, I had to condition them to say it's okay to make mistakes to get to that point. Those two points were a lot of work. So I think that's one of the things

administration Description: principals, district officials who make policies for instruction and curriculum

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 15632-15974

scores were not real good. The teachers, I would let them teach my children, my own children. But there were a lot of circumstances there that weren't good so they came up with investment schools and we were one of them and they decided to, quote, reconstitute us. They let us all go out of that school. We had to interview for new schools

assessments Description: related to measures of literacy achievement

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 23912-24056

P: Not a whole year. Less than, less than, let's say nine months, let's take September off of there. You've got testing. Let's say six months.

basal Description: published reading program

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 12011-12672

Trophies, yes. I don't use that as much as maybe I should and it's really… you know, I think they're 2008 but, you know, so it's fine if I have to use it but to me, they're short excerpts of stories which I've learned through all the years that I've used Harcourt Brace books, they're short excerpts. You're only getting a snapshot and I understand you're focusing on a skill. I will use it if I need help on a skill to teach it or something more concrete or like, as you see, everybody was in and out. Those are my, those are tutors that are coming in to work with them so I can pace them to do something. And it's on grade level reading so it's a little tough

collaboration with colleagues Description: instructional planning in literacy; student achievement in literacy--types of collaboration used in settings

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 7622-7765

Yeah, and a lot of collaboration. Being new to this building, I've been very grateful that teachers that I've worked with have helped me a lot

commitment to students Description: promoting student achievement in literacy

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 21122-21549

Yes, absolutely. So anyway, so we have a new principal, a lot of new staff, lot more support staff in here to help the students grow. Now, we've already had an improvement in our test scores and I think I can show you this right here.

Common Core Description: national standards in reading and mathematics

Excerpt - Document: Katie's Interview.docx, Position: 78-521

I just shifted and pulled a regular old Harcourt manual, basal story so that they have, all have that material and they'll all be together because they do love those stories and it ties in so…The basal is suggested but with the Common Core, our district has chosen to allow us the freedom to utilize whatever we feel is necessary as long as we're meeting the Common Core standards.

curriculum Description: relates to all materials and tools used for literacy instruction

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 1785-2744

My classroom is more on target 2nd grade. The other 2nd grade teacher, it's, they're a little bit behind so she's really hammering all the basic phonics. Resources, we have, we use Harcourt Trophies series and it comes with a lot of resources but it's also an old series. So I don't have everything that they, you know, that's readily available or supposed to be readily available. I, we have what's called a barrier breaker in Cleveland and they're the ones you go to if you don't have stuff that you need and they usually go around and find it. But since this is my first, well, not my first year. I did teach 2nd at the beginning of my career, I don't know everything that goes with it. So I can't ask for it if I don't know. So I make do with what I have. We have the manual, the teacher's edition and a lot of it has a lot of activities and stuff that I try to do. I do a lot of my own as well. I look at their idea and then I tweak it for the classroom.

differentiation Description: planning varied instructional activities for students--based on students' needs and other considerations

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 8682-10460

main reason I use chapter books cuz eventually our kids are gonna be reading. We want them to read a full book, read full chapter books. And they've been exposed to the picture books, the short reading books. Not as much chapter books. Even if there's some still reading at a pre-primer stage, it's not that they can't comprehend. They may not have that fluency piece. Or that word identification. But if they hear it, I'm still providing that fluency. They still have that fluency of hearing and that comprehension. So when I do the read alouds like I did with the Cam Jansen book, they are getting a comprehension behind it. So that's why I do it that way, because of the different levels. Then if we wanta do some kind of skill set, let's say a strategy focus, I may introduce the whole strategy or the skill to the whole group, then I have to accommodate the different levels. Like for example, if we're doing, oh, let me think of one. Cause and effect, we're actually gonna start that. Cause and effect. So some are gonna be able to look at it, know cause and effect and pick it up. You know, and other ones are gonna be like, hm, what's a cause and what's an effect. We have to constantly remind them or they just completely won't understand. There's our three groups right here. Ones that I can keep going, more

complex text out of that, go back to the Cam Jansen book, refer back to what they're familiar with, what are some cause and effects. There were a lot of cause and effects going on there. Then that middle group, if they're not quite there, do more remediation in that and then the smaller group, scale it back as far as okay, this is going back to maybe a sentence. You know, and getting them to think of cause and effects instead of me giving it to them

diversity Description: cultural, linguistic, and educational considerations with students

Excerpt - Document: Katie's Interview.docx, Position: 865-1095

Everyone is not in the same place. I have in here a range from, we just finished our STAR reading test for the reading test, and I have children ranging from middle kindergarten ZPDs, 0.5, 0.6. I have a little boy at 3.5 to 5.1.

educational policies Description: related to NCLB; Common Core; Reading First--impact literacy instruction/assessment

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 22276-22630

Would you say, would you say you feel pressures of policies?

P: yes

I: in the classroom?

P: I do

I: What particular policies would you say the most are pressuring right now?

P: Numbers. Data. I'm not saying data is not important. Data is a good measuring growth but to, but to say, turn around this number labels a child, what they can and can't do

grouping Description: how students are organized or instructed in small group settings or across a whole class setting

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 4042-4654

So there's three different levels. We have a below, at and above. And I try to do all three with the kids because I think, number one, it challenges them, number two, for kids that are maybe above grade level, it's a comfort level and they can then work with somebody else who might be struggling.

improvement Description: relates to instructional teaching or student achievement improvements

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 21577-21902

And that's what they, the school district is looking for, that we're working to improve the quality of education for our students.

instability Description: relating to teaching placement, students' attendance, or requirements within school/school district

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 14813-15219

If I knew I was gonna be in 2nd grade for a couple years, you can go on Teachers Pay Teachers or even Pinterest and they have all of the I can statements for the Common Core that you can buy. I would be very willing to do that if I knew I was gonna be in it for a while, just so I'd have them and I don't have to make them

instructional objectives Description: the goals of a lesson, lessons, or units for instruction

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 15706-16265

My, my objective is because, you know, with, is to make sure that we're remembering the story cuz like I said, when we get to the end, I want them to have something to say, ah, I can take this part of my circle, this part and write a summary. Beginning, middle and end. I can write a summary to it. The top part was mostly the basic things. I knew they already knew. I was just wondering if they got title page. I always wonder because that was something I know I taught them in kindergarten. I was like, they remember? And they remembered it was a title page

interventions Description: special instruction provided to students who need improvement in their literacy skills and strategies, typically 1-1 or small-group in nature

Excerpt - Document: Suzanne's Interview.docx, Position: 10109-10490

we have no Title I specific reading person in the building on a regular basis. We have a person who does reading and she gives me an intervention twice a week out of my super lows, out of my low group, she takes half. So at least I can subdivide twice a week in that respect and I can get eight of the kids and she gets eight of the kids and we're subdividing in that respect.

literacy skills Description: behaviors and responses to literature by a child--also relates to the behaviors and responses expected developmentally for literacy progress

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 12058-12462

And my kids didn't know what an index was. And the class just thought that was a dictionary at the end of the book and I'm like no, it has a special name. I wish I had dictionaries for each kid because even though we could go on the Internet and we can bring up these programs, a lot of our kids don't have that. So they still need old school, this is how you read a dictionary. This is what it's for.

modification to curriculum Description: changing the curriculum as designed--adapting the curriculum within the local classroom

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 3475-3754

I do a lot of like below level or grade level or I use a lot of supplemental. If it's… like this is a realistic fiction story so it's called Turtle Bay so we did a nonfiction story on turtles so they have a background of turtles. I do a lot of integrating of different materials.

NCLB Description: *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*--revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Excerpt - Document: Suzanne's Interview.docx, Position: 2434-2546

And with the third grade proficiency expectations from NCLB, and again, this was state mandated at the time, we decided to cover ourselves.

resistance Description: refusing; ignoring

Excerpt - Document: Suzanne's Interview.docx, Position: 7175-7200

My principal wanted me to work individually with student and that was not gonna happen.

resources Description: materials used to support literacy instruction

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 12976-13140

If I want to and they have the workbooks to go with it so I don't have… you know, what I do is I kind of, I know that's there but I kinda still put my own together.

schedules- overwhelmed Description: stressed/frustrated with requirements of schedule for teaching elementary literacy

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 22666-22969

P: Yes. I would also plan my day, my specials, lunch around that. We just got a new schedule and now my lunch is fourth. I don't have my plan until sixth. That I like though because it used to be third. So we would come in, do our bell work, use the restroom, start, go to specials. Then go to lunch.

scope and sequence/pacing Description: pacing guide--scripted guide to instruction in literacy; scope and sequence-guidance of skills and strategies in literacy with curriculum

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 13292-13509

P: We have a scope and sequence our district has put together. So they say, well, during the early second quarter, this is what we're, this is what you should be teaching or late second quarter… have you seen one yet?

student challenges Description: lack of home support; lack of motivation/engagement in literacy

Excerpt - Document: Tina's Interview.docx, Position: 25462-26214

One of my students in here, too, we've been talking about some SEL, socio-emotional stuff and we were talking two weeks about what it is to be kind, how do you be kind, what does it look like, what does it feel like, you know, and he is one, you know, one that has some challenges behaviorally and one day, I think it was after two weeks we'd talked about this, he received two prizes and he saw one student was highly upset that he didn't get it and he actually demonstrated. He goes; I know you're upset. Why don't you have this? It was, it was

one of those moments. You actually, and I called his mom. I was like he demonstrated it. He understood it. He acted on it. And I said that to me is… no test can ever measure. No test can ever measure so…

support Description: instructional/administrative support for teaching literacy

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 22755-23422

So, this principal is new as of this year and all the new staff that have come in this year. So I think that's huge, having lower, reduced class size and a lot more support, that's huge.

teacher agency Description: thoughtful opportunities taken up by teachers to inform their local classroom instruction--decision-making

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 9629-9833

And you know, like I, even though I've been teaching 30 years, I still spend hours creating things because every class is different and every kid's needs are different. And so I try to meet those for them

teacher background Description: part of teacher identity- educational experiences; teaching experiences

Excerpt - Document: Maggie's Interview.docx, Position: 4060-4130

P: Yes. And then I use some of my own experience and my own resources.

teacher experiences Description: part of teacher identity--instructional "know how" for literacy

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 8856-8962

It's something I have to use. I prefer just, I think teacher observation says a lot and what they produce

teacher history Description: part of teacher identity--any significant events relating to how a teacher is informed about how to teach elementary literacy

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 845-1071

I have been teaching, this is my 30th year. I taught 1st grade for 19 years.

teacher planning Description: relates to instructional planning in literacy--often demonstrates autonomy (degrees of freedom reflecting personal/professional beliefs for effective teaching) over literacy instruction

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 10765-11228

I looked and I saw extended response and my principal was saying we have to do extended response every day. She wants a prompt up, do the writing every day so I want do what she asks. But then also, the nonfiction, if they're really good at skimming and scanning and picking out words, they can go in and they don't even have to read the whole piece. They can just find that answer, underline it and go write it down. So that's what I'm trying to get them to do

teacher preparation Description: relates to teacher identity- how a teacher was prepared

Excerpt - Document: Jennifer's Interview.docx, Position: 26926-27290

I was like, oh, my gosh, and I thought these kids- Like they don't know anything. And so I started my master's in special education and I was taking classes and I realized there's nothing wrong with the kids. It's, I have to teach to where they're at and bring them up. And so I've kind of evolved in

testing Description: relates to formative and summative measures of students' learning in literacy

Excerpt - Document: Lisa's Interview.docx, Position: 29081-29145

After the whole test is over, I can teach the way I want to teach.

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

Reading, Reforms, and Resources:
How Elementary Teachers Teach Literacy in Contexts of Mandated Curriculum and Educational Policies

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Experienced Teacher:

You are being invited to participate in a research study of learning to teach literacy. The focus of this study is your experiences in literacy teaching and how you use literacy curriculumr resources within your classroom context. If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to complete surveys, questionnaires, observations, or interviews about your literacy teaching in your classroom as data for the study. This research may also be used to frame future research.

If you agree to participate, please check the items below to indicate your voluntary participation in data collection that will contribute to this study. At the bottom of this letter, please sign and print your name, and indicate today's date.

_____You grant permission to allow us to use your completed surveys or questionnaires, complete as part of a study on literacy teaching in the classroom.
_____You grant permission to allow us to use your completed surveys or questionnaire responses to inform future research studies.
_____You grant permission to allow us to interview you and use your interview responses as a part of a study on literacy teaching in the classroom.
_____You grant permission to allow us to observe your classroom teaching practices and use these observation notes as a part of study on literacy teaching in the classroom.
_____You grant permission to allow us to review and collect artifacts of your teaching and classroom instruction, including lesson/unit plans or copies of instructional materials.

If you agree to participate in this study and in the use of your surveys, interviews, observations, or questionnaires, y**our participation is entirely *voluntary* and your identity will be kept anonymous.** You will not be penalized or lose any benefits for choosing not to participate or for withdrawing from the study at any time. **You may also refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions.** If you agree to participate, you will be asked to discuss your unit planning and teaching and the context for teaching literacy. You may also choose not to answer questions at any time and can withdraw from this study at any time, without any penalty.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All data that we collect from you will be kept confidential. Results of this study may be presented at professional conferences, in journal articles, or in a book. However, pseudonyms will be used so no person or place can be identified.

While direct benefits of participation may not be recognizable, we believe that allowing teachers to reflect on their experiences, perceptions, and understandings of their literacy teaching

experiences can be of great personal satisfaction and might offer strategies for enhancing the teacher preparation for future teachers.
You will not be asked to miss your teaching for any part of participation in this study. All data collection will be completed at your convenience.

All data pertain to this study will be stored on computer in a locked file that can only be opened by the investigators. All material will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project. Pseudonyms will always be used in transcribing the date as well as in speaking or writing about the data analysis for professional conferences.

This study is not being conducted to evaluate you in any way. Additionally, if you choose not to participate, you will not be included in any analysis. If you have questions about the study, such as scientific issues, your role in this study, or how do any part of the study; or would like to obtain more information or offer input, please contact the lead researcher, Dr. Susan Florio Ruane, 305 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, 248-761-7912 (cell); susanfr@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, register a complaint about this study, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you,

Susan Florio-Ruane, Professor and Principal Investigator &
Chad Waldron, Ph.D. Candidate and Research Assistant

College of Education
Department of Teacher Education

APPROVED MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY IRB- EXEMPT- IRB #x13-658e

"My literacy teaching is comprehensive, but is it coherent?"
Teachers' Learning of Local Curriculum Decision-Making in the Context of State Mandates, Scripted Curriculum, and Standardized Assessment

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Teacher's Signature _____

Date _____

Email _____

Contact Phone Number _____

Researcher Signature _____

APPROVED MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY IRB- EXEMPT- IRB #x13-658e

APPENDIX H

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Initial IRB Application Determination *Exempt*

July 23, 2013

To: Susan Florio-Ruane
26509 Old Homestead Court
Farmington Hills, MI 48331

Re: **IRB# x13-658e** Category: Exempt 1, 2
Approval Date: July 23, 2013

Title: Reading, Reforms, and Resources: How Elementary Teachers Teach Literacy in Contexts of Mandated Curriculum and Educational Policies

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been deemed as exempt** in accordance with federal regulations.

The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. **Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects** in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material. The IRB office has received your signed assurance for exempt research. A copy of this signed agreement is appended for your information and records.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit an ***Application for Permanent Closure***.

Revisions: Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the IRB.

Follow-up: If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the IRB office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

H. McGee

Harry McGee, MPH
SIRB Chair

c: Chad Waldron

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Human Research Protection Programs

Biomedical & Health Institutional Review Board (BIRB)

Community Research Institutional Review Board (CRIRB)

Social Science Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB)

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