

## **ABSTRACT**

JONES, JILL SPARGUR. Examining Small-Group Reading Instruction for Students Identified as Having Difficulty with Reading: A Multi-Case Study (Under the direction of Drs. Angela M. Wiseman and Jill F. Grifenhagen).

This qualitative case study examined two first-grade teachers' scaffolding within daily small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and how the scaffolds supported students' reading. This research occurred in two first-grade classrooms at Springville Elementary School, a school in a rural town outside a larger city in the Southeastern United States. Participants consisted of two purposefully selected teachers and seven students they identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Data collection occurred over eight weeks and consisted of participant observations, field notes, teacher and student interviews, students' reading data, and instructional artifacts. Data analysis entailed the process of open coding using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) method of First Cycle and Second Cycle coding and collapsing data into five overall themes. The first three themes focused on teachers' scaffolding forms, the small-group instructional focus, and students' engagement with text. The final two themes focused on how teachers supported students' abilities to determine unknown words and varied levels of support students required in the word solving process. The findings from this study align with prior research on teacher scaffolding forms, and highlight the importance of the instructional focus, opportunities for students to read text, and implementing various levels of support. These findings have implications for policy, practice, and future research.

© Copyright 2018 by Jill Spargur Jones

All Rights Reserved

Examining Small-Group Reading Instruction for Students Identified as Having Difficulty with  
Reading: A Multi-Case Study

by  
Jill Spargur Jones

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Curriculum and Instruction

Raleigh, North Carolina

2018

APPROVED BY:

---

Dr. Angela Wiseman  
Co-Chair

---

Dr. Jill Grifenhagen  
Co-Chair

---

Dr. Dennis Davis

---

Dr. Jessica DeCuir-Gunby

---

Dr. Kristin Conradi Smith  
External Member

**DEDICATION**

To my parents, Jon and Jean Spargur, who have fostered my love of learning and always supported my continued academic endeavors.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Jill Spargur Jones grew up in Rockville, Maryland. Early in life she realized her calling as an educator. She earned her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology and her K-8 Teaching Certification from Roanoke College. She received her Master of Education Degree in Reading from Meredith College. Her previous professional roles include classroom teacher, literacy specialist, and literacy coach in elementary schools in the Raleigh, North Carolina area. Her passion for helping students identified as having the most difficulty with reading as well as their classroom teachers further fueled her desire to pursue a doctoral degree. Her research interests include teacher scaffolding, interventions for students identified as having difficulty with reading, and preparing teachers as effective literacy educators of all students, especially those who require further support.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“I will provide for you and I’ll stand by your side. You’ll need a good companion now for this part of the ride”* (Bruce Springsteen, *The Land of Hope and Dreams*, 2012).

As I entered my doctoral program, a wise soul provided enlightenment by stating this journey would be the hardest thing I would ever do. I cannot agree more as I have only arrived at this pinnacle through the support of many people. Consequently, I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for their efforts. First, I thank my family because without them no part of this journey would have been possible. To my husband Chris, thank you for your unwavering belief in my abilities. Every day you have gone above and beyond enabling me to focus on the academic tasks I needed to complete. You have been my problem solver, technical support, voice of reason, and rock at the times I needed support and encouragement the most. Thank you to my dearest daughter Cammie. Through this accomplishment, I hope you recognize that you can attain your dreams whatever they may be. Thank you for the many pictures and encouraging words which provided motivation to complete this dissertation. The most insightful words from an eight-year old, “Don’t worry about other things - just chose one!” You have been so understanding of the countless hours I needed to spend in my office. I pursued this dissertation with the hopes of supporting more students in achieving the level of literacy you demonstrate daily. To my mom and dad, I appreciate your support and encouragement during this process. Finally, I would thank my family members and friends who understood when my studies took precedence over spending time with them. Upon completion of this dissertation, I look forward to spending more time with you.

I would also like to thank the teachers in the study, Emily and Julie. They accepted my role as an observer and researcher and opened their classrooms and instruction for my

examination. I am so appreciative of your willingness to participate and how dedicated you are to your students. I am also grateful to the principal at Springville who was supportive of this project and recognized the positive benefits of these teachers being research participants.

I know without a doubt I would not have accomplished what I have without several of my peers in the doctoral program. First, I am so thankful for my unbelievable sole cohort mate and accountability partner, Dr. Abbey Graham. I appreciate your willingness to listen at crucial moments, provide your wealth of advice and support, and share constant reminders that “you got this”. Kirsten Aleman, I learned so much collaborating with you on our qualitative project and from your inquisitive, relevant, and insightful feedback. You are next to complete the doctoral journey! Dr. Melissa Pendleton, thank you for choosing to become my mentor. I know I would not be here without your constant willingness to provide meaningful advice. I would also like to thank Dr. Casey Medlock Paul for your collaboration, feedback, encouragement, and friendship. Laurie Brummitt, thank you for your willingness to share your qualitative expertise, becoming an accountability partner, and reminding me what matters most. Finally, I would like to thank Norm Vehabovic for your collaborative nature and partnership opportunities to expand my notion of literacy.

Most of all, I must thank an exceptional set of committee members. Without them, I certainly would have not accomplished this goal. Dr. Wiseman, I am thankful you agreed to co-chair my committee. You have provided endless amounts of meaningful advice and feedback throughout the process. By working with you, I have grown as a researcher and a literacy educator and broadened my perspective of literacy. Thank you for continuing to push me forward in my thinking and my writing. To my second co-chair Dr. Grifenhagen, I am so grateful you became my advisor in the middle of my program. The opportunities to participate in your

research, collaborate on projects, and receive your thorough feedback have been invaluable. You have guided me to think more as a researcher and a scholar and to “zoom out”. I am also grateful to Dr. Conradi Smith who provided valuable research and writing opportunities. Thank you for sharing advice, asking tough questions, ensuring I could justify the “so what” in my work, and pushing me to become a better writer. Thank you to Dr. Davis who agreed to join my committee upon his arrival at NC State. You have provided relevant and exciting research opportunities in addition to teaching me new ways of questioning and thinking critically. Dr. DeCuir-Gunby, I appreciate your presence on my committee and your role as my professor. Your teaching enabled me to gain a clearer understanding of the research process. You have asked important questions of my work and helped me state ideas more explicitly. I appreciate Dr. Tran agreeing to be a participant and offering another perspective. Finally, thank you to Dr. Harrington who provided opportunities to participate in her courses where I learned valuable lessons about teaching. I am forever grateful to all of you as my committee members and your role in enabling me to accomplish my ultimate goal.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Purpose Statement and Research Questions .....	3
Significance of the Study .....	4
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	5
Introduction to the Chapter .....	5
Theoretical Framework .....	5
How Learning Transpires .....	6
Zone of Proximal Development .....	7
Students Identified as Having the Most Difficulty with Reading .....	9
The Role of Identification .....	10
The Role of Grouping .....	11
The Role of the Teacher .....	13
The Role of Instruction .....	14
The Role of Text Selection .....	18
The Role of Scaffolding .....	22
The Historical Context of Scaffolding .....	22
Scaffolding and ZPD .....	23
The Current State of Scaffolding .....	24
Scaffolding in Literacy .....	26
The Relationship Between Student Characteristics and Scaffolding Practices .....	26
Establishing Scaffolding Forms .....	28
Scaffolding in Reading Recovery .....	32
Scaffolding in classroom small-group instruction .....	33
Scaffolding Cueing Systems .....	34
Effectiveness of Scaffolding .....	37
Chapter Summary .....	39
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	40
Introduction to the Chapter .....	40
Case Study .....	41
Description of the Research Site .....	43
Site Selection and Access .....	43
The School .....	44
The Instruction .....	46
The Classrooms .....	47
The Teachers .....	48
The Students .....	49
Data Collection .....	53

Participant Observations .....	54
Field Notes .....	56
Teacher Interviews .....	57
Student Interviews .....	58
Artifacts.....	59
Student Reading Data .....	61
Data Analysis .....	62
First Cycle Coding .....	64
Second Cycle Coding.....	67
Validity and Reliability.....	68
Internal Validity .....	68
External Validity .....	70
Reliability.....	70
Limitations .....	71
Subjectivity Statement .....	72
Chapter Summary .....	73
 CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT.....	 74
Introduction to the Chapter .....	74
Emily’s Instructional Approach.....	75
Feelings About Students Identified as Having Difficulty.....	75
Small-group Instruction .....	79
Instructional Logistics.....	79
Differences from Other Reading Groups .....	80
Instructional Materials .....	81
Julie’s Instructional Approach .....	87
Small-group Instruction .....	87
Instructional Logistics.....	88
Differences from Other Reading Groups .....	89
Instructional Materials .....	90
Chapter Summary .....	101
 CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS .....	 102
Introduction to the Chapter .....	102
Theme 1: The Role of Scaffolding.....	103
Defining Scaffolding Forms .....	104
Emily’s Scaffolding Forms.....	107
Emily’s Type of Scaffolding Directedness .....	113
Emily’s Responsiveness to Student Needs .....	114
Julie’s Scaffolding Forms .....	115
Julie’s Type of Scaffolding Directedness .....	125
Julie’s Responsiveness to Student Needs .....	126
Cross-Case Analysis .....	128
Theme 2: Instructional Focus.....	129
Emily’s Instructional Focus .....	130
Phonics.....	130

Fluency.....	133
Comprehension .....	133
Strategy Instruction.....	135
Julie’s Instructional Focus .....	137
Strategy Instruction.....	138
Comprehension .....	140
Phonics.....	141
Cross-Case Analysis .....	142
Theme 3: Engagement with Connected Text.....	143
Emily’s Use of Connected Text.....	143
Frequency.....	144
Modeled Reading.....	145
Type .....	146
Julie’s Use of Connected Text.....	148
Frequency .....	149
Type .....	150
Cross-Case Analysis .....	151
Theme 4: Students’ Determination of Unknown Words Through Scaffolding.....	152
Emily’s Students.....	153
Julie’s Students .....	156
Cross-Case Analysis .....	159
Theme 5: Teachers Provided Varied Levels of Scaffolding.....	159
Emily’s Students.....	160
Julie’s Students .....	163
Cross-Case Analysis .....	170
Chapter Summary .....	170
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....	172
Introduction to the Chapter .....	172
Summary of Methodology .....	173
Summary of Findings.....	174
Discussion.....	176
Research Question #1: How do two first-grade teachers scaffold within their small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading? .....	177
Research Question #2: How does teacher scaffolding support students’ reading during small-group reading instruction?.....	182
Implications for Practice.....	184
Implications for Policy.....	188
Implications for Research.....	189
Concluding Thoughts.....	191
REFERENCES .....	192
APPENDICES .....	202
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter .....	203

Appendix B: Observational Protocol .....	204
Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol .....	205
Appendix D: Student Interview Protocol.....	208

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	<i>Scaffolding Forms Determined in Prior Research</i> .....	29
Table 3.1	<i>Objectives, Research Questions, and Data Forms</i> .....	41
Table 3.2	<i>Description of Student Participants in Emily’s Classroom</i> .....	50
Table 3.3	<i>Description of Student Participants in Julie’s Classroom</i> .....	52
Table 3.4	<i>Data Collection Timeline</i> .....	54
Table 3.5	<i>Weekly Classroom Observation Rotation Schedule</i> .....	55
Table 3.6	<i>Dates of Teacher Interviews</i> .....	58
Table 3.7	<i>Dates of Student Interviews</i> .....	58
Table 3.8	<i>Summary of Data Collection Sources</i> .....	60
Table 3.9	<i>Example of Descriptive Coding Process</i> .....	65
Table 5.1	<i>Teacher Scaffolding Forms</i> .....	105
Table 5.2	<i>Scaffolding Forms in Emily’s Classroom</i> .....	107
Table 5.3	<i>Scaffolding Forms in Julie’s Classroom</i> .....	116
Table 5.4	<i>Focus for Emily’s Small Group Reading Instruction</i> .....	131
Table 5.5	<i>Focus for Julie’s Small Group Reading Instruction</i> .....	137
Table 5.6	<i>Texts Used for Instruction in Emily’s Small-Group Reading Instruction</i> .....	147
Table 5.7	<i>Texts Used for Instruction in Julie’s Small-Group Reading Instruction</i> .....	150

**LIST OF FIGURES**

<i>Figure 3.1</i>	Case study design.....	42
<i>Figure 3.2</i>	Steps in data analysis coding process .....	64
<i>Figure 4.1</i>	Poster used for decoding strategy instruction .....	86
<i>Figure 4.2</i>	Comprehension story element activity with wh question stems .....	95
<i>Figure 4.3</i>	Story element comprehension activity .....	96
<i>Figure 4.4</i>	Comprehension activity in which students responded to written prompts .....	97
<i>Figure 5.1</i>	Overall thematic findings.....	103
<i>Figure 5.2</i>	Teacher and student-directed scaffolding forms.....	106
<i>Figure 5.3</i>	Strategies to decode unknown words.....	139
<i>Figure 5.4</i>	Letterland decodable story .....	148

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“We do not want to produce children who can read only in the presence of adults. We want children who can read for enjoyment and knowledge on their own...Independence must somehow be achieved through the daily interactions between teachers and children” (Beed, Hawkins, & Roller, 1991, p. 648).*

#### Background

For more than forty years, literacy researchers have sought to determine how to best provide reading instruction to emerging readers (e.g., Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Many studies have examined reading instruction within first grade, the schooling year in which students are emerging readers and often exhibit the most progress in the development of their literacy skills (Pressley et al., 2001). Although the overall question of what is the most effective reading instruction for emerging readers remains relatively unanswered, previous studies demonstrated the influential role of the teacher in reading instruction (Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton et al., 1998). The teacher’s ability to create and provide effective instruction to support the diverse reading needs of primary students is essential.

Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) posited “research affirms that quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure” (p. 343). This quote illustrates the importance of the teacher’s literacy instruction, especially during the beginning years of students’ schooling. Further findings indicate that effective reading instruction in the regular classroom can help improve students’ reading abilities (Mathes et al., 2005; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011) and often results in students making

progress in reading without the need for intervention (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Slavin et al., 2011).

One important role of the teacher in helping students progress in the area of reading is through the implementation of scaffolding. Scaffolding is defined as the teacher providing support to a student with the goal of achieving or mastering a task which that student cannot complete independently. Prior research on effective literacy instruction and effective teachers of literacy determined that scaffolding is an effective method for providing support (Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton et al., 1998). Furthermore, scaffolding is more prevalent in first-grade classrooms with students achieving at a higher level than in first-grade classrooms achieving at a lower level (Pressley et al., 2001). Scaffolding is an effective instructional method within other instructional contexts including one-on-one targeted reading instruction (Rodgers, 2004; van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010; Wong et al., 2004); small-group literature discussions in upper elementary grades (Maloch, 2002; Jadallah et al., 2011); and small-group comprehension instruction (Clark & Graves, 2005; Palinscar & Brown, 1984).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although prior research supports scaffolding as an effective instructional method in the regular classroom setting (Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton et al., 1998), these studies generally do not include descriptions of scaffolding methods and formats. In addition, little is known about how scaffolding occurs within daily small-group reading instruction designed to develop students' reading practices to accurately read and comprehend connected text (van de Pol et al., 2010). Instead, available research identified different types and frequencies of scaffolding implemented with primary students exhibiting reading difficulties within one-on-one pull-out reading intervention settings (Rodgers, 2004; Rodgers, D'Agostino, Harmey, Kelly, &

Brownfield, 2016; Wong et al., 1994). However, these studies did not provide descriptive accounts of how classroom teachers provided support within small-group classroom instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Rodgers (2004) explicitly stated the need to further understand how teachers scaffold within the small-group instructional framework. Furthermore, additional research is needed to understand how students respond to the scaffolding experienced within small-group reading instruction (Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol et al., 2010) and which scaffold types are effective in supporting students' reading development. Therefore, a need exists to understand the nature of how teachers scaffold within daily small-group reading instruction and how these scaffolds affect students' reading development. The present study addresses this need by examining teacher scaffolding implemented with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading within small-group instruction and the effects of scaffolding on students' reading practices.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study (Stake, 1995) is to provide an in-depth understanding of how primary classroom teachers scaffold their instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. This study examines how two first-grade teachers used scaffolding as an instructional approach during small-group reading instruction and how the teachers' scaffolding methods supported the reading practices of seven first-grade students, identified by the teachers as those having the most difficulty with reading. The study also describes how teachers make decisions regarding the instructional focus and the materials for small-group reading instruction. The following two research questions guide this study:

1. How do two first-grade teachers scaffold within their small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading?

2. How does teacher scaffolding support students' reading during small-group instruction?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addresses the need in literacy research for further examination of teacher scaffolding practices and how these scaffolds support students' development of reading practices. Through the theoretical lens of social constructivism, the findings from this multi-case study create an understanding of the scaffolding practices of two first-grade teachers and their instructional intentions implemented in small-group instruction with students they identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Additionally, the findings describe how teachers use scaffolding when students are unable to determine words in connected text. As a result, this study extends research on scaffolding to include implementation within small-group reading instruction for primary-grade students and the focus on how the scaffolding impacts the students' development of reading practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“Learning occurs in a context of social interactions leading to understanding” (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997, p. 8).*

#### Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present social constructivism as the theoretical framework grounding this study and to provide a review of research factors related to literacy instruction and scaffolding as they pertain to students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. First, I discuss the major principles of social constructivism and how these principles align with my study. Second, I explain findings about factors affecting literacy instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Finally, I present a review of the literature on scaffolding including the history of the concept of scaffolding, scaffolding within literacy, and teacher scaffolding. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overall findings from the literature review.

#### Theoretical Framework

Social constructivist theory posits people interact with one another, develop based on these social interactions, and utilize tools to gain meaning and assimilate beliefs and perspectives pertaining to the surrounding world (Handsfield, 2015; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Therefore, this theoretical framework emphasizes how knowledge is created through human interaction and social factors, which in turn produces understanding (Au, 1998; Hogan & Pressley, 1997). With its focus on how historical and social factors impact individuals’ activities and influence their learning, social constructivist theory is categorized as a subset of sociocultural theory (Handsfield, 2015; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). However, specific distinctions between the two

theories exist. The sociocultural approach focuses solely on the influence of culture and the larger social system on an individual's learning, whereas the social constructivist approach separates social influences on learning from mental representations that transpire within the individual (Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). In the following section, I discuss how learning transpires according to social constructivism in addition to defining and explaining the influential role of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **How Learning Transpires**

Vygotsky, who developed several overarching principles pertaining to learning, is considered a prominent influence on the development of social constructivist theory (Au, 1998; Handsfield, 2015; Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Wertsch, 2009). He believed that learning was situated in the context of the social world and social interactions (Au, 1997; Gee, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009). Vygotsky (1978) argued an interrelationship existed between learning and development wherein learning fostered an individual's development. Furthermore, he created the *general genetic law of development* stating that development occurs in two areas: first between people in the social arena, and then internalized within the individual (Au, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Warschauer, 1997; Wertsch, 2009). Thus, he specified learning between individuals as *interpsychological*, whereas he entitled learning within an individual as *intrapsychological* (Au, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Warschauer, 1997).

According to Vygotsky, the mind is organized into functional systems, which allow for the development of higher level mental abilities (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). The psychological systems inside the brain, or the *functional systems*, combine separate internal and external processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) stated "within genetic analysis, the use of functional systems provides a framework for representing the

complex interrelationships between external devices, psychological tools, the individual, and the social world” (p. 194).

Vygotsky asserted that higher mental functioning and actions were mediated by tools and signs (Handsfield, 2015; Palinscar, 2005; Scott & Palinscar, 2013; Warschauer, 1997; Wertsch, 2009). The tools and signs are referred to as *semiotics* and, in addition to language, comprised various forms such as writing, numerical systems, diagrams, computers, and artisan forms (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009). Vygotsky (1978) believed language was the most influential form of semiotic mediation on learning, and explained that language encompassed mastery of the alphabet and words in addition to the acts of listening, speaking and writing; he argued that language enabled children to interpret and react to their surrounding environments (Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009).

### **Zone of Proximal Development**

During the time of Vygotsky’s work, a widely accepted range of cognitive theories centered on the belief that developmental levels hindered learning. However, Vygotsky did not believe these theories accurately described the learning process. In contrast, he argued development occurred alongside learning as individuals encountered and solved new problems (Vygotsky, 1978). He established two different two levels of development that exist within an individual: the *actual* level and the *potential* level (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009). The actual level is the development of mental functions based on genetics and is retrospective in that the development has already occurred (Palinscar, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). In contrast, the potential level is the development of mental functions achieved from the support of others and is prospective as this term indicates possible future learning (Palinscar, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). He called the difference between these two levels and the developmental process that occurs after

learning the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Specifically, Vygotsky (1978) defined this term as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 33). Although an individual initially requires support from another to potentially expand his or her learning capacity, the knowledge is eventually internalized and the individual becomes more independent (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). Consequently, the continuously expanding knowledge is co-constructed between the social interactions and the learner (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997).

According to social constructivist theory, acts of learning and teaching take place in social situations where knowledge construction results from the social context (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). Social constructivism is best used to examine how students extend their own knowledge through interaction with others (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997) with the intent to discover how the specific actions of teachers, peers, or family members affect the learning of an individual (Moll, 1990). The tenets of social constructivism theory framed my understanding for the present study. Consequently, this study is grounded in the belief that the social interaction between the teacher and the students during small-group reading instruction influences students’ reading practices. This study specifically focuses on teacher scaffolding practices during instruction with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Therefore, the following section provides information on factors affecting students identified as having the most difficulty: how students receive identification of needed support, instructional grouping practices, the role of the teacher, instructional formats, and text selection.

### **Students Identified as Having the Most Difficulty with Reading**

A debate continues within the field of reading as to what accounts for young students' difficulty learning to read. Some scholars believe that reading difficulty derives from an individual's cognitive deficit (Vellutino et al., 1996). However, others believe that students are labeled as having difficulty due to the social context of learning, the type of curriculum that is enacted, or even the relationship between the teacher and the students (Triplett, 2007). Furthermore, educators may categorize students as "struggling readers" based on the students' socioeconomic status (Triplett, 2007). Often schools value middle class literacy practices, "knowledge, and pedagogical practices" (Dudley-Marling & Murphy, 1997; Triplett, 2007) which positions some students as more successful in reading, beginning in the primary grades. Moreover, the literacy expectations within classrooms represent those of dominant cultures and do not reflect those valued in home and community environments (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To identify and describe the focal students of the study, I purposefully chose to use the description "students identified as having the most difficulty with reading" rather than labels or terms such as "struggling reader" or "low reader, disabled reader, or at-risk reader" (Alvermann, 2001). These alternate labels convey a negative connotation, imply the students will remain below proficiency, and arise from a deficit perspective rather than recognize students' capabilities. Furthermore, students may often receive this label due to results on specific reading assessments or practices not designed to reveal the full potential of the student (Triplett, 2007). In contrast, using the selected phrase illustrates how teachers categorize students as exhibiting difficulty. This phrase further acknowledges that students face challenges in reading; however, with the right support, instruction, and learning experiences, students will likely experience

growth in literacy practices. As an experienced reading educator who focuses on developing students' literacy practices, I chose to use a descriptive phrase that more positively and accurately represents students' capabilities. In the following sections, I describe factors affecting students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

### **The Role of Identification**

I also selected the aforementioned phrase “students identified as having the most difficulty in reading” because in the current educational climate heavily focused on accountability, standardized testing, and ensuring students are developing as proficient readers at an early age, students' proficiency is often determined based on students' literacy assessment results. In the primary grades, teachers administer diagnostic measures such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills or DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2002) and analyze students' results to identify which students need additional support in reading. However, many educators and researchers have articulated concerns regarding the use of assessments that assess specific skills rather than portray students' full literacy capabilities to categorize students by levels of instructional need. For example, Shannon and Edmonson (2010) stated “To the extent that participants internalize these discourses, the power of DIBELS becomes invisible and natural, local administrators make policies, teachers labels students, parents worry about their children, and readers are made or unmade accordingly” (p. 4). Even more importantly, these assessments and determined benchmarks do not align with primary students' typical reading developmental behaviors or account for students' differing abilities within developmental stages. In addition to determining grade-level benchmark proficiency levels, school staff use these assessment results to determine students' needs and group students together for instruction on skills deemed not proficient and determine who needs the most support.

## **The Role of Grouping**

Students in primary grades often receive differentiated literacy instruction in a small-group format determined by grouping students with similar needs together. Providing different instruction to various groups of students traces back to 1924 (Barr, 1975); however, teachers have employed different methods to group students. In the 1970s, teachers used reading readiness indicators to determine ability levels and group students based on these levels (Barr, 1975; Durkin, 1978). This form of grouping together students of similar need is known as *homogeneous grouping*. Furthermore, the publication of the *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (BNR) report (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) continued the implementation of homogeneous grouping for reading instruction by achievement level.

Another grouping method used in previous decades involved determining groups based on students' performance on informal reading inventories (IRI; Walpole & McKenna, 2009). Students with similar IRI levels were grouped together as these levels were believed to correspond with basal text levels. However, research findings have led to concerns with the use of IRIs as a measurement tool to determine students' abilities (Walpole & McKenna, 2009). In the late 1990s, the focus shifted to grouping students with similar instructional reading levels determined as a result of leveled text reading assessments using leveled text trade books and teacher observation (Jeanne, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000; Walpole & McKenna, 2009). However, some researchers debate this form of determining small-groups and instruction especially for students who are in need of support in a wider range of literacy skills (Walpole & McKenna, 2009).

Although the grouping method was intended to support students' progress, many researchers critiqued homogeneous grouping in the 1980s and 1990s (Hong, Corter, Hong, &

Pelletier, 2012). One negative consequence of homogeneous grouping is the implementation of instruction void of higher-order thinking which further impacts students' reading progress (Allington, 1980; Barr, 1975; Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). Students identified as having the most difficulty with reading often receive instruction focused on lower-level skills, whereas students identified as having greater ability receive instruction focused on higher-level skills. This variation in the instruction based on ability level leads to increasing differences in students' progress and reading practices also known as *The Matthew Effect* (Stanovich, 1986). Students in groups considered lower ability tend to receive instruction focused on specific skills and rote memorization, and do not progress in their reading practices, thus increasing the achievement gap between students in these different groups.

In addition, students identified as having the most difficulty with reading often remain together in the same group over an extended instructional period (Barr, 1975; Ford & Opitz, 2011; Maloch et al., 2013; Walpole & McKenna, 2009). For example, Ford and Opitz (2008) discovered that 53% of 720 primary teachers characterized their reading groups as being stable and changing less than once a month. Concern exists that static grouping creates a reemergence of the detrimental effects of homogeneous grouping practices on students' reading (Ford & Opitz, 2011; Maloch et al., 2013). If groups consist of the same participants, students do not experience opportunities to interact and learn from students of differing ability levels during literacy instruction. Furthermore, teachers often implement this similar grouping format in other content areas beyond reading (Learned, 2016; Triplett, 2007), thus maintaining the status quo of separating students based on ability (Dudley-Marling & Murphy, 1997; Triplett, 2007). Researchers have called for the use of a different grouping format known as *flexible grouping* (Flood et al., 1992; Jeanne et al., 2000) to address these negative effects by creating groups based

on students' immediate needs yet providing consistent and frequent opportunities to change the group participants.

A third grouping approach for literacy instruction entails grouping students according to similar areas of need using assessments that measure constructs other than reading levels. By implementing the Cognitive Model of Reading Assessment (McKenna & Stahl, 2009), teachers analyze students' assessment data to determine whether students' needs pertain to phonological awareness, fluency, decoding, vocabulary, or comprehension (McKenna & Stahl, 2009; Walpole & McKenna, 2009). Students needing support in the same areas are grouped together for instruction. Using this approach, teachers have frequent opportunities to assess students' progress in determined areas of needs and opportunities to adjust student placement in groups, and can align instruction align with the determined area of need (Walpole & McKenna, 2009).

### **The Role of the Teacher**

In addition to grouping practices, research indicates teachers' beliefs about students identified as having the most difficulty with reading may also contribute to those students' continued challenges. Some teachers possess low expectations for students who are categorized as having difficulty (McIntyre, 2010; Wiseman, 2012). Instead, teachers should hold high expectations of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and consider them just as capable as higher-performing readers (Allington, 2013; McIntyre, 2010). In studies of effective literacy instruction for emerging readers in first grade, the most effective teachers set high expectations for all types of students (Anderson et al., 1985; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). In addition to possessing low expectations for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading, teachers often employ deficit perspectives in which they focus on students' inabilities (McIntyre, 2010). In contrast, it is important for teachers to

recognize students' *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) which denotes focusing on students' strengths within the learning environment.

Despite these recommendations to consider students' strengths and to hold high expectations, some teachers continue to have a different perception of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Triplett (2007) found teachers viewed students who were less proficient as disengaged or unmotivated regardless if the students demonstrated proficiency in other literacy instructional contexts such as disciplinary literacy activities and Book Clubs. However, motivation is a complicated construct and a lack of motivation may result from various factors (see Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015). Some teachers also categorize students identified as having the most difficulty with reading as exhibiting behavioral problems (Learned, 2016). In addition, students' lack of success or engagement in literacy activities can reinforce some teachers' beliefs that these students struggle (Learned, 2016; Triplett, 2007). Some teachers blame students' difficulties on the home environment rather than reflecting on the instructional decisions and supports enacted in their own classrooms (Triplett, 2007). Finally, some teachers do not feel knowledgeable about how to support the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading (Triplett, 2007).

### **The Role of Instruction**

Effective first-grade teachers possess the ability to scaffold literacy instruction based on their students' literacy needs within social contexts of learning (Allington, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). In a seminal study, Wharton-McDonald and colleagues (1998) investigated literacy instruction deemed effective in nine classrooms and found scaffolding an integral practice in high-achieving classrooms. Other researchers extended these findings by

investigating literacy instruction in first-grade classrooms across several states. Through observing nine first-grade teachers nominated by their administrators and confirmed as effective by the researchers, Pressley and colleagues (2001) found the most effective teachers frequently determined students' reading needs and their ZPD to provide an appropriate amount of scaffolding. Students of the five most effective teachers also demonstrated higher growth than students of less effective teachers as measured by standardized Terra Nova reading assessments for passage reading, language, word analysis, vocabulary, and reading composite (Pressley et al., 2001). Finally, in studies specifically examining effective instruction in high poverty schools, observations indicated that teachers in effective schools provided scaffolding in the form of coaching (Pressley, 2002; Taylor et al., 2000). In contrast, across grade levels, telling students information did not support students' reading growth (Taylor et al., 2002).

Debate in the literacy field continues about the most effective method of literacy instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading. Often literacy instruction is differentiated with a focus on skills-based instruction rather than higher-level skills (Allington, 2013; Duffy-Hester, 1999; McIntyre, 2010) and consists of repetition and memorization (Wiseman, 2012). In contrast, researchers argue that instruction should not differ qualitatively. Snow and colleagues (1998) stated "Children who are having difficulty learning to read do not, as a rule, require qualitatively different instruction from children who are 'getting it'" (p. 12). Instead, students identified as having the most difficulty with reading require instruction similar to that of capable readers, especially from teachers knowledgeable about the students' needs (Allington, 2013; Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Snow et al., 1998). Furthermore, studies show that students identified as having the most difficulty with reading possess strengths in literacy when they are engaged in meaningful literacy tasks such as Book Clubs (Triplett,

2007), disciplinary literacy activities (Learned, 2016), and interactive read-alouds (Wiseman, 2012).

Researchers who examined effective literacy instruction for emerging readers in first grade found the most successful teachers incorporated a balanced focus on skills and meaning (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998), integrated reading and writing instruction (Allington, 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998), and incorporated a significant amount of time for reading (Allington, 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Some researchers posited that students identified as having the most difficulty with reading benefit from a balanced literacy instructional approach (Pressley & Allington, 2014) which includes whole and small-group instruction in the forms of modeled reading, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading.

In contrast, other researchers recommend frequent, explicit, and intensive instruction, with more scaffolding focused on foundational reading skills and comprehension (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; McIntyre, 2010; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009; Snow et al., 1998). Because each student has individual needs, some researchers assert the importance of differentiating intervention instruction for students (Jones, Conradi, & Amendum, 2016). Teachers should determine students' specific needs, select interventions aligned with those needs, and provide the focused instruction in a brief format to avoid detracting from the regular instruction students receive (Jones et al., 2016). Furthermore, prior research indicates the effectiveness of small-group Tier 2 intervention instruction as recommended within the Multi-Tier Systems of Support, or MTSS (Greenwood et al., 2014) and the Response to Intervention or RTI (Gersten et al., 2008) frameworks in which multiple tiers of support exist to ensure students

achieve proficient levels in reading (Gersten et al., 2008; Greenwood et al., 2014). However, these instructional opportunities often occur outside the classroom.

In the regular primary classroom, a prevalent structure for differentiating instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading is the use of small-group reading instruction. This instructional format enables differentiation based on students' needs, especially for students who require additional support in reading (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Reutzel, 2011). Small-group instruction employed in various grade-level classrooms has been effective in developing phonemic awareness skills (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001), comprehension skills (Lutz, Guthrie, & Davis, 2006; Maloch, 2002; Palinscar & Brown, 1984), and interventions in reading (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Mathes et al., 2005). Additionally, prior research has identified small-group instruction as an effective instructional approach in first-grade classrooms (Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998).

It is important to note that small-group reading instruction entails only one component of literacy instruction. In typical instruction in the primary classroom, students participate in other text-based instructional activities such as interactive read-alouds (Sipe, 2002), shared reading of text, independent reading, and instructional lessons on decoding and comprehending text.

Furthermore, students receive reading instruction within formats beyond small-group instruction including whole-group instruction, pull-out interventions, and one-on-one conferences.

One example of small-group instruction is the guided reading model which consists of grouping students based on similar instructional reading levels and then: 1) selecting a text, 2) introducing a text, 3) students' reading of the text, 4) discussing the text, 5) implementing selected teaching points, 6) engaging in word work, and 7) extending the learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). The teacher plays an essential role because "the precise teaching moves and

language choices are related to the behaviors observed, moment by moment, and... guide the reader to engage in problem solving that expands his or her reading power” (Maloch et al., 2013, p. 279). The guided reading format is quite prevalent in primary classrooms (Ford & Opitz, 2011; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003) as evidenced by a national survey on guided reading on which 72% of 730 kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers throughout the country indicated their use of guided reading at least three days a week (Ford & Opitz, 2008). Despite its prevalence in the classroom, a lack of empirical research supporting the effectiveness of guided reading exists (Denton, Fletcher, Taylor, Barth, & Vaughn, 2014; Maloch et al., 2013; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).

More research is needed on how teachers implement various forms of small-group instruction in primary classrooms, the effectiveness of these methods such as guided reading (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Maloch et al., 2013; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003), and how teachers differentiate instruction for students’ needs (Ankrum & Bean, 2008). Because students identified as having the most difficulty often receive small-group instruction to scaffold and support their reading development, an understanding of the instruction implemented and how the instruction impacts the students’ reading practices is necessary. Therefore, this study describes classroom teachers’ current implementation practices of small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading and describes how teachers’ scaffolding and instructional method support students’ development of reading practices.

### **The Role of Text Selection**

Within small-group instruction, text selection and usage play an integral role. Research focused on examining types of text used during instruction for emerging readers has identified the following text formats: basals (Juel & Roper-Schneider, 1985), controlled vocabulary texts

(Mesmer, 2010; Morris, 2015), high-frequency word texts known as the “look-say model” (Hiebert, 2014, p.11; Mesmer, 2010), authentic literature (Hiebert, 2014; Mesmer, 2010; Morris, 2015), leveled books (Hoffman, Roser, Salas, Patterson, & Pennington, 2001; Mesmer, 2010; Morris, 2015), and decodable books (Hiebert, 2014; Mesmer, 2010). The following sections describe the text selection process and the role of leveled text.

**Text selection methods.** Researchers argue over the use of text leveling practices and text selection based on levels. Some researchers deem leveled texts most appropriate for small-group literacy instruction in primary grades because of the following features that support early reading development: repetition of high frequency words, decodable patterns, predictable words, and inclusion of a story plot (Morris, 2015). One study investigating the types of factors affecting teachers’ text-selection process determined that first-grade students in two classrooms more accurately decoded words in leveled text (Mesmer, 2010). However, the researchers stated further investigation of the use of leveled texts in primary classrooms is warranted. Some argue that the shift in text complexity in primary grades based on the Common Core State Standards negatively affects decoding ability, fluency, motivation, and engagement (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). Finally, other researchers question whether students should read more complex texts when a considerable number of students are still unable to proficiently read grade-level text (Allington et al., 2015; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013).

In contrast, some researchers have raised significant concerns about whether matching students’ instructional reading levels to leveled texts is most appropriate for literacy instruction, especially with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. One negative impact of this process is that some teachers’ text selection process is solely dependent on text and accuracy level (Ford & Opitz, 2011; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Furthermore, Hoffman

(2017) explained that a multitude of consequences occur as a result of solely using leveled text for instruction. Especially relevant is the issue that restricting students' access to a variety of text forms leads to a greater division in reading capabilities between students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and students with less difficulty (Hoffman, 2017). In addition, students should receive opportunities to select their own texts as choice increases engagement and provides opportunities for students to read text related to their own interests (Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2007). In contrast to selecting leveled text, some researchers posit that with teacher support, students identified as having the most difficulty in reading should engage more often with increasingly complex text (Cowen, 2003; Hoffman, 2017; Pressley et al., 2001; Snow et al., 1998). Furthermore, emerging readers need to sufficiently read and comprehend increasingly complex text to align with the standards and recommendations of the CCSS (Shanahan, 2013).

**Selecting leveled text.** Discussion in the field has also raised questions about the most appropriate text accuracy level. Teachers often use the accuracy rate for word recognition, in addition to fluency and comprehension ability, to determine students' instructional reading levels and select appropriate leveled texts for small-group reading instruction. Several authors provide evidence of teachers' implementation of instructional leveled texts within the reading instructional framework (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Ford & Opitz, 2011; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Reutzel, 2011).

The concept of the *instructional* level originated from the work of Betts (1946) who differentiated between the following three levels of reading: *basal*, *independent*, and *frustrational*. The basal level indicated an accuracy rate of 99% and above; the instructional level indicated an accuracy rate of at least 95%; and the frustrational level indicated an accuracy rate

of less than 90%. Betts (1946) asserted that small-group reading instruction should incorporate the use of instructional level text deemed as the “teaching level” (p. 448). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) drew upon Betts’ levels in their creation of guided reading small-group instruction and distinguished between the following three reading levels: the *independent level* consisting of at least 95% accuracy; the *instructional level* consisting of 90-94% accuracy; and the *frustrational level* consisting of less than 90% accuracy. Similar to Betts, these authors recommended that text for small-group guided reading instruction should reflect students’ instructional levels.

Other researchers extended the work on appropriate accuracy rates for beginning readers by providing different recommendations. Some researchers have posited that the accuracy rate of 95% is an appropriate instructional level (Allington, McCuiston, & Billen; 2015) and first-grade benchmark level (Hoffman et al., 2001). Another belief reflected in available research is that students identified as having the most difficulty with reading often spend a greater amount of time reading text that is too difficult for them, thus adversely affecting their reading progress (Allington, 2013). Therefore, students should have the opportunity to read a wide variety of texts with 98% accuracy (Allington, 2013).

Overall, little empirical evidence exists to indicate which accuracy level and percentage is most effective for students who experience difficulty reading. Recent research specifically addressed this void and provided new findings related to the accuracy level debate. The findings showed that students who experienced difficulty in beginning reading and read text at 90% accuracy or below experienced less progress in reading as measured on the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2002; Rodgers, D’Agostino, Kelly, & Mikita, n.d.)

Within this section, I described how grouping practices, teacher beliefs, instructional methods, and text selection related to literacy instruction for students identified as having the

most difficulty in reading. Because research has identified scaffolding as an important component of supporting students' learning, especially those who need more support, I now transition to providing an understanding of the history and current state of scaffolding. Then, I provide relevant findings about the use of scaffolding within literacy instruction and more specifically for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading.

### **The Role of Scaffolding**

Since the origination of the concept, scaffolding has been associated with the social learning theories of Vygotsky (Beed et al., 1991; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Stone, 1998; van de Pol et al., 2010). Researchers have reported that effective teachers implement scaffolding in literacy instruction. Given that this study specifically examines how scaffolding transpires within small-group reading instruction, the following section explores the historical context of scaffolding and relevant research regarding the current state of scaffolding within literacy instruction in elementary classrooms.

### **The Historical Context of Scaffolding**

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) first defined the term scaffolding as “the process that enables a child or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). In their seminal study, Wood and colleagues examined the ability of 30 children ages three, four, and five to build a pyramid out of blocks while receiving support from an adult tutor. Adult tutors used the following six types of support: recruitment (ensuring completion of the task), reduction in degrees of freedom (reducing the number of steps needed to solve the problem), direction maintenance (situating the child to accomplish the goal), marking critical features in the task (determining what prevents problem solving), control of frustration (making sure unsuccessful attempts did not detract from the goal),

and demonstration of the task (Wood et al., 1976). Although these support forms describe specific adult tutor-child interactions, the formation of different scaffolding techniques in the classroom are rooted in these six supports (Cazden, 1979).

**Scaffolding and ZPD.** Cazden (1979) first associated scaffolding and Vygotsky's ZPD when applying scaffolding to the classroom context of teacher-student question and answer interactions (Puntambekar & Hubscher, 2005; Stone, 1998; van de Pol et al., 2010). Scaffolding refers to providing students with social learning experiences within their ZPD wherein learning consequently transpires from the scaffolded support provided by more knowledgeable others (Puntambekar & Hubscher, 2005; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). A common metaphor for scaffolding is the comparison to scaffold structures used during construction of buildings (Stone, 1998; van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). One noted difference between the two types of scaffolds is that scaffolding within the classroom environment is intended to gradually decrease while the continued presence of construction scaffolding is imperative throughout the building process.

Other researchers expanded upon Vygotsky's concept of ZPD (Stone, 1998) and offered alternative terms to scaffolding. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) explained ZPD as the difference between the individual's supported ability and the individual's independent ability that results in the individual's target learning area. However, they established the term *assisted performance* to denote the child's capability of achievement with the support of self, others, and their shared environment. The authors explained the role of teaching as "assisting performance through the ZPD. Teaching can be said to occur when assistance is offered at points in the ZPD at which performance requires assistance" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 31). Assisted performance emphasizes the existence of various forms of available support including modeling, contingency

management, providing feedback, instructing, questioning, and cognitive structuring (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; van de Pol et al., 2010) and is based upon the child's performance (Stone, 1998). In contrast, Rogoff (1990) offered an alternative to scaffolding, labeled *guided participation*, to explain the combination of the learner's knowledge with various events resulting in the learner's own responsibility for learning. For this responsibility and learning to occur, *intersubjectivity* (Rogoff, 1990) was essential; in this condition, the learner and the individual providing support shared the same purpose for learning. These authors provide the foundation for the concept of scaffolding and in the next section, I will provide a more current understanding of scaffolding.

### **The Current State of Scaffolding**

Currently no universally accepted definition of scaffolding exists (van de Pol et al., 2010), even though other researchers expanded upon Wood et al.'s (1976) original definition. Scaffolding has been defined as providing support to allow a child to think independently (Hogan & Pressley, 1997). Roehler and Cantlon (1997) asserted "assistance in the zone of proximal development is called *scaffolding* and is a major component of teaching activity" (p. 9). They further described scaffolding as teacher-student interaction occurring before acquiring knowledge and strategies relevant to the student's learning, a process that entails providing support within the student's potential level. Accordingly, classroom teachers seek to determine students' ZPDs to design appropriate instruction, thus aiding students' transference of knowledge to independent ability (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Similarly, Tyner (2004) explained the importance of the teacher's role in scaffolding by stating "It is our responsibility as teachers to determine the developmental needs of each student in the beginning reading process and offer instruction necessary to advance his or her literacy learning" (p. 3). Engaging in scaffolding,

wherein teachers determine students' needs and implement appropriate levels and types of support, is instrumental to students' learning.

Van de Pol et al. (2010) asserted scaffolding is comprised of three essential factors: contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility. *Contingency*, the first factor, is defined as “responsiveness, tailored, adjusted, differentiated, titrated, or calibrated support” (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 274). In other words, the teacher determines the level of support necessary to assist students, implements support, and adjusts subsequent scaffolding based on students' responses. In fact, Rodgers et al. (2016) define scaffolding as *contingent teaching* and contingency, according to Wood (2003), consists of three components identified as *temporal*, *instructional*, and *domain* (Rodgers et al., 2016). Temporal contingency involves determining when to provide support; instructional contingency consists of identifying the amount and level of support; and domain contingency refers to deciding the specific type of support to provide (Rodgers et al., 2016). The second factor, *fading*, is described as the teachers' incremental decrease of scaffolding (van de Pol et al., 2010). *Transfer of responsibility*, the final factor, explains the shift of task completion to the learner. Most scaffolding studies have focused on instructional contingency whereas few studies have measured domain contingency and, to date, no studies have examined temporal contingency of scaffolding (Rodgers et al., 2016).

In addition to the absence of an accepted definition of scaffolding, no established framework to analyze scaffolding exists. Consequently, van de Pol and colleagues (2010) created their own instructional framework. Referring to the work of Wood et al. (1976) and Tharp and Gallimore (1988), the framework integrated an examination of scaffolding intentions in the following areas: metacognition (keeping the learner on task), cognition (executing the task or making the task more simplistic), and affect (enlisting the learner in the task and helping the

learner manage frustration). Furthermore, the framework encompassed the means, or methods, of scaffolding that consisted of giving feedback, providing cues, instructing, explaining, modeling, and asking questions (van de Pol et al., 2010).

My research is grounded in the assumption that scaffolding entails determining the student's literacy needs, providing support to promote further progress aligned with these needs, and determining how to implement further support based on the student's response (Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol et al., 2010). A central focus of this study is to describe how teachers provide specific forms of scaffolding to first-grade students and identify their focus of instruction, which I describe in more depth in Chapter 4.

### **Scaffolding in Literacy**

In recent research, much attention surrounds the concept of scaffolding. Although scaffolding is an important instructional tool teachers use to build students' reading practices, few studies exist that specifically investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding. In a systematic review of scaffolding literature within the past two decades, van de Pol and colleagues (2010) stated "scaffolding is an important and frequently studied concept, but much remains unclear with regard to effectiveness and use of scaffolding in education" (p. 287). In various content areas overall, these researchers found 26 descriptive studies of scaffolding and eight quantitative studies on the effectiveness of scaffolding. Only 16 of the 34 studies examined scaffolding in literacy and of those 16, none measured the effectiveness of scaffolding. Scholars believe measuring the effectiveness of scaffolding is difficult (Van de Pol et al., 2016).

### **The Relationship Between Student Characteristics and Scaffolding Practices**

Early research on scaffolding focused on whether teachers' scaffolding patterns differed based on individual characteristics of students. Overall, research reflected how during classroom

reading instruction, students identified as having the most difficulty received different scaffolding forms that targeted lower-level skills rather than higher-level skills and neglected to differentiate based on students' needs (Allington, 1980; Chinn, Waggoner, Anderson, Schommer, and Wilkinson, 1993; Mertzman, 2008).

Allington (1980) found that 20 first and second-grade teachers exhibited a higher frequency of interruption patterns during reading instruction for students characterized as low-ability readers (74%) than high-ability readers (31%). Furthermore, teachers interrupted low-ability readers more often to incorporate graphemic cues (based on the letter) in contrast to the semantic cues (based on meaning) and syntactic cues (based on grammatical soundness) that high-ability readers received. Similarly, Mertzman (2008) established significant differences in 1,498 interruption patterns of four multi-age primary teachers based on students' ethnicities and levels of socioeconomic status (SES). Teachers' interruptions focused on word recognition eight times with minority students as compared to three times with non-minority students. In addition, teachers used word recognition interruptions two times more with students identified as low SES than those of higher SES. In contrast, teachers used interruptions based on meaning two times more often with non-minority students than with minority students. In other words, teachers focused on word-related skills with minority and low SES students whereas they focused on meaning with non-minority and higher SES students.

Students also experienced differences in the incorporation of meaning with the type of feedback they received. In 72 small-group reading lessons for 116 second and third-grade students, researchers found that six teachers engaged in terminal feedback 54.6% of the time by telling students the word (Chinn et al., 1993). In contrast, these teachers gave sustaining feedback only 45.4% of the time in the form of prompting students to reread, identifying the

error without offering help, offering meaning-based support, or giving word structure support. The specific feedback format depended upon students' level of understanding and the nature of the text.

### **Establishing Scaffolding Forms**

Additional research examined teachers' scaffolding during literacy instruction in general to provide an understanding of the various types of scaffolding implemented. See Table 2.1 for a summary of the scaffolding studies consisting of the focus, the instructional context, specific scaffolding forms, and definitions of the forms. Studies reviewed here focus on the investigation of scaffolding forms within two separate instructional formats, one-on-one RR instruction (Clay, 1993) and small-group reading instruction in the classroom. Findings from these studies are shared in the following sections.

Table 2.1

*Scaffolding Forms Determined in Prior Research.*

Authors	Focus	Context	Teacher Moves/Scaffolding Codes	Definitions
Rodgers et al. (2016)	Examine relationship between temporal, instructional, and domain contingency and student reading outcomes	Reading Recovery instruction	Prompting Prompting with information Directing Demonstrating Telling	Solve with no information Gives general information Gives specific information Modeling Teacher provides information
Rodgers (2004)	Describe how students' use of sources of information change and how teachers respond based on level and type of help	Reading Recovery instruction	Telling Demonstrating Directing Questioning	Teacher provides information Models problem-solving Directs student Asks a question
Ankrum, Genest, & Belcastro (2014)	Describe kindergarten teacher's verbal scaffolds in differentiated reading instruction	Small-group reading instruction	Direct Explanation Explicit Modeling Invitation to Participate Clarification Verification Telling	Teacher statements Verbal demonstration Ask for participation Guided discussion Confirmation Provides the answer

Table 2.1 (continued)

Authors	Focus	Context	Teacher Moves/Scaffolding Codes	Definitions
Silliman, Bahr, Beasman, & Wilkinson (2000)	Describe the nature of scaffolding sequences by classroom and special education teacher	Small-group reading instruction in an inclusive classroom	Modeling Explanations Verbal Participation Verification/ Clarification	Direct teaching Explicit statements Invite participation Responds to student
Wong et al. (1994)	Determine key instructional principles that guide systematic and comprehensive instructional reform in the regular classroom for students at-risk	Reading Recovery instruction	Telling  Modeling  Prompting  Coaching Discussing	Provides word or explanation Explicit demonstration Focus on specific cues Sharing procedures Discussion of text and meaning
Beed et al. (1991)	Provide an understanding of strategic and contingent scaffolding	Reading clinic	Teacher modeling Inviting student performance Cueing specific elements Cueing specific strategies Providing general cues	Models the process Asks for participation Cues strategy element Cues overall strategy General cue for action

Table 2.1 (continued)

Authors	Focus	Context	Teacher Moves/Scaffolding Codes	Definitions
Clark (2000)	Provide an understanding of four teachers' scaffolding methods	Small-group instruction	Prompt Hint Directive Modeling	Provides general cue Provides focused cue Takes action Make thoughts or procedures visible
Tharp & Gallimore (1988)	Describe six means of assistance in teaching	Teaching	Modeling Contingency Management Providing Feedback Instructing Questioning Cognitive Structuring	Imitates behavior Provides rewards and consequences Shares feedback Tells what to do Asks questions Gives a "structure for thinking and acting"
Roehler & Cantlon (1997)	Describe scaffolding types in 2 classrooms	Classroom literacy instruction	Offering explanations Inviting student participation Verifying and clarifying understandings Modeling Inviting students to contribute	Direct statements Opportunities to join Checks understanding Shows Give clues for solving

**Scaffolding in Reading Recovery.** Many scaffolding studies focus on examining scaffolding types implemented within the context of Clay's (1993) Reading Recovery (RR) instructional format, a one-on-one instructional intervention delivered in a setting separate from the mainstream classroom and focused on developing students' abilities to use strategies to read text (Clay, 1993). The one-on-one nature of the RR learning environment allows investigation of the moves and the language of both the teacher and the student during the co-construction of student reading practices. Within this instructional model, Clay (1993) asserted that teachers should determine students' needs and create instruction to scaffold within students' ZPD. This model also calls for teachers to use assessment results and observation of students' reading practices to uncover students' needs and, in turn, determine effective scaffolding forms to implement during instruction.

A number of research studies identify and describe specific scaffolding categories implemented during RR literacy instruction with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading (see Table 2.1). During 25 lessons for 10 students identified as needing support, Wong et al. (1994) found that five first and second-grade RR teachers scaffolded using the five forms of telling, modeling, prompting, coaching, and discussing. Furthermore, teachers' use of the scaffolding forms depended on the level of familiarity with the instructional text. Specifically, teachers coached when using already known texts but told, modeled, prompted, or discussed with novel texts. In a case study examining 201 RR lessons conducted by two first-grade teachers with four students, Rodgers (2004) adapted Wood and Middleton's (1975) and Rodgers' (2000) coding schemes to determine teachers' frequency use of the following scaffolds: telling, demonstrating, directing, or questioning. The teachers most consistently used directing or questioning scaffolds rather than telling or demonstrating. Further analysis examined the

scaffolding content, specifically whether teachers told the word or prompted for one of the following five actions: using one-to-one correspondence, using meaning, using the first letter, finding known words parts, or rereading. Findings indicated that most teacher scaffolding pertained to the actions matched to students' needs rather than words (Rodgers, 2004). This study also investigated the four students' growth as measured by their scores on Clay's (2002) Observation Survey for literacy and their reading practices. Although a causal inference could not be drawn, each of these students showed growth in their literacy scores. Regarding their reading practices, students increased their one-to-one correspondence ability and the use of the initial letter in determining unknown words (Rodgers, 2004).

In more recent research, Rodgers and colleagues (2016) expanded Rodgers' (2004) four scaffolding forms to include the following six forms: prompting, prompting with information, directing, demonstrating, and telling. Through analysis of 201 RR lessons, findings revealed teachers used demonstrating and telling as scaffolding types during initial lessons and then transitioned to directing during subsequent lessons. These findings align with the gradual release model of scaffolding in which teachers provide more support during initial interactions and decrease support as students demonstrate more independent abilities (Maloch, 2002; van de Pol et al., 2010).

**Scaffolding in classroom small-group instruction.** Although various examinations of scaffolding within the RR instructional context exist, scant studies investigate scaffolding within small-group instruction in the regular classroom. However, results from several studies provide insights as to scaffolding types and responsiveness to student needs within the small-group instructional setting. Clark (2000) examined six primary teachers' methods of scaffolding for word recognition during small-group literacy instruction and found teachers used prompting,

directing, hinting, and modeling as scaffolding forms with the order of frequency as follows: hinting, directing, modeling and prompting.

Ankrum and colleagues (2014) analyzed the small-group literacy lessons of a kindergarten teacher and, using forms adapted from Roehler and Cantlon (1997), determined the following six scaffolding types: direct explanation, explicit modeling, invitations for students to participate, clarification, verification, and telling. In addition to providing evidence of these scaffolding forms, they determined the teacher effectively matched scaffolding to the students' literacy needs. However, in another study of scaffolding in small-group reading instruction, researchers found teachers did not scaffold according to students' needs. Silliman and colleagues (2000) examined the co-teaching of a special education teacher and a classroom teacher and found the following categories of scaffolding: modeling, explaining, gaining verbal participation, and verifying or clarifying understanding. Despite the fact that four students were identified as having language and literacy difficulties, no differences in teacher scaffolding for the students existed. Furthermore, the researchers categorized 229 of the 231 scaffolding sequences as directive instruction rather than supportive instruction. Therefore, teachers imparted information rather than engaging students in the process of determining unknown words.

### **Scaffolding Cueing Systems**

One form of scaffolding implemented during small-group literacy instruction focuses on how students respond to teacher cueing as teachers assist them with unknown words. Three different types of cues described as part of the reading process include *graphophonemic*, *semantic*, and *syntactic*. Graphophonemic refers to using the visual components of the word; semantic involves using meaning and context; and syntactic refers to using sentence and

grammatical structure to determine unfamiliar words (Adams, 1998; Clay, 2002; Goodman, 1977).

Goodman introduced a new instructional reading practice known as *miscue analysis* (1977) and called attention to understanding which of the three cueing systems students used and did not use to determine unfamiliar words. He described the analysis of students' miscues as "a window on the reading process" (1977, p. 5). The miscue analysis gained more popularity as part of the focus of RR instruction in analyzing running records and teaching strategies to students based on these cues (Clay, 1999; 2002). From this work, the concept of the three-cueing system emerged in which all three cueing forms—graphophonemic, semantic, and syntactic— should be considered equally to determine an unknown word (Adams, 1998; Shanahan, 2017).

Furthermore, to establish a balanced cueing system, teachers should observe students' cue usage and support learning of unused cues to determine words (Clay, 1999; 2002; Goodman, 1977).

The need to support readers in implementing a balanced cueing approach continued to receive support within published works intended for teachers (Burkins & Croft, 2010; Routman, 1994).

However, later research determined ensuring students develop a balanced cueing system is not an appropriate instructional method. Although the three-cueing system has received popularity within teacher practice, this instructional form of scaffolding is not based on research findings (Adams, 1998). Other researchers have explained that providing support in the form of semantic cues is ineffective because eventually students experience lack of success determining unknown words without the support of graphophonemic cues (Seidenberg, 2017; Shanahan, 2017; Stanovich, 1990). Furthermore, according to Seidenberg (2017), promoting the balanced use of cueing forms as opposed to focusing on graphophonemic cues leads to what less efficient readers do. Therefore, he argues against the balanced cueing approach and believes instruction

should focus on decoding words as good readers automatically recognize and, when needed, break words apart (Seidenberg, 2017).

The intersection of scaffolding and the three cueing systems has not received much attention in literacy research. However, Cole (2006) investigated teacher scaffolding in reading and determined the following four forms of cueing: primary, secondary, micro, and macro. *Primary* cues consist of graphophonemic, semantic, and syntactic cues that affect readers' ability to decode text. However, *secondary* cues are those outside of the text and include consistent prompting of the same cues, discussion surrounding previous lessons, phonics rules, and various sounds of specific letters. These cues are believed to adversely affect beginning readers' abilities to decode text or gain meaning (Cole, 2006). *Micro* cues focus on small units of text including sounds, letters, and words; whereas *macro* cues indicate larger units of text such as phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or the entire text. Cole found all seven teachers used each of the primary cue sources to increase students' decoding ability. As students became more proficient, the teachers shifted to integrating macro cues more frequently to focus on reading connected text. This finding represents the use of the balanced approach of cueing systems; however, the investigation did not focus specifically on comparing the frequencies of the three cues.

Another less often explored component of teacher scaffolding of cueing systems is the extent of specificity. The investigation of specificity entails categorizing the scaffolds into levels of general or specific prompts. Clark (2000) categorized six teachers' scaffolds by level of general or specific cues and found most teachers providing more specific scaffolds. In a reading clinic at an elementary school, Beed and colleagues (1991) introduced a specific strategy called *SWAT* to decode words that consisted of the following sequenced strategies: reading the sentence, looking at pictures, asking what word starts with a given letter and makes sense,

blending word parts together, and reading on and asking for help. The researchers found instances of contingent teacher scaffolding in the following forms sequenced from most to least scaffolded support: modeling, seeking student participation, prompting for specific strategy elements, prompting for the SWAT strategy in general, and providing more general prompts beyond the specific strategy. Furthermore, they provided example scripts of teacher scaffolding to illustrate different levels of specificity in the scaffolding methods.

### **Effectiveness of Scaffolding**

In contrast to the analysis of scaffolding forms and patterns, few studies explore the relationship between teacher scaffolding and student outcomes. One reason for this limited research is the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of scaffolding (van de Pol et al., 2010). However, one study focused on how teachers' scaffolding forms affected students' reading practices as related to cueing systems. Within 15 RR lessons, Lee and Schmitt (2014) found positive relationships between 8 of 11 teachers' scaffolds and students' use of independent reading strategies. Strong, significant correlations existed with searching ( $r=.88; p<.004$ ), self-monitoring ( $r=.85; p<.007$ ), cross-checking ( $r=.87; p<.005$ ), and visual as an information source ( $r=.87; p<.005$ ). Moderately strong and significant correlations occurred for self-correcting ( $r=.75; p<.03$ ), and moderately strong, non-significant correlations resulted for recognizing word parts ( $r=.65; p<.08$ ), using structure ( $r=.59; p<.12$ ), and meaning as an information source ( $r=.55; p<.15$ ). This study demonstrated how teachers' scaffolding led to students' increased use of strategies during independent reading, as well as increased reading ability. Evidence from pre- and post-test results on a metacognitive interview further suggested students' growth in becoming more aware of themselves as readers, of what the reading task entailed, and of how to implement strategies while reading.

In addition to examining the effects of specific scaffolding forms on students' reading practices, another study investigated the effectiveness of different forms of contingency scaffolding within RR instruction. With her colleagues, Rodgers (2016) conducted an analysis of the following three types of scaffolding contingencies identified by Wood (2003) and further explained by van de Pol et al. (2010): domain, instructional, and temporal. From a sample of 38 teachers in RR training, six of the teachers were selected as highly effective literacy teachers based on the National Teacher Effectiveness Index and their students' performance on the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement. These six teachers exhibited more domain contingency than less effective RR teachers and improved their implementation of this form of scaffolding over instructional time. Furthermore, these six teachers were eight times more likely to support students in using forgotten cue sources during reading than less effective teachers. According to Rodgers and colleagues (2016), domain contingency is potentially the most essential component in increasing students' reading proficiency. These findings highlight the importance of teacher scaffolding within the context of reading instruction.

Prior studies have focused on scaffolding practices in one-on-one intervention settings whereas little research exists on scaffolding in classroom small-group literacy instruction. Therefore, this study adds to the literature on types of scaffolding provided by first-grade teachers in small-group instruction for students identified as having difficulty with reading. Moreover, prior research has not often addressed the role of the student within scaffolded reading instruction. Rodgers (2004) argued studies examining scaffolding should incorporate both the role of the teacher and the students and "because the measure of scaffolding cannot be considered without examining whether, and how, what the teacher is doing is related to changes in what the student is able to do" (p. 506). Therefore, this study aimed to add to the findings on

how primary-grade teachers' scaffolding in small-group literacy instruction supports students' reading practices.

### **Chapter Summary**

Aligned with the concepts of the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and the co-construction of knowledge within social situations (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978), social constructivism lays the groundwork for this examination of teacher scaffolding in small-group instruction. Studies of effective literacy instruction identified teacher scaffolding as an important component in reading instruction. However, with few studies focused on scaffolding in small-group reading instruction, more research is necessary to describe the existing scaffolds within teacher-student interactions in daily small-group reading instruction, especially for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and determine how these forms support the development of students' reading practices.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

*“The aim is to thoroughly understand” (Stake, 1995, p. 9).*

#### **Introduction to the Chapter**

This study implemented qualitative multi-case study methodology to examine how classroom teachers instruct students identified as having the most difficulty with reading in small-group reading instruction. Case study methodology allows for the desired intention of interpreting the happenings in a specific context (Creswell, 2013). Within this methodology, I employed First and Second Cycle coding methods (Miles et al., 2014) to answer the following guiding research questions:

1. How do first-grade teachers scaffold within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading?
2. How does teacher scaffolding support students’ reading during small-group instruction?

See Table 3.1 for the alignment of research objectives, research questions, and forms of data collection forms.

Table 3.1

*Objectives, Research Questions, and Data Forms.*

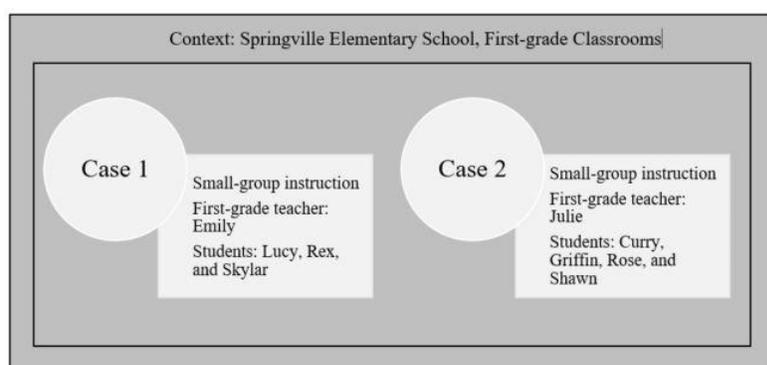
Objective	Research Questions	Data Forms
Provide an understanding of the nature of teacher scaffolding during small-group reading instruction	(1) How do first-grade teachers scaffold within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having difficulty with reading?	Observation transcriptions, Field notes, Lesson plans, Instructional logs, and Interviews
Provide an understanding of how two teachers' scaffolding affected students' reading	(2) How does teacher scaffolding support students' reading during small-group instruction?	Observation transcripts, Field notes, Instructional logs, and Students' reading assessment data

### Case Study

I chose to implement the case study method based on the desired outcome of the study, which was to more deeply understand small-group reading instruction, teachers' scaffolding and instructional decision making, and how students identified as having the most difficulty with reading in reading responded to scaffolding. My goal in this study was to understand more about the concept of scaffolding in small group reading instruction and student learning through observation and analysis (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Conducting qualitative research using the case study format allows the researcher to examine a case determined by the boundaries of place and time and to provide a detailed description of information from several different data sources (Creswell, 2013). The case can consist of a person, a group of people, a place, or an event that allows the analysis of something complex (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Stake (1995) defined the

case as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (p. 2) and asserted that case studies are essential in creating an understanding of how events take place in the daily classroom.

Furthermore, this study is a multi-case study design. Each case is defined as an individual first-grade teacher along with a specific group of students that have been identified as having the most difficulty in reading; therefore, these students participated in the reading group needing the most support. The multi-case study is bounded by the number of teachers (two), the grade level (first), the type of instruction observed (small-group reading), and the length of the study (2 months). (See Figure 3.1 for case study design.) This study is an instrumental case study as the case was not predetermined and the results provide knowledge extending beyond the teacher and student participants; instead, the case creates an understanding of the larger phenomenon (Stake, 1995) of small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading, teacher scaffolding, and the effect of the scaffolding on students’ reading practices. I describe and report thematic findings from each of the two individual cases in addition to overall thematic findings from a cross case analysis (Creswell, 2013).



*Figure 3.1.* Case study design.

### **Description of the Research Site**

The research site was Springville Elementary School (pseudonym). This school is a public school serving pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. Springville Elementary is located in a small rural town on the outskirts of a larger city and is a member of a large school district in the Southeastern United States.

### **Site Selection and Access**

I used purposeful sampling to select the school site. First, the student demographics of Springville met my desired intentions of selecting a research site with a diverse student population. Second, the principal and I have a professional relationship as she was the assistant principal at a former elementary school when I worked as a K-2 literacy specialist and coach. In selecting specific classrooms and teachers, I focused on early elementary grades and teacher participants who had diverse professional experiences. I selected first grade as the intended grade level due to the focus on reading instruction in this grade level, especially using the small-group format. After selecting this site and grade level in the fall semester prior to collecting data, I contacted the principal, met to share an overview of my study, and asked permission to informally observe various teachers to determine whether current instructional practices in first-grade classrooms aligned with my research focus. The principal confirmed that first-grade teachers would align best with my intentions. She viewed the teachers' involvement in this study as a positive learning experience and gave permission for me to informally observe classrooms of willing first-grade teachers. I observed three separate first-grade classrooms. Finally, I met with the three teachers as a whole to share more details about the study and answer questions.

After receiving approval from both the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University on February 8, 2017 and the local school district on February 10, 2017, I met

with the principal and received official consent to conduct my study at Springville Elementary School. All three first-grade teachers I observed shared interest in participating in the study. To fulfill my intention of focusing on two teachers and their students, the principal selected the two participants based on the number of years of experience and whose instruction she felt would best answer the intended research questions. I met with the teachers, Emily and Julie (pseudonyms), to explain the consent forms and received permission from both. In addition, I asked each teacher to identify the students as having the most difficulty with reading. Prior to the beginning of the study, the teachers formed groups based on students' mCLASS Text Reading Comprehension (TRC; Amplify, 2015) assessment data given at midyear as required by the local school district. The TRC is an assessment in which students read and orally retell leveled texts and, at specific text levels, provide written responses to comprehension questions. Students' assessment results determine whether they are reading on grade level in addition to their reading needs. Each teacher identified the students in the reading group considered most in need of support, which included three students in Emily's classroom and five in Julie's classroom. I gave the teachers the parental consent forms to send home. I returned to the school throughout the week of February 13, 2017 to informally observe and collect the signed parental consent forms. The parents of all three students in Emily's classroom granted permission. In Julie's classroom, the parents of four out of identified five students gave permission. After receiving parental consent, I met with the students as a group in each classroom to discuss the study and receive their assent to participate.

### **The School**

There are 836 students at Springville Elementary School. Students (based on parent/guardian report for school records) are identified as belonging to the following

racial/ethnic groups: 66.17% White, 18.86% African American, 18.45% Hispanic, 4.2% Multi-Racial, 1.39% Asian, and 0.42% American Indian/Native American. Overall, 38% of students receive free and reduced lunch, 5.98% of students receive special education services, and 7.89% of students are considered to have limited English proficiency. Last year, Springville received the honor of *School of Distinction with High Growth*. This honor is a state-level designation based on standardized assessment performance and denotes 80-89% percent of students scored at or above Level III proficiency—out of the range Level I-Level V—and the school achieved or exceeded the growth target. The school received an overall combined proficiency rate in reading, math, and science of 61.7% and more specifically, received a 65.6% proficiency rate in reading. The mission of the school is “Springville Elementary School will promote collaboration so that every student loves learning, lives learning and shares learning to be productive, successful citizens” (Springville school website).

A document called the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is required for each school within the state. The SIP is used to analyze the needs of the school, create an overarching goal, and determine action steps to achieve the goal. At Springville, the SIP focuses on increasing reading achievement in all grade-levels. The school goal states that

By June 2018, Springville Elementary School will increase overall Grade Level Proficiency in grades 3-5 by 10% in Math, Reading, and Science and all subgroups will meet their AMO Targets measured by the End of Grade Tests. By June 2018, 80% of K-3 students will be at benchmark as measured by the end of year mCLASS TRC level. (Springville school website)

AMO Targets is a term denoting *Annual Measurable Objectives* and “is defined as a series of performance targets that states, school districts, and specific subgroups within their schools must achieve each year to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind” (North Carolina Department of Instruction, p. 1, 2012). A relevant action step to meet the school goal states

“Teachers will utilize all minutes of a lesson to activate knowledge, facilitate learning, and provide scaffolded levels of support to all learners” (Springville school website). Consequently, small-group reading instruction implemented in first-grade classrooms is a valuable instructional component to meet both this specific action step and the overall school literacy goal.

### **The Instruction**

At Springville, in all first-grade classrooms the literacy block occurred in the morning. In both classrooms, the students received word work instruction using the Letterland program (Letterland International, 2014) per district requirements, engaged in Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006) literacy instruction per district recommendations, and engaged in whole-group reading instruction using the ReadyGen Literacy Program (Pearson Education Company, 2017). Last year the entire grade level voluntarily piloted this literacy program. Letterland is an approach based on phonics to help primary aged students learn to read, write, and spell (Letterland International, 2014). During Daily Five, the students rotated in small groups through the following five different literacy activities: Word Work, Listen to Reading, Work on Writing, Read to Self, and Read to Someone (Boushey & Moser, 2006). The stations generally lasted for 15-20 minutes and a song or chime indicated students should transition to the next activity. On a typical day of instruction, the students completed three different Daily Five activities and the teachers selected the sequence of three activities for the students.

While students worked independently at their Daily Five activities, the teacher pulled a small group of students to a kidney-shaped table in the back of the classroom to provide what both teachers identified as guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) for 15-30 minutes. The teachers determined student participation in small groups based on students’ reading needs and levels and in a homogeneous manner. Prior to the study, and as a result of

analyzing their mid-year mCLASS and TRC assessment data, the teachers made changes to participants in reading groups. During the study, group participants did not change during the study. After completing Daily Five activities and Guided Reading, students received whole-group literacy instruction using the ReadyGen Literacy Program in which authentic literature is used to teach reading and writing skills (Pearson Education Company, website). Teachers used a variety of narrative and informational mentor focus texts to guide students in practicing different reading and writing related skills.

The first-grade teachers at Springville Elementary received support in literacy from a K-2 literacy coach who collaborated with the teachers during their instructional planning to implement the Daily Five framework and research-based literacy practices. The literacy coach did not conduct small-group reading instruction. Instead, she rotated through first-grade classrooms to work with small groups of students considered on grade level in reading to practice creating effective written comprehension responses. Of note, on two occasions during the study, the literacy coach worked with the focus students in Julie's classroom to develop written comprehension responses. Otherwise, she only worked with students not participating in the study.

### **The Classrooms**

Both first-grade classrooms were bright and colorful. They each had classroom libraries with many different genres and types of books in addition to individual book boxes used by students during independent reading. Each classroom had a specific area for small-group reading instruction which entailed a kidney table, bookshelves, and areas to display information. At designated instructional times, the teacher invited students to join her at the kidney table for

instruction while the other students engaged in Daily Five literacy activities in various stations around the classroom.

**Emily.** In Emily's classroom, chair pockets containing a whiteboard, a marker, and an eraser for use during instruction covered the chairs around the kidney table. A large whiteboard hung on the wall behind the kidney table. Emily often wrote on this board during the lesson. Bins with the instructional materials for each reading group and tubs of books were housed on a shelf under the whiteboard. Reading groups were designated by a color and an animal name. Emily had a notebook on the kidney table to record attendance, book titles, notes prior to instruction, and observational data during instruction.

**Julie.** In Julie's classroom, small posters of decoding strategies were displayed on a bulletin board behind the kidney table. The insect names given to each of the reading groups and the names of the students in each group were also displayed on the board. She used an easel with a whiteboard to record information and store other instructional materials such as visuals of decoding strategies and word patterns. A bookshelf behind the table and the easel housed books for instruction.

### **The Teachers**

Both teachers were Caucasian females with prior experience teaching first grade. However, their experience differed as detailed below.

**Emily.** Emily has taught for 17 years in a variety of grade levels yet. After teaching in the upper elementary grades, she accepted a first-grade position in which she has remained for the last four years (interview, February 16, 2017). She earned a Master's degree in Elementary Education. She wanted to complete her degree in reading; however, she experienced uncertainty as to whether she would receive compensation with this specification (interview, February 16,

2017). She explained how she learned about teaching reading through various workshops and teaching her own children to read (interview, February 16, 2017), although, she did not share specifics about the workshops.

**Julie.** Julie has taught first grade solely at Springville for the past 10 years. Julie obtained both her undergraduate and Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education. Julie's desire to teach first grade resulted from her positive student teaching experience in first grade in which she "just loved first grade" (interview, March 9, 2017). She shared that she learned a lot about teaching reading from observing others as explained in the following quote:

Just workshops and just being able to visit with other colleagues and you know when I first started just going into Title One classes and then watching the reading teacher. I did a lot of that my first year here. (interview, March 9, 2017)

In addition, she attended professional development, worked with the literacy coach, and participated in book studies.

### **The Students**

**Emily's Students.** Emily identified three students as participating in the small reading group having the most difficulty with reading. This reading group consisted of two male students, one Caucasian and one Hispanic, and one Hispanic female (see Table 3.2). Emily selected these students for this reading group based on their mCLASS scores and her anecdotal observations (interview, February 16, 2017). At the beginning of the study, the three students read below grade level benchmark. According to the mCLASS TRC assessment, the students scored a level E. Aligned with the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system (1996), each text was assigned a letter value beginning with A and first-grade reading levels range from D-J.

According to the school district, students should read at level D meet grade-level benchmark at the beginning of the year, level H at mid-year, and level J at the end of the year. One student,

Skylar, received below benchmark composite scores based on additional grade level mCLASS DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Early Basic Skills) assessments. However, the other two students received on-grade level composite scores. As per requirements from the local school district and the state, Emily monitored the progress of all three students in reading grade level text.

Table 3.2

*Description of Student Participants in Emily's Classroom.*

Student Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Race	Number of Sessions	TRC Benchmark Assessment	Running Record
Lucy	Female	Hispanic	19	Level E	Level F 95% accuracy
Rex	Male	Caucasian	19	Level E	Level F 94% accuracy
Skylar	Male	Hispanic	21	Level E	Below Level E

**Lucy.** Lucy is a Hispanic female who was very quiet. She was hesitant to answer questions or attempt unknown words. She described reading as a happy event because she could learn and described the reading group as when they practiced “tricky” words (interview, February 28, 2017). She furthered shared she did not like reading, but liked “the little card things” (interview, April 4, 2017) in which students used letters to build words incorporating the specific word patterns. She explained that when she found an unknown word, she asked the teacher the word (interview, February 28, 2017).

**Rex.** Rex is a white male who loved to converse. He often made personal connections to reading material and created tangents to instruction. He also desired to show his teacher his

capabilities and sought out affirmation. He described reading as fun when you are able to read a book you like (interview, March 6, 2017). If he found an unknown word, he sounded out the words or “tapped” the sound (interview, March 6, 2017) or looked at the picture (interview, April 3, 2017). He described reading group as consisting of working on new sounds (interview, March 6, 2017). He explained reading was sort of fun (interview, April 3, 2017).

**Skylar.** Skylar is a Hispanic male who was a very active participant in the reading group and the classroom. He loved to converse with peers and read books about sharks. He described reading group as consisting of reading books and reading words on cards (interview, March 16, 2017). He shared that reading was boring and he did not like school (interview, March 16, 2017). He explained that when he experienced an unknown word, he sounded it out or told the teacher (interview, March 16, 2017). He also self-described himself as “bad reader” (interview, April 4, 2017); however, stated he loved to read sometimes (interview, April 4, 2017).

**Julie’s Students.** The small group identified as having the most difficulty with reading in Julie’s classroom consisted of five students; however, only four consented to participate. There were three males, two African-American and one Caucasian, and one African-American female (see Table 3.3). At the beginning of the study, the students read text approximately on level H and all the students except Curry received below-benchmark composite scores on mCLASS assessments. As per requirements from the local school district and the state, every ten days Julie monitored the progress of the three students in reading grade level text.

Table 3.3

*Description of Student Participants in Julie's Classroom.*

Student Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Race	Number of Sessions	TRC Benchmark Assessment	Running Record
Curry	Male	African American	16	Level H	Level H
Griffin	Male	African American	17	Level G	Below Level E 90% accuracy
Rose	Female	African American	16	Level F	Level F 96% accuracy
Shawn	Male	Caucasian	14	Level G	Below Level F 85% accuracy

**Curry.** He is an African-American male who actively participated in reading group. His strength was decoding. He described reading as “not really my type” but he believed he was a good reader (interview, March 6, 2017). He liked to read books with lots of words (interview, March 6, 2017). He described reading group as when his teacher asked questions about books (interview, March 6, 2017). Furthermore, he shared that they read books, sorted words, and tapped out sounds and unfamiliar words (interview, April 4, 2017).

**Griffin.** He is an African-American male who loved talking with both adults and his peers. He participated often in reading group. He stated, “when you can read, you can do anything”. He shared that he read like a second grader and wanted to become a better reader (interview, March 6, 2017). He described reading group as reading to his teacher, receiving

praise, taking picture walks of books, and working on strategies (interview, March 6, 2017). When he encountered unknown words, he stated he would “break it apart and use my [his] strategies” (interview, March 6, 2017).

**Rose.** She is an African-American female who was quiet and participated less often. She described the reading group as a time to read books (interview, March 6, 2017). She explained she liked to read easy books (interview, March 6, 2017). She explained she broke unknown words apart and used the “Chunky Monkey” strategy (interview, March 6, 2017). Later she shared she skipped words, read, and returned to them (interview, April 4, 2017).

**Shawn.** He is a Caucasian male who was an active participant in reading group. He loved to make personal connections. He shared his ability to read easy books, but experienced confusion with hard books (interview, April 5, 2017). He described reading group as consisting of reading books, tapping out sounds, and using strategies such as “Flippy the Dolphin,” “Tappy the Turtle,” and “Chunky Monkey” (interview, April 5, 2017). When he experienced an unknown word, he skipped the word and continued to read or thought about whether the word looked right, sounded right, and made sense (interview, April 5, 2017).

### **Data Collection**

Stake (1995) asserted that data collection does not have an explicit starting point within the study as the researcher begins actual collection of data with the identification of the case. The use of related sources of data is a component of qualitative research and enables the compilation of information to discern answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Based on the research questions for this study, relevant information was gathered from several data sources including (a) participant observations (b) field notes (c) semi-structured interviews, and (d) artifacts. See Table 3.4 for the timeline for the collection of each data source.

Table 3.4

*Data Collection Timeline.*

Activity	Timeline
Recruitment/Consent	January 12-February 17
First Round of Teacher Interviews/Collect Student Reading Data	February 13-February 17
Observations/Field Notes	February 20-April 5
First Round of Student Interviews	February 28-March 16
Second Round of Teacher Interviews	March 27-March 28
Individual Student Reading Assessment/Second Round of Student Interviews	April 3-April 6
Third Round of Teacher Interviews	April 17-April 21

**Participant Observations**

Observations occurred four days of the week for eight consecutive weeks from February 20, 2017 to April 5, 2017. The purpose of the observations was to understand what forms of scaffolding, instructional foci, and instructional activities and materials teachers utilized within the small-group reading lesson and how students responded to the scaffolding. Additionally, the observations illustrated the nature of daily classroom reading instruction received by students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

In each of the two classrooms, I observed Monday through Thursday. On Monday and Tuesday, I conducted initial observations of Julie's classroom and then observed Emily's

classroom. On Wednesday and Thursday, I initially observed Emily’s classroom and then observed Julie’s classroom (see Table 3.5). This rotation allowed the focus students in each classroom to receive instruction at the earliest instructional time for an equal amount of time in each classroom. I conducted the observations at 9:45 and 10:25 in each classroom and they lasted for approximately 15-30 minutes.

Table 3.5

*Weekly Classroom Observation Rotation Schedule.*

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
9:45 Instruction	Julie	Julie	Emily	Emily
10:25 Instruction	Emily	Emily	Julie	Julie

During these observations, I assumed the participant observer role (Creswell, 2013) which involved mainly observing and taking notes on what transpired during small-group literacy instruction. I used an observational protocol on my personal laptop to record field notes and gather information during the small-group instruction (see Appendix B). I audio and video recorded each observation using a video camera on a tripod and a microphone placed on the kidney-shaped table. This method enabled me to capture the communication and understand each teacher’s instructional move, how students responded to the scaffolds, and what types of reading practices the students exhibited. After completing the instructional observations, I extended my field notes and transcribed the small-group reading lessons. Creating transcriptions of the

instruction allowed the data to be readily available in a consistent format for further analysis and review throughout the study.

Because I was a regular visitor to the classroom, I became a familiar face and upon entry would interact with the teacher and the students by greeting them and sharing quick comments prior to their participation in their instructional reading group. However, I did not provide coaching or recommendations on small-group reading instruction to the teachers. I also did not provide the students with any feedback about their reading practices during the small-group reading instruction.

To further understand the case and the students as readers, I observed literacy instruction beyond the small-group instruction. When I was in a classroom to observe small-group reading instruction, I remained to observe the focus students in their next literacy station. Per agreement with the teachers, I interacted with the students during this time and provided support, moving my role to more of a participant (Creswell, 2013). Prior to and after working with them, I recorded field notes describing what types of activities the focal students engaged in and the type of reading practices demonstrated. I recorded these notes on the observational protocol previously described for small-group instruction (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) and I extended the notes after I left the classroom. Once a week, I also took pictures of the books in each focal student's box. I compiled information about these books in a spreadsheet in Excel. Upon completion of the observation in the first classroom, I proceeded to the second classroom to observe small-group instruction.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were recorded during the observations using the observational protocol and housed on a password protected, personal computer. Recording the notes enabled me to provide

further detail of the cases. Within the protocol, I recorded both *descriptive notes* and *reflective notes* (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; see Appendix B). The descriptive notes provided a deep description of the events and the setting whereas the reflective notes allowed for personal reflection and thoughts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). After completing the observations, I expanded the field notes to prepare them as a data source for analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

### **Teacher Interviews**

I interviewed both teachers at the beginning of the study, during the study, and at the conclusion of data collection. The three specific time points provided the opportunity to discover the teacher's perspective at the beginning, in the middle, and at the study's conclusion (see Table 3.6). My purpose for these semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013) was to understand the teacher's approach to instruction with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading, selection of the instructional focus, forms of scaffolds, and activities and materials, in addition to teachers' perspectives on the students as readers. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C), yet my approach was semi-structured—there were opportunities to delve beyond the script. Interviews occurred during the teacher's instructional planning time at the same kidney table while the students attended their special activity for the day. Of note, one interview with Julie took place in a quiet corner of the hallway at a desk with chairs because the students' special activity took place in their classroom. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for further review and lasted for 10-40 minutes.

Table 3.6

*Dates of Teacher Interviews.*

Teacher Name	Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3
Emily	2-16-17	3-27-17	4-17-17
Julie	3-9-17	3-28-17	4-21-17

**Student Interviews**

To understand more about the student as a reader and to gain knowledge of his/her perspective regarding reading and small-group instruction, each student participated in a semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2013) at the beginning and at the end of the study. Similar to the teacher interviews, I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix D); however, I also gave opportunities for extension. Interviews took place in the hallway or in a quiet spot in the classroom separate from the other students. Each interview lasted between 5 and 15 minutes.

Table 3.7

*Dates of Student Interviews.*

Student Name	Interview #1	Interview #2
Lucy	2-28-17	4-3-17
Rex	3-6-17	4-3-17
Skylar	3-6-17	4-4-17
Curry	3-9-17	4-4-17
Griffin	3-6-17	4-5-17
Rose	3-6-17	4-6-17
Shawn	3-16-17	4-5-17

## **Artifacts**

I collected several forms of artifacts for further review. These included instructional lesson plans and anecdotal observations, student work samples, and photographs of the books being used during instruction. The various artifacts are described in more detail in the following sections.

**Instructional artifacts.** In discussion prior to the beginning of the study, Emily stated that she created written instructional lesson plans. In order to record Emily's plans, I photographed the small-group instructional lesson plans for the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. During instruction, Emily often wrote observational notes. Consequently, the instructional plan and notes were photographed after the sessions to capture the entirety of information. In contrast, Julie did not keep written instructional plans or records.

In addition, I took photographs of the books implemented in small-group reading instruction in both classrooms. The pictures allowed me to understand the main ideas of the text and to know whether students read words correctly in the text. In Julie's classroom, I also photographed students' at home reading folders and strategy cards used during lessons.

**Teacher instructional book log.** I recorded the title of the book used in small-group instruction on the observational protocol each day. In addition, I took photographs of the books and then created a spreadsheet in Excel to record the following categories: the titles, the authors of each book used in instruction during small-group instruction, book type, levels of book (when applicable), the publisher, and the location of the book. (See Tables 5.6 and 5.7 for the instructional book logs for each teacher.)

**Student book log.** The students chose their own books to place in their boxes and read these books during independent reading time in Daily Five. To understand more about students'

book preferences, I created an Excel spreadsheet that contained the following categories: the title, the author, the type of book, the source for the book(s), who selected the book, and whether the text was leveled. Since the students selected books one day each week, I updated this spreadsheet on a weekly basis throughout the study.

**Student work samples.** Activities completed during small-group instruction were also photographed for further analysis. These activities included decodable stories or sentences and written comprehension activities completed in a journal or on individual paper.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, I collected numerous forms of data. See Table 3.8 for a summary of the quantity of each individual data source collected during the study.

Table 3.8

*Summary of Data Collection Sources.*

Data Source	Quantity
Artifacts	6
Small-Group Field Notes	38
Small-Group Reading Observations	38
Student Book Log	1

Table 3.8 (continued)

Data Source	Quantity
Student Literacy Activity Field Notes	15
Student Interviews	14
Teacher Instructional Book Log	1
Teacher Instructional Plans (Weekly)	8
Teacher Interviews	6

### **Student Reading Data**

To better understand the students' reading abilities and determine reading profiles of individual readers, I obtained the focal students' reading assessment results. In January, the students completed local school district required benchmark assessments. Students received an overall composite score based on their performance on mCLASS DIBELS (Amplify, 2015) assessments. These assessments consisted of the Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and Dynamic Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) assessments. On the NSW assessment, students read three letter words consisting of non-real vowel-consonant-vowel words for one minute to calculate student scores for how many sounds and whole words read correctly. With the DORF assessment, students read grade level passages for a minute to determine how many words read correctly per minute. I compared the students' scores with benchmark scores for first-grade.

In addition, the students also completed an assessment called the Text Reading Comprehension or TRC (Amplify, 2015). For each student, the teacher selects a specific level of text based on the Fountas Pinnell text leveling system (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) and referred to as a letter of the alphabet. According to district benchmarks, first-grade reading range is generally D-J with J denoted as the benchmark level for the end of the grade. Students read the text aloud as the teacher records the types of errors made. Then, the teacher asks students to orally answer questions about the text. If the students demonstrate proficiency with the oral retelling task, they complete written responses to two specific comprehension questions. The teachers score students' written responses using a rubric with scores ranging from 0 to 3. Students are considered proficient if they receive a level 3 on both written responses.

Since teachers did not administer benchmark DIBELS or TRC assessments again until the end of the semester, I conducted individual reading performance assessments with each focal student using Clay's (1993) running record format in addition to a retelling of the text. I completed the assessments to provide an understanding of each focal student's reading practices and abilities at the end of the study. I used the benchmark text associated with different reading levels found on the [readingatoz.com](http://readingatoz.com) website. I received input from the teacher on the appropriate starting level for each student. In addition to text reading, each focal student completed a retelling of the text to provide an indication of the student's text comprehension capability.

### **Data Analysis**

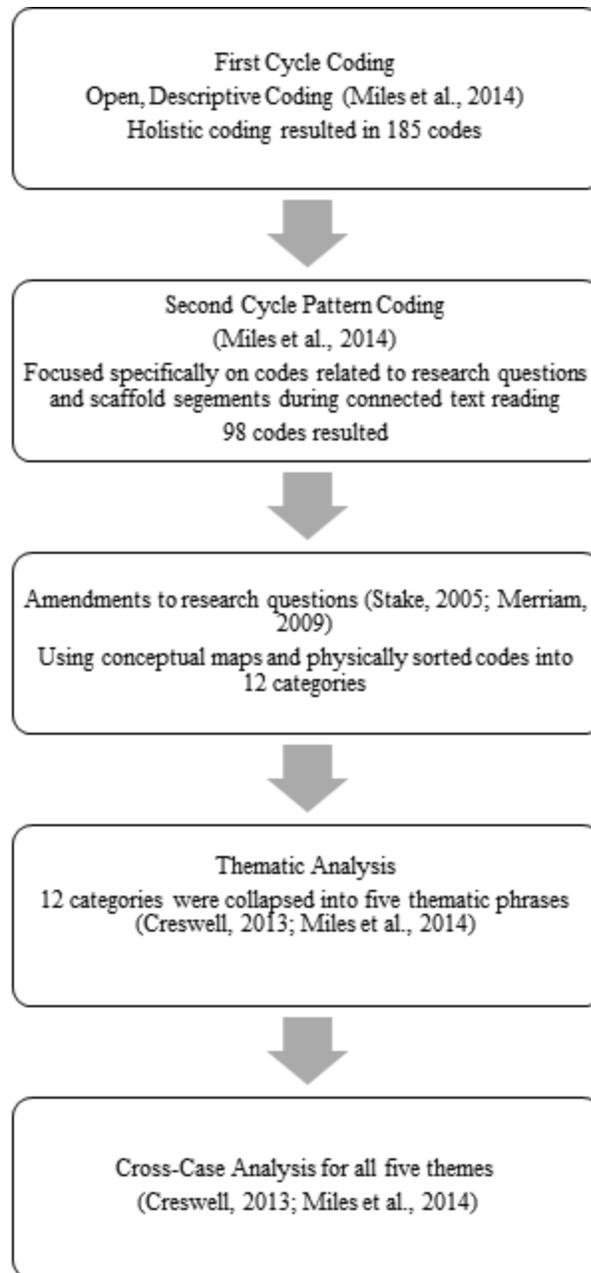
In case student methodology, data analysis does not have an initial starting point, but represents one component of a recursive process of making meaning, which consists of unpacking what has occurred and putting it all back together again (Stake, 1995). Analysis is intended to align with the overall research questions (Stake, 1995). Due to the nature and overall

goal of this instrumental multi-case study, the data analysis process focused on determining categories meaningful to address the research questions and to explain the cases (Stake, 1995).

The goal of this multi-case study was to understand teacher scaffolding in small-group instruction and how the scaffolding forms supported students' reading practices.

As the initial analysis step, I transcribed all small-group observations and interviews to become well-acquainted with and thoroughly understand the data in its totality. During this process, I determined initial and emerging patterns within the data by creating memos.

Additionally, I created memos to record emerging ideas, patterns, questions, and reflections from the various data sources. Upon completion of the transcription process, I uploaded all transcripts and field notes into Atlasti.com software. I conducted coding methods within the software and I describe this process in the following sections. See Figure 3.2 for a description of the data analysis coding process.



*Figure 3.2 Steps in data analysis coding process.*

### **First Cycle Coding**

For data analysis, I utilized Miles and colleagues' (2014) qualitative method of First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. During the process of coding in both cycles, I created memos of emerging ideas and patterns (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014) within Atlasti.com. In the First

Cycle, I implemented inductive, open coding (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Miles et al., 2014) which consisted of assigning codes to portions of data (Miles et al., 2014). Various First Cycle coding methods exist; however, in this study, I enacted *Descriptive Coding* (Miles et al., 2014) in which I assigned short phrases signifying the main idea to data portions. I selected this method because the resulting phrases summarized patterns in the data (See Table 3.9) and facilitated transition to assigning similar codes to one category.

Table 3.9

*Example of Descriptive Coding Process.*

Data Source	Small-Group Transcript	Interview
Descriptive Code Name	Telling	Instructional Focus
Definition	Teacher tells student the correct word or strategy to use	Teacher explains what the instructional focus is or how it is determined for small-group reading instruction.

Table 3.9 (continued)

Data Source	Small-Group Transcript	Interview
Example	<p>Lucy: [reading a page from the text] The bus has a flat tire said Mrs. Coats – Cots.</p> <p>Emily: Coats. You were right.</p>	<p>Researcher: So the first question is just how would you describe the focus for your small group reading instruction for the students that I've been watching that have had the most difficulty. Like what is your particular focus right now [for them]?</p> <p>Julie: Right now it's - it's getting them to use those strategies... you know they just get stuck on a word and they freeze up.</p> <p>Researcher: Right.</p> <p>Julie: You know. I think they get nervous or you know and they just don't try to you know to use those strategies. So that's like my big focus now is making sure that they're just using those strategies when they come to a word.</p>

Furthermore, I coded data using both emergent and pre-established phrases. The pre-established phrases derived from scaffolding categories determined in previous literature on scaffolding included explaining, modeling, prompting, prompting with information, directing, demonstrating, verifying/clarifying, and telling (Ankrum et al., 2014; Rodgers, 2004; Rodgers et al., 2016; Silliman et al., 2000; Wong et al., 1994). The First Cycle Coding method resulted in 185 codes. A codebook with a definition for each code was created within Atlasti.com.

## Second Cycle Coding

Due to the holistic nature of the first round of coding, the next phase entailed focusing on the data pertaining solely to answering the research questions. Specifically, I wanted to examine how teachers implemented scaffolding during small-group reading instruction and how the forms of teacher scaffolding supported students' development of reading practices. I drew on the unit of analysis in Rodgers et al. (2016)'s scaffolding study referred to as "talk cycles" and defined as "periods of interaction between the teacher and a student during the first reading of the new book when the teacher helped the student problem solve a difficult word" (p. 6). Within the small-group instruction data, I determined individual *scaffold segments* which I defined as when the student experienced difficulty reading a word and the teacher provided support to determine the word. The teacher-student interaction for each word denoted a separate scaffold segment even if students required support for more than one word. Furthermore, within each scaffold segment, teachers may have implemented multiple scaffolds. In addition to identifying and analyzing scaffold segments, I analyzed the data for other codes related to the overall research questions. This iterative process resulted in the reduction of the number of codes from 185 to 98.

The next phase of data analysis consisted of determining overarching patterns from codes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995) by implementing *Second Cycle Pattern Coding* (Miles et al., 2014). To identify the patterns, I enacted an iterative analysis process of comparing data to the research questions and refining the questions to align with the findings in the data. This process led to the condensing of the five initial research questions into two overall questions. This process aligns with Stake's (2005) belief that research questions may change within the course of case study methodology due to the iterative nature of qualitative research. The initial number of research questions decreased during analysis because context became such an

important factor that it became its own chapter (see Chapter 4) rather than individual questions about the instructional foci and materials used. The resulting two research questions focused on the nature of teacher scaffolding and how the implementation of scaffolding supported students' reading.

After amending the overall research questions and focusing on two specific research questions, I physically sorted codes. I placed each code name into a pocket chart and grouped together similar codes. As a result, I reduced the number of codes and determined 12 categories. I conducted peer debriefing of these categories (Creswell, 2013). Then, using conceptual maps, I condensed the 12 categories into five overarching themes (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The final stage of analysis consisted of ensuring that the five themes addressed the two research questions (Stake, 1995). Additionally, I conducted peer debriefing of the themes (Creswell, 2013) and completed a cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014) for each theme. In Chapter 5, I discuss the five themes and each cross-case analysis in depth.

## **Validity and Reliability**

### **Internal Validity**

Internal validity in qualitative research denotes verifying the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995) and I implemented several strategies in this study to ensure validity. First, the triangulation of data sources, or *methodological triangulation* (Stake, 1995), was established as I collected data from observations, interviews, field notes, and artifacts. In addition, I analyzed each of these sources to determine its effect on the findings and relationships with findings from other sources. Second, I engaged in member checking (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 1995) by allowing the teachers to examine their own instruction, their scaffolding methods, and their students' responses. On May 9, 2017 and May

11, 2017, with the teachers' input for transcript selection, I provided copies of a transcript from their small-group reading instruction and allowed the teachers time to read and review the transcript. On May 23, 2017, I met with Emily individually. We discussed both her findings and questions as they related to the transcript. Based on her responses, I also offered to provide additional resources on designing small-group instruction. Although Julie and I intended to meet in May, she canceled our session and a follow-up meeting was not scheduled. In addition, the teachers had an opportunity to engage in member checking of the findings. I provided the teachers with an overview of the findings and then provided them with the detailed thematic findings in writing with the opportunity to share feedback. This process is an important step because the participants in the study bring their own important perspectives and "triangulate the researcher's observations and interpretations" (Stake, 1995, p. 115). After having this opportunity to review the findings, neither teacher provided any further feedback.

During my analysis, I engaged in peer debriefing (Creswell, 2013) as another method to ensure validity. On several occasions, I received feedback from peers regarding the determination and relevancy of codes, categories, and overall themes. Furthermore, ensuring an extended time in the field contributes to the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I purposefully designed the timeline of the study to provide ample time in the field. The initial engagement with the case began in October 2016 when I received an invitation to informally observe three different first-grade classrooms and discuss the intentions for my study. After receiving IRB approval in January 2017, we met again to discuss the study informally. In February 2017, after the local school district granted permission to conduct the study, I received two teachers' formal consent to participate. My formal physical presence in each classroom occurred from February 2017 until May 2017. After the conclusion of data

collection in April, I conducted a reading group with the student participants and provided additional assistance as the student participants completed literacy activities in their classrooms once weekly in each classroom.

### **External Validity**

Another form of validity relates to the ability to apply the study's findings. One method to establish external validity is to provide a detailed and deep description of the case (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), an approach that I relied on in this study. As reflected in my timeline, I observed in each classroom four days a week for almost an entire instructional period of nine weeks. However, I informally observed in the classrooms prior to this time. Additionally, I address validity by presenting detailed descriptions about the small-group instruction, the teachers, the students, the classrooms, and the school to provide a comprehensive account of each individual case. I also recognize and address the potential for researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 1995). I included a subjectivity statement (see below) to describe personal characteristics, past professional experiences, and my perspective on reading instruction, all of which influence my role as a literacy researcher and therefore, may have influenced the results of the study.

### **Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research consists of establishing the consistency of findings and is achieved through the use of descriptive field notes, transcriptions of recorded events, and the use of software to house and interpret data (Creswell, 2013). I created detailed field notes from the observations conducted in each classroom. I uploaded the completed transcripts of observations and interviews into the qualitative software Atlasti.com in addition to field notes and artifacts. This program was used to create initial codes and then, in the second round of data

analysis, overall categories and overarching themes. I created a codebook within Atlasti.com with code names, definitions, examples, and used the codebook to assign codes and themes to various data sources. In addition, I used one Excel spreadsheet to house the names and location of each data source and another as an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to record the events that transpired throughout the study.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the goal of case study methodology is to describe a particular case or a phenomenon. My aim for this study was to describe the concept of how teachers scaffold and determine appropriate small-group instruction to promote students' reading development. However, two difficulties arose with the implementation of case study methodology. First, findings from this case study are not inherently relevant to other cases (Stake, 1995). Second, although I made efforts to minimize any effects related to my presence in the classroom, engaging in observation may have altered the actions of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, the act of observing in the natural classroom setting had the potential to affect the teachers' instruction and the behaviors of the students.

Furthermore, I used purposeful sampling to select the site for this case study and therefore the participants may not be representative of typical first-grade classroom teachers. In addition, only certain members of the grade level volunteered to participate and therefore, little variation in the demographics of the participants and their instructional styles may exist. Teachers' identified students having the most difficulty with reading and these students became the participants. The responses and reading practices of the students who participated in this study may not have been representative of first-grade students across the school or the district. Finally, the timeline of the study in which data collection occurred during the second semester of

reading instruction may have affected the results because teachers had established certain instructional routines and students had already received one semester of small-group instruction.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

Dyson and Genishi (2005) assert that “Every person has a biography that precedes her existence as a researcher, incorporating characteristics like race, class, gender, and ability” (p. 57). I recognize that without explicit intent, my own perspective and biases might have influenced the outcomes of the study. To clarify potential research biases, I explain my own personal experiences and beliefs. First, I am a Caucasian, privileged, female researcher in my early forties pursuing a doctoral degree in literacy and language arts. Within my professional career, ample opportunities and experiences have extended my own knowledge in the area of literacy. Second, I was a former classroom teacher and literacy specialist who conducted small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading. However, my experience as an educator is limited to school settings located in one specific district within one particular state. In these roles, I implemented specific forms and types of scaffolds in addition to instructional formats, foci, and materials based on students’ reading practice needs. From these experiences, my own expectations and intentions for small-group instruction may have differed from those of the teachers in this study. Throughout the study, I attempted to accurately portray and detail the perspectives of the teachers and examine possible findings that countered my own viewpoints on scaffolding and small-group literacy instruction.

Furthermore, my teaching philosophy is rooted in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and I believe it is important to provide students with opportunities to co-construct knowledge (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997) with the teacher within small-group instruction. Students need ample opportunities to read and comprehend various forms of text including those on

students' instructional level in addition to more challenging texts. Additionally, it is also essential for teachers to analyze literacy assessments and observational data, determine students' needs, and design instruction aligned with those needs. I believe first-grade students, especially those identified as having the most difficulty in reading, should engage in instruction focused on both how to proficiently decode and comprehend text.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the instrumental multi-case study conducted to understand the nature of teachers' scaffolding within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading and students' responses to the scaffolding. I purposefully selected the site, the first-grade teacher participants, and the student participants. Data collection sources consisted of audio and video recorded observations, audio recorded interviews, field notes from observations and interviews, and artifacts consisting of instructional lesson plans, teacher observational data, teacher instructional and student independent reading logs, and student reading assessment data. I analyzed these forms of data through First and Second Cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014) to discover emerging patterns and themes related to how teachers provided scaffolding during small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and how the scaffolding supported students' reading practices. The findings contribute to the knowledge of forms and patterns of scaffolding teachers utilize in daily small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Furthermore, they provide more information about how teachers make decisions about scaffolding, can support students' reading practices, and implement small-group instruction.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTEXT

*“It takes no time for the visitor of a first-grade classroom to come to the conclusion that a great deal goes on in such place” (Pressley et al., 2001, p. 33).*

#### **Introduction to the Chapter**

*After reviewing the activities at various literacy stations, the teacher states “I’m ready to meet the butterflies at the back table for reading”. Five different students scramble to assemble at the kidney table. The teacher sits down facing the students and shares how she selected a new text for them to read. The text is appropriately matched to the students’ reading levels or the skills on which they need to work. The teacher shares the text title, students make predictions about the contents, and they discuss the pictures. The students will have an opportunity to read the text while teacher listens to the students read and provides scaffolding as needed.*

In many primary classrooms, reading instruction occurs in a small-group format similar to this description. In this format, students are grouped based on similar literacy needs. Furthermore, students’ development as readers occurs within a social context including the teacher and peers. This particular case study seeks to describe the role of scaffolding in small-group instruction within the social context to create student knowledge of how to decode unfamiliar words. In order to better understand the findings within and across the two cases contained in this case study, it is necessary to more deeply understand the learning context and the teachers’ pedagogical approaches. Therefore, in this chapter, I provide detailed information describing the context and the teacher’s perspective within each individual case. The cases consist of two first-grade teachers, Emily and Julie, and the students they identified as having the most difficulty with reading thus requiring the highest level of teacher support. I begin by

describing the small-group instruction, instructional logistics, differences in small-group instruction, and instructional resources for Emily and her students.

### **Emily's Instructional Approach**

In Emily's first-grade classroom, she implemented homogeneous ability-grouping (Hiebert, 1983; Slavin, 1987) for small-group reading instruction in which she established reading groups based on students' similar literacy abilities. Emily implemented several methods to determine the individual needs of her students. First, she analyzed the students' DIBELS and TRC mCLASS (Amplify, 2015) reading assessment scores. In addition, she examined observational data of students' performance and classroom literacy practices. When forming reading groups at the beginning of the year, she considered students' end of the kindergarten year mCLASS reading assessment scores and information shared by the students' kindergarten teachers (interview, February 17, 2017). Since this research occurred during the second half of the school year, Emily made changes to the group participants prior to the beginning of the study based primarily on students' assessment results and observational data. Three students, two males and one female, participated in the small group considered to have the most difficulty in reading. This group of students remained constant throughout the study.

**Feelings about teaching students identified as having difficulty.** Without being specifically asked, Emily revealed her feelings about teaching the students in the reading group she identified as having the most difficulty. She shared that often felt "overwhelmed, exhausted, frustrated" (interview, February 16, 2017) with teaching this group of students because of the amount of support they required. She stated, "So I feel it's my most important group but it's also causes me the most concern" (interview, February 16, 2017). She further expressed, "I feel stressed to teach them. I feel the pressure to have them daily...And sometimes if they are...very

unfocused - facing that every day...without [a] break can be overwhelming” (interview, February 16, 2017). There were many factors related to the students, the instruction, instructional support, and her own professional knowledge that contributed to this overwhelmed feeling. Each of these factors are described in more detail below.

***Student factors.*** Emily discussed characteristics of the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading that caused her to feel exhausted from teaching these students. First, she stated how the students lacked focus and engagement throughout instruction. She explained the need to incorporate activities that would hold their attention, especially on days in which she taught this reading group during the last rotation. Emily believed the students exhibited increased focus when the reading group was conducted first and immediately after whole-group word work instruction.

Additionally, based on the students’ lack of background knowledge and her perception of their inability to engage in higher-level thinking, Emily felt she could not develop deep discussions about text. In contrast to students in other reading groups, she stated the students in the group identified as having the most difficulty with reading lacked engagement with the text and the ability to initiate or extend discussions. Emily explained, “sometimes asking a question and getting an answer that’s completely off base...It just seems like it’s more strained...to teach and work with them then the other groups” (interview, February 16, 2017). She further described how “...it’s kind of difficult to have a rich conversation. That’s not in their nature or that’s not what they do” (interview, February 16, 2017). Finally, Emily described the students’ view of reading instruction as just one more thing to complete during the school day and, as well as her sense that it was hard for them to “get as engaged” (interview, March 27, 2017).

***Instructional factors.*** In addition to student factors, Emily felt the impact of carrying out repetitive instruction. She incorporated similar procedures and routines because the students needed to experience consistency. However, the monotonous nature of instruction is illustrated through Emily's statement, "And there's so much with them of doing [phonics]– it's just so repetitive" (interview, March 27, 2017). Furthermore, she voiced the feeling of exhaustion because she met with these students every day, four days of small-group reading instruction and one day of progress monitoring: "I think it's exhausting to meet with them every day...we're meeting Monday through Thursday but then...I progress monitor on Fridays so it's them again" (interview, March 27, 2017).

***Instructional support.*** One factor contributing to her sense of feeling overwhelmed reflected an important difference in the students' reading instruction this school year as compared to the previous year. Last year students received additional literacy instruction with Title 1 reading teachers. However, the school no longer held the Title 1 distinction this year and, therefore, students did not receive additional instruction with another teacher. Emily explained the pressure of being solely responsible for these students' progress in literacy without the support of additional personnel (interview, April 17, 2017). She found it difficult that the students no longer had additional intervention instruction. She desired more support from another staff member who could "take the burden off" (interview, March 27, 2017) her by providing instruction to these students on certain literacy skills.

***Professional knowledge.*** Emily also described characteristics of herself as the students' teacher that related to her belief in the difficulty of teaching these students. She did not feel prepared or trained to meet the needs of these students. However, she voiced her willingness to learn and implement new instructional methods in addition to her strong desire to be an effective

teacher, especially with this particular group of students. She did not experience many professional development opportunities enabling her to feel more prepared and confident to work with students who exhibit the most difficulty in reading. She lamented, “I hope they’re getting what they need and I just – you know – you don’t know. It’s so hard...I guess I feel...unsure of myself and what I’m doing with them” (interview, March 27, 2017). She further expressed her feelings of inadequacy about teaching these students who had more difficulty with reading in an interview where she disclosed “So – there’s that I think is a [struggle]...I just don’t feel confident teaching these kids who are needing so much more support” (interview, April 17, 2017). Her lack of confidence in providing effective instruction addresses Allington’s (2013) call for further professional development for teachers on effective literacy instructional practices for students who struggle with reading.

In the following dialogue, Emily stated how she would appear as a significantly different teacher when working with the students in other reading groups who had less difficulty in reading:

I guess my biggest issue is... I feel like – I you know – some people feel like – feel like they’re more of a boy parent or a girl parent you know? And – I feel like as a teacher I like – and I hear this in my evaluations – it’s like my questioning and the higher levels maybe...And – you know – I feel like if you had observed the high groups - I mean I don’t even know if I would look like the same teacher as what you saw. (interview, April 17, 2017)

Emily addressed how differences existed in her teaching of students based on their literacy abilities. Students in other reading groups participated in higher-level thinking activities. However, the students in this group received literacy instruction focused on foundational skills, instruction more often implemented with students having difficulty in reading (Triplett, 2007; Wiseman, 2012). Rather than view the strengths of the students, Emily appeared to exhibit a deficit perspective about the students’ abilities and literacy practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, &

Gonzalez, 1992; Triplett, 2007; Wiseman, 2012). Rather than seeing the strengths the students brought to the instructional setting, she focused on what students lacked within their reading practices.

**Small-group instruction.** Emily's approach to small-group instruction can best be described as centered on phonics instruction, or skills-based instruction. Emily discussed the struggle to balance phonics instruction with reading connected text thus achieving her goal of students reading connected text on their level everyday; however, she found it difficult to incorporate all these components in a 15-20 minute reading lesson (interview, March 27, 2017). Her instruction centered primarily on rote-based instruction rather than opportunities to read connected text, engage in comprehension, and enact higher-order thinking skills. This instructional format aligns with prior research showing that students identified as having the most difficulty with reading often receive rote-based instruction focused on mastering basic reading skills (Allington, 2002; McIntyre, 2010; Wiseman, 2012) or constrained skills (Paris, 2005).

**Instructional logistics.** In Emily's classroom, the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading met four times a week. On the fifth day, Emily conducted individual progress monitoring assessments with each of the three student participants. The small-group reading instruction took place at a kidney table in the back of the room. Emily sat facing the students with a whiteboard and materials positioned behind her. The small-group lessons were typically 15-25 minutes in length. However, in an interview Emily shared, "I meet with them for fifteen-twenty minutes. I base that [length] on their interest and their attention span. Depending on what we are doing. Sometimes it lasts longer than others" (interview, February 16, 2017). Emily described the routine of meeting daily with these students as a strength of her small-group

instruction. She stated, “It’s just the consistency that they know I meet with them every day” (interview, April 17, 2017). Emily worked diligently to provide instruction and guidance during every minute of the small-group instruction.

Each reading group in Emily’s classroom was designated by a specific color and animal. The group of students with the most difficulty in reading participated in the *red rhinos* group. To begin each lesson, she invited students to join her at the back table. For half of the observed lessons, this reading group met as the first reading group, whereas for the other half of the observed lessons, this group met as the last reading group. During the instructional lesson, Emily utilized a notebook to store important information related to each reading group. Prior to each lesson, she recorded the instructional text and specific notes for instruction. During the lesson, Emily recorded attendance, wrote notes about the students’ practices and progress, and documented specific areas needing further instruction.

**Differences from other reading groups.** Significant differences existed between the instruction for the reading group of students having the most difficulty and the other reading groups in Emily’s classroom. First, Emily met with this reading group daily, whereas she did not meet with other reading groups on a daily basis (interview, February 16, 2017). Secondly, she stated the biggest difference was the instructional focus on phonics for this particular reading group (interview, April 17, 2017). She spent a majority of time reviewing phonics-based word patterns featured in whole-group word work instruction. Only one other reading group spent instructional time on word work and only for brief periods of instruction (interview, April 17, 2017).

In addition, the texts selected for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading differed from the texts selected for other reading groups. Emily described the texts as

“quite a bit lower than the text level with other groups” (interview, February 16, 2017). During instruction with other reading groups, students also engaged in comprehension of text with a focus on creating effective written responses to comprehension questions. Emily noted that the students in the reading group having the most difficulty attained the reading level in which the focus switches to written comprehension (interview, April 17, 2017); however, there was no inclusion of written comprehension during the observed lessons. This focus aligns with prior research findings that students of higher reading ability engage in meaning-related instruction in contrast to students of lower reading ability who engage in more word and phonics-based tasks (Allington, 1980; Gambrell, Wilson, & Gantt, 1981). Lastly, the students in this reading group required progress monitoring of literacy skills, whereas the students in each of the other reading groups did not complete progress monitoring in literacy because of their proficiency level (interview, April 17, 2017).

**Instructional materials.** In order to address focal instructional areas, accomplish instructional goals, and provide meaningful instruction, Emily enlisted the use of a variety of materials. Overall, the students used hands-on materials most frequently during the phonics portion of the lesson. In this section, I describe instructional resources used for phonics, text reading, strategy instruction, and comprehension.

**Phonics materials.** Because Emily observed her students as exhibiting limited attention, she intended to create engaging instruction for both herself and the students. She stated the need for “kind of psyching myself up to make this engaging but getting through the points I want to get through with them” (interview, February 16, 2017). To address the students’ lack of attention and interest, Emily aimed to make the phonics portion of the lesson hands-on and engaging. Therefore, she incorporated a variety of materials to accomplish this task and described, “You

know we use these whiteboards. We use little tiles. We use a lot of the pointer fingers you know... Just different things for them to keep it fresh” (interview, February 16, 2017).

Emily often asked the students to review the stories of the Letterland characters designed to help students understand word patterns. During this review, she often used the Letterland instructional cards as a visual to help students tell the story. The students’ storytelling is illustrated in this example:

Emily: Alright Skylar tell [us about Irving Ir]. [T hands him the “ir” card.]

Skylar: [First Impy] Ink was there and then...Irving Ir ran fast and then stopped...Impy Ink and his mat. And so – and then he – and then Impy Ink was like splashing [T shakes hand in agreement] and then the ink was getting in his back and then here [points to card]. (transcription, April 3, 2017)

Students used letter cards to build words Emily dictated. She instructed them that, “yesterday I spelled the words and you read them. Today, you’re going to spell the *oa* and *ow* words, right? Can you get your vowels separated from your consonants?” (transcription, February 21, 2017). In addition to building the words, the students also read the words. Emily displayed word cards so the students could segment and blend the words. For example, Emily stated “Alright I want you to sound these out with me. [Has word cards that she is showing the students.] All: n-ur-s. Nurse” (transcription, April 3, 2017). Lastly, students practiced writing words especially with similar sounding words with different spellings such as *door* and *more*. Students retrieved whiteboards and markers and received feedback on spelling words. Emily directed:

Emily: Okay get your little whiteboard out of your pocket.

Lucy: [Yay]!

Skylar: [Umhum].

Emily: And your marker. And your eraser. Here's what I want you to do. We're gonna write all three ways [of the word door] and decide which one's right. Let's write this one first [makes the word d-our]." (transcription, March 28, 2017)

*Connected texts.* Another important instructional material was texts selected for students to read. Using mCLASS TRC reading assessments to determine students' instructional reading levels, Emily selected text aligned with the levels at which students exhibited 90-94% accuracy. This selection format aligns with some researchers' recommendations about using text at students' instructional reading levels, especially for students identified as having difficulty with reading (Allington, 2013; Betts, 1946; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). However, other researchers have questioned the effectiveness of this approach (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hoffman, 2017; Shanahan, 2013). Emily expressed feeling the expectation to engage students solely with text at their instructional level even though she desired to engage students with other texts such as the mentor texts taught in whole group (interview, April 17, 2017). Although she did not use the mentor texts in small-group instruction, she created connections between texts students read in whole-group literacy instruction and texts read in small-group instruction in the text format and content.

Emily described experiencing much difficulty finding appropriate texts to use in small-group reading instruction. As a result of her first-grade position and classroom created as an addition to the grade level, she had a "piecemeal collection" (interview, February 16, 2017) of leveled books. These books consisted of extra copies of books donated by other teachers, leveled readers from a formerly used basal series, and two grade-level sets of ReadyGEN (Pearson, 2017) leveled readers, the whole-group literacy instructional program. Emily explained a lack of consistency of text materials across the grade level, "So resources are a problem and they're not something we can work on as a team because everybody's got different stuff" (interview,

February 16, 2017). She further explained, “And it’s hard – it’s hard to know what resources to use because we’ve all got different stuff...So it’s not even something that as a grade level we can say this is a great book for whatever” (interview, February 16, 2017). Based on differing instructional materials, first-grade teachers at Springville experienced difficulty collaboratively planning instruction with texts.

In addition to a small number of texts within her classroom, a limited supply of texts existed for students at the beginning stages of reading development in the school. She explained, “And like our F and G levels – F and G library – everybody’s slim in that area and that’s where – that’s where the majority of our kids were back in the fall” (interview, February 16, 2017). Although a school-wide book room for text selection existed at Springville Elementary, Emily asserted “...it does not have...a lot at the levels these children are at...It’s-it’s more focused on upper - you know a lot of chapter books-beginning chapter books” (interview, February 16, 2017). Furthermore, she stated how many of the books did not appeal to students and therefore, she uses the book room as “kind of a last resort” (interview, February 16, 2017).

***Word-solving strategy posters.*** Emily incorporated the use of word-solving strategy posters to teach and reinforce strategies to the whole reading group during five small-group lessons (see Figure 4.1). Emily intentionally selected and covered up a word. After examining the picture and reading the sentence, students stated possible words that would make sense in the sentence. The following example illustrates this activity:

Emily: What word do you think could be under my finger?

Skylar: Huh!

Rex: Huh! I think I know!

Emily: We're going to – we're using the strategy of getting your eyes focused on the picture [Skylar and Rex raising their hands]. Alright I am going to – my pet [points to words]. What do you think [it is Skylar]?

Skylar: [Huh]! Um “horse.”

Emily: Let's – Can you say the sentence and put horse where that sticky note is?

Skylar: I am going to her - wait no.

Emily: You don't want that answer anymore? Okay. So there is a horse in the picture. He's paying attention to the picture but then he realized it didn't make sense in it. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

Using an additional strategy of looking at the letters, they determined *feed* was the actual word in the sentence. Then, Emily reinforced how to use the strategy during students' independent reading. At the end of this strategy lesson, she explained,

Alright. So when you come to a word in the book today that you don't know I want you to try that. Okay? Look at this picture and look at the first letter. And let it help you try and figure out the word. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

The use of these posters was the sole form of instruction for teaching strategies to students as Emily did not provide students with other resources for decoding strategies. Often during instruction with these posters, Emily stated the objective was for students to practice their strategies without referencing specific strategies.



*Figure 4.1* Poster (Benchmark Education Company, 1999) used for decoding strategy instruction.

***Comprehension materials.*** Interestingly, no specific instructional materials were implemented for comprehension instruction. Emily asked students oral comprehension questions aloud such as what parts students liked best in the book and why. She did not use any prompts, resources, or written materials. In fact, the students engaged in comprehension at a minimal level. Conversations occurred during the introduction of a text when students engaged in discussing the pictures in addition to making predictions and connections.

Overall, first-grade teacher Emily and her students identified as having the most difficulty with reading engaged in instruction heavily emphasizing phonics and constrained skills to decode words rather than focusing on gaining meaning from the text. Students read texts aligned with their instructional reading levels. Emily revealed her lack of confidence in teaching the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and the exhausting nature of this work. In the following sections, I transition to sharing contextual information about the second case consisting of first-grade teacher Julie and her four students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. In the following sections, I describe the small-group instruction, instructional logistics, differences in small-group instruction, and instructional resources.

### **Julie's Instructional Approach**

Homogeneous grouping of students (Hiebert, 1983; Slavin, 1987) for reading instruction was evident in Julie's first-grade classroom. Students were selected for reading groups based on similarities in their literacy needs as determined from DIBELS and TRC mCLASS (Amplify, 2015) literacy assessment scores and observational data. According to Julie, she changed student participants in reading groups every quarter based on report card data, mCLASS data, and her own observations, which usually resulted in changing one or two participants (interview, March 9, 2017). She changed participants in the group needing the most support prior to the beginning of the study which resulted in five student participants: three males and two females. However, one female did not have consent to participate in the study and therefore, her responses were not recorded. Unlike Emily, Julie's conversations about small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading focused more specifically on instructional foci and instructional materials rather than her feelings about teaching this specific group of students.

**Small-group instruction.** Julie's small-group instruction for students having difficulty with reading focused on several components of reading including strategies for decoding words, comprehension, and phonics. The following statement illustrates Julie's belief of the most important concepts in small-group instruction:

I definitely think just the phonics – definitely having them do the phonics and then their reading strategies... You know once they get that – you know really focusing on the retell too... Making sure that they're comprehending what they're reading. (interview, March 9, 2017)

Her overall instructional format aligned with the Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) small-group format as evident in Julie's following description of her small-group instruction:

Well you know I—I love just to always start with introducing a book...taking a picture walk, setting the background knowledge you know to...help them with their understanding...To help them with you know what they're gonna be reading about so that they have that foundation first and then...you know reading it and having them you know read a little bit to me and just listen to see what strategies they are using...and then you know at the end just doing like a retell – making sure that they're comprehending it. (interview, March 9, 2017)

Within the small-group lesson, Julie implemented a book introduction, taught a strategy, provided time for guided practice and scaffolding, and discussed the text. With the inclusion of these components, her lesson was similar to the following traditional components of the Guided Reading small-group lesson: an introduction, student reading, discussion of a text, teaching points, and word work instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). In addition to focus on text, she provided word work instruction in some small-group lessons. Julie explained the importance of incorporating phonics aligned with the Letterland focus in whole- group instruction and the struggle to complete all these components within 15-20 minutes (interview, March 9, 2017).

**Instructional logistics.** The students with the most difficulty received instructional lessons ranging from 20-30 minutes in length four days a week. On the fifth day, Julie completed progress monitoring assessments for necessary students. The small-group reading instruction occurred at a kidney table in the back of the room. Julie had an easel beside her where she would display materials aligned with her instruction. Each reading group was designated by an insect and the group needing the most support was called the *butterflies*. She typically conducted small-group instruction for students having the most difficulty as the first reading group except on days when the research schedule designated the group occur as the last reading group. Julie did not follow a written lesson plan during instruction nor did she record any anecdotal information during her instruction.

**Differences from other reading groups.** Several instructional differences surfaced between the reading group for students with the most difficulty and other reading groups. First, the students needing the most support received daily reading instruction; however, in order to meet with all groups each week, other reading groups only met with Julie twice weekly (interview, March 9, 2017). In addition, Julie stated the instructional lesson had a similar structure for all reading groups; however, differences existed for her students identified as having difficulty with reading in instructional strategies and comprehension. In the following dialogue, she first explained similarities between reading groups and then the differences:

Definitely the strategies...Definitely the comprehension part of it...It's definitely the theme you know? I like to...always start off the same way with taking a picture walk and building their background knowledge...you know maybe we're doing a different strategy you know...Each week you know. With a different group I may be doing different strategies. I may be asking harder retell questions...But those you know I do similar things with those groups. (interview, March 9, 2017)

As instruction progressed, Julie explained how the other reading groups no longer needed to work on strategies, and instead, the instructional focus with those groups was on crafting written comprehension responses (interview, April 21, 2017). Additionally, there were differences in the type of text used for instruction. First, she incorporated lower level text with the students who had more difficulty (interview, March 9, 2017). Second, for different reading groups, Julie established varying goals for the use of text. For the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading, she aimed to provide a variety of texts to read within each week in order to provide increased time in text. In contrast, for students who needed less support, she intended for them to interact with one book and focus on comprehension as stated in the dialogue below:

Julie: Now I know you haven't really seen this much but with my lower group I like to kind of give them more text where the – the higher groups I would use you know different texts – I would use the same text...for longer...Because I would – I would like for the you know the group that you watch – I like for them to get a chance to read different books [you know].

Researcher: [Yeah that's important.]

Julie: And you know you haven't really seen it but the beginning of the year I did it more...I – I would try to read a – a different book with them...at least two or three different books a week...We spend a lot more time now with our phonics and stuff...So I haven't been using as many books with them but at the beginning of the year I did because I wanted them to be exposed to as much text as they can...whereas my higher group you know we try to focus more on more on the comprehension...So I like for them to you know really dig deeper into a text. (interview, March 9, 2017)

This dialogue illustrates Julie's text-related intended goals but the difficulty she perceived with balancing other instructional needs. In the following section, I discuss in greater depth the instructional materials used during instruction in decoding strategies, comprehension, and phonics.

**Instructional materials.** Julie incorporated different materials to align with the various instructional purposes of each small-group lesson. She used materials to incorporate effective instruction in the areas of strategies, comprehension, and phonics. These materials are described in the following sections.

**Strategy instruction materials.** Since teaching decoding strategies was a significant focus in Julie's classroom, she used various materials to help students understand and learn strategies to determine unknown words. Julie had small visuals of different strategies she displayed on the easel in front of the small-group. When introducing, explaining, or reviewing a strategy, Julie shared the visual of the strategy. For example, she used a visual to teach the *read skip read* strategy in the following interaction:

Julie: See where the arrow is in the blue circle? Can you guys find it on your strategy cards? Okay. Do you remember what we said to do to use this strategy? It's down here honey. Okay. We did – we used this strategy. Last week you practiced using it. Do you remember what you do? Griffin?

Griffin: You skip the word then reread it.

Julie: You skip the word and the you reread the sentence. Very good. (transcription, April 4, 2017)

To further reinforce the strategies being taught, Julie provided the students with what she called “a strategy card” or a strategy bookmark which contained the names of different decoding strategies, visuals of the strategies, and explanations of the strategies. In addition to directing students to a focal strategy, Julie often provided the opportunity for students to use the card to review explanations of the strategies. For example, in one lesson Julie stated, “So let’s take a look at our strategy cards. What are some strategies you can use when you come to a word that you don’t know?” (transcription, March 23, 2017). Then, students stated and explained various strategies to implement. After using these cards in strategy instruction, the students also preferred to use them as a reference during their own reading as illustrated in the following dialogue:

Julie: Alright so. Do you guys want to keep these next to you [referring to strategy card bookmarks] just in case you wanna remember?

All: Yes! (transcription, April 4, 2017)

Julie characterized these strategy card bookmarks as an important support she provided in small-group instruction. She identified them as, “you know – the strategies – the different parts you know... Like giving them bookmarks that have the different parts on them” (interview, March 28, 2017). Furthermore, these bookmarks provided students with a reference during their own reading.

Similar to Emily, to explain and demonstrate individual strategies in six different lessons, Julie used word-solving strategy posters with a picture and a sentence describing the picture. Julie covered a word in the sentence and asked students to determine what word would make

sense in the sentence. Then, she uncovered the word and the students applied the focal strategy to determine the word. This instructional format is illustrated in the following example:

Julie: Everyone's eyes up here because Ms. X [Julie]'s gonna read you this sentence. And I have a word that's covered up [points to the word]. Now if I uncover it and you guys know what the word is please don't call it out okay? Because today we're gonna be working on using the strategy where we're gonna break the word apart and then we're gonna put the word back together.

Shawn: Like Humpty [Dumpty].

Julie: [Like Humpty] Dumpty okay? So. This sentence says *Here is a*.

Shawn: Blank.

All: Blank.

Julie: Okay?

All: He is working on a building.

Griffin: Huh!

Julie: Okay? So, let's think about...what word – first of all what word makes sense cause that's what we wanna do right? [Curry and Griffin are raising their hands.]

Griffin: I know it.

Julie: We tried this before okay? So, Ms. X[Julie]'s gonna uncover the word [takes off the sticky note]. Now this is a big long word. So [before you] before you read it we're gonna break it apart into these little chunks we know okay?

Shawn: Now we can break it.

Julie: So, let's take a look at this word. Is there any small part inside this word that you know? (transcription, February 23, 2017)

In addition to the posters, Julie also recorded sentences from the text on a whiteboard, and in a process similar to the instructional steps used with the posters, she covered up a word to model for students how to ascertain the word. The following quote illustrates Julie's request for students to use the strategy to discover the word. For example,

Now I want you think about this. Now I'm gonna read a sentence to you and I'm gonna pretend like I don't know what this word is. I covered it up just so you guys don't...in case you can figure it out. You might know what this word is but I want you to use this strategy so I covered it up okay? (transcription, March 28, 2017)

After students determined a possible word, she recorded the word and reread the sentence to ensure the intended word made sense.

*Connected text.* In addition to strategy instruction, Julie ensured students had ample time to read text during small-group lessons, were exposed to various types of text, and had opportunities to read texts from the lessons at home. Afforded these opportunities within small-group instruction, students understood the importance of reading connected text. In the same manner as Emily, Julie analyzed students' results on mCLASS TRC reading assessments to determine students' instructional reading levels and selected texts aligned with these levels for small-group instruction.

On several occasions, Julie described the text selection process as one of her biggest challenges associated with small-group instruction. First, a lack of effective resources existed as she concluded, "Sometimes we don't really have much. Like I don't really have that much available at their level. So sometimes I don't really have much choice" (interview, March 9, 2017). In her opinion, more leveled books existed for students in the early stages of reading development than for the needs of this particular group of students (interview, April 21, 2017). She reiterated this difficulty in another interview stating, "And then just trying to find books for them is always a challenge too...To be able to match like their – what they need to work on but then match their interests and thinking about all of those" (interview, March 28, 2017). In addition to limited texts from which to choose, an additional challenge was selecting texts matched to students' interests. She explained,

I mean I try to get things that are you know - that I think would be you know something that they [the students] really would like... You know like when I go to the book room, I try to pick out stuff that you know I think they would all enjoy. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

Finally, she also selected text based on whether the content provided opportunities for students to apply focal strategies. She described this process in the following quote:

And also, you know I always try to look for you know like a – a book that might have a word in it that if I'm focusing on a certain strategy make sure that I can pick out you know a page or a line in that book that would help them use that strategy. (interview, March 9, 2017)

**Comprehension materials.** In Julie's small-group instruction, comprehension was a focus, especially within lessons observed during the later portion of the study. Julie wanted students to understand the importance of determining meaning from text in addition to accurately decoding words and explicitly shared this message with students in the following statement: "So reading the words is really important but it's also really important that we understand okay?" (transcription, March 14, 2017). To teach comprehension, Julie used a variety of instructional formats. First, she used a K-W-L chart in which one records ideas of what students know about a topic, what they wonder, and what they learned. In addition, students completed two story element worksheets and one question stem activity. During two small-group instructional lessons, Julie used the K-W-L chart to reinforce students' learning from an informational text about rivers. Julie explains this process to her students by stating:

Ms. X [Julie] has the K-W-L chart. And on here we're gonna make a list about what we know. So the K stands for know. So what do we already know about rivers?

Shawn: Know.

Julie: What do we want to know about rivers? And then after we read the book we're gonna talk about what we learned from reading this book. (transcription, March 1, 2017)

To work on story elements, one sheet was glued into each student's reading response journal.

There were four tabs, each with a picture and a question word such as *who* or *when*. Students recorded written answers to these questions (see Figure 4.2).

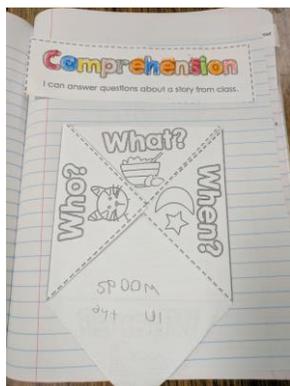


Figure 4.2 Comprehension story element activity with wh question stems.

Julie explained the process using the first question of *who* in the following conversation:

Julie: So we are going to open up the section that says who and we're gonna leave the rest of it closed. So you're just gonna open it like this [shows them with paper]?

Griffin: Does it have to be closed?

Skylar: Can I please have a pencil? [hands him his journal back]

Julie: And you are going to – we're gonna put in here who this story is about. So who are the characters in this story? (transcription, April 5, 2017)

During another subsequent lesson centered on story elements, students filled out a worksheet to answer questions about the different story elements including the setting, the characters, and the events (see Figure 4.3).

The form contains the following handwritten text:

- Title:** henny's big present
- Author:** [blank]
- Setting:** at their home henny's
- Characters:** val, kevin, henny's dad, mom
- Beginning:** they see a present they are guessing what
- Middle:** after they ask his dad can will they open the present
- End:** henny's dad open his present.

Figure 4.3 Story element comprehension activity.

Julie provided opportunities for the students to practice written comprehension responses.

First, she explained the rubric students encountered in their work with the literacy coach

addressing how to score responses:

Julie: So what we're gonna do today is I am going to give you guys your rubrics okay? So remember we want to get a 3 right? So when you get a 3 on [your rubric] – I'm gonna read it to you. [Julie passes out the rubrics.]

Griffin: [Ow!]

Julie: I know it's a lot of words right? But when you get a 3 that means you underline the important parts in the question umkay? You start [your answer] with words from the question right?

Shawn: [With the question.]

Julie: So that's like writing in a complete sentence. You use some of those important words. And then you use details from the story to support your answer okay? (transcription, March 30, 2017)

Then, she explained how she placed a label with a question stem in everyone's journal (see Figure 4.4) and how the task involved writing one fact they learned about birds from the book *Many Kinds of Birds* (Emerson, 2004). She stated:

Okay so it says – Write one fact you learned about birds [some join in the reading with her halfway through]. So when you're gonna to answer this what words are important in this question that we need to underline. (transcription, April 5, 2017)

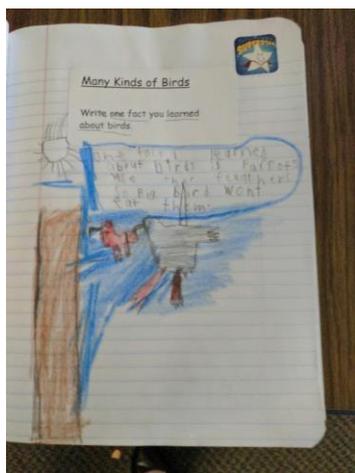


Figure 4.4 Comprehension activity in which students responded to written prompts.

The students discussed what essential words to include in the response and the need to reference the text. Even though Julie discussed and provided directions, she did not explicitly model the steps of how to provide a written answer for students.

**Phonics materials.** Although not a primary focus, students did engage in phonics instruction. Most often students received words cards used to build dictated words, which featured the word patterns taught in whole-group word work instruction. The following excerpt provides an example of how Julie asked students to build the dictated words:

Alright guys now I would like for you to change “goat” into “goal”. Like when I play soccer I score a goal. G - let’s finger tap it [finger taps the word and stretches it out]. Alright which spelling did you use? [Which] which spelling of “o” did you use Griffin? Did you use “oa” or “ow” [points to easel]? (transcription, February 21, 2017)

To reinforce patterns discussed in whole-group Letterland instruction, Julie often had a small pocket chart on the easel in which she displayed cards with the focus sounds. Students received word cards and one at a time, they read the word, tapped out the sounds, and then determined where Julie should position the word on the chart. The following interaction describes this activity:

Julie: Okay. Rose?

Rose: Bird.

Julie: Good job. Everybody look up here at this word [shows word]. Let’s finger tap it. Everybody. Shawn honey focus up here please.

All: B-irrr-d. Bird. [show on fingers].

Julie: Okay we...who did this one – Rose [laugh]. Er – I mean *ur* or *ir*?

Rose: Ir.

Julie: Ir [places under *ir* in pocket chart]]. We have to keep reading these words and keep remembering so they – they look right to us okay? (transcription, April 3, 2017)

In addition to sorting on the easel, Julie also used materials from Letterland to differentiate between sounds. During one lesson, the students sorted *ed* words on a word mat using the categories of the *t*, *d*, and *ed* sounds, as illustrated in the following dialogue:

Julie: Alright Rose.

Rose: Played [speaks softly].

Julie: What is it?

Rose: Played.

Julie: Pl-ay-ed. What’s the base word?

Rose: Play.

Julie: Play. Very good and you added the ed ending to get played. What sound does the ed ending make?

Rose: Ed.

Julie: Okay did you say play-ed [with ed sound]? You said play-d [with d sound]. So what sound does that ed make? The d sound. D. Can you put it on here? Okay remember this makes the *ed*. It's not play-ed. It's play-d. [She moves it to the d column.] Kay good job. (transcription, March 13, 2017)

Julie also explained how posters on the wall provided students with a visual of different word patterns. For example, a picture of a finger with a cut on it was displayed and the *ow* and *ou* letters were written underneath. She shared,

Okay I want you – I wanted to tell you what this *ou* makes like an *ow* sound. Okay and if you look up at the finger – remember when you get hurt [you say] *ow* umkay? So remember that – look up at the finger when you come to this word. (transcription, March 13, 2017)

Julie also referred to these visuals during students' reading. For example, Julie asked Curry to reference this same visual as he tried to figure out the word *ouch* in his text. She stated, "Ou. Look up here [points to posters on the wall]. Underneath the finger [makes a finger gesture]. Remember what that o says?" (transcription, February 23, 2017).

Similar to the strategy cards, Julie gave the students vowel bookmark consisting of each vowel listed with a word and picture of something containing each vowel. The following example illustrates students' use of the visual as they learned about words with r-controlled vowels:

Julie: I want you to point to it as you're saying it. [Points to er on the vowel card. Each student has a vowel card next to them.] Right? This week we're learning about the "ir" sound. What sound does it make?

Curry: Er.

Julie: Bird. I-r i-r.

All: Err. Err. Err. (transcription, April 3, 2017)

The students used these cards as they read words spelled with either *ir* or *ur* r-controlled vowels.

In summary, Julie focused heavily on strategy instruction and comprehension with the students she identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Students read leveled texts aligned with their instructional reading levels. Julie taught decoding strategies through cloze procedures with posters and sentences from the text. Additionally, Julie incorporated the use of visuals as a scaffold to support students' ability to decode. Lastly, students participated in several different comprehension activities designed to focus on story elements and information learned from text.

Similarities and differences existed within the small-group instruction designed for the students needing the most support in each of the two focal first-grade classrooms. First, both teachers implemented homogeneous grouping (Hiebert, 1983; Slavin, 1987) based on the students' mCLASS and TRC literacy assessments results and students' instructional reading levels. The students received instruction four days a week and completed progress monitoring activities on the fifth day. Both teachers explained how this focal reading group differed from other reading groups in each classroom. The teachers selected lower level texts, focused on different instructional goals, and emphasized comprehension instruction less than in other reading groups. Both teachers experienced difficulties finding texts aligned with student reading levels and their interests. However, Emily implemented more materials for phonics whereas Julie integrated more materials for strategy and comprehension instruction.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, to better understand the findings, I presented a detailed description of the instructional contexts in both Emily and Julie's first-grade classrooms in addition to their pedagogical approaches. To describe the context, I shared information about the small-group instructional format, differences from other reading groups, and instructional materials used to enact instructional goals. Emily's small-group reading instruction for students exhibiting the most difficulty focused on phonics-based instruction and, in contrast, Julie's small-group instruction centered on learning decoding strategies and comprehending text. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings of each case in relation to the research questions that guided this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

*“Scaffolding characterizes the social interaction among students and teachers that precedes internalization of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions deemed valuable and useful for learners” (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997, p. 9).*

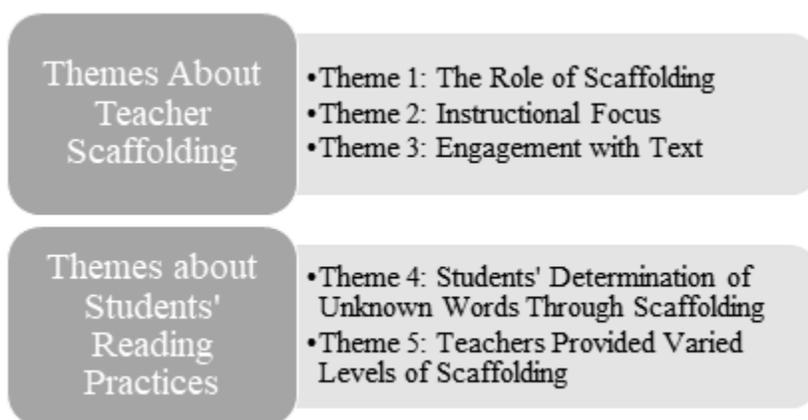
#### Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I present the findings from a qualitative case study examining teacher scaffolding and student responses in two first-grade classrooms during small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading. I collected data (audio and video recordings of observed instruction, field notes, interviews, and artifacts) from two months of observations in two first-grade classrooms and analyzed these data through my application of a social constructivist lens. Using Miles and colleagues’ (2014) method of First and Second cycle coding, the data were collapsed into two categories: 1) types of teacher scaffolding and 2) how characteristics of the scaffolding supported students’ development of reading practices. The themes that emerged from each category are described in detail and answer the following guiding research questions for this study:

- 1) How do first-grade teachers scaffold within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading?
- 2) How does teacher scaffolding support students’ reading during small-group instruction?

The first three themes I present describe how teachers enacted scaffolding during small-group instruction with students whom they identified as having the most difficulty with reading. The final two themes addressed how students determined unknown words through teacher scaffolding and the need for varied levels of teacher support in students’ word solving process

(see Figure 5.1). After each presentation of the theme, a cross-case analysis is shared. Of note, I preface the cross-case analyses with the statement that the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading in each classroom had differing literacy practices and needs. Based on students' mCLASS and TRC assessment data, the students in Julie's classroom read more difficult books than the students in Emily's classroom. As a result, the characteristics of unknown words differed in texts encountered by students. In Chapter 6, the findings are discussed within the context of the existing literature.



*Figure 5.1* Overall thematic findings.

### **Theme 1: The Role of Scaffolding**

Both first-grade teachers implemented the following six forms of scaffolding within their small-group reading instruction for students identified as having difficulty with reading: affirming, explaining, modeling, prompting, questioning, and telling (see Table 5.1). Some of the scaffolds align with those determined in previous research (Ankrum et al., 2014; Rodgers, 2004; Rodgers et al., 2016; Silliman et al., 2000) whereas others are forms that emerged from the data. In the next section, I define, describe, and provide examples of each form of scaffolding.

## Defining Scaffolding Forms

Scaffolding in the form of *affirming* denoted providing comments or thoughts about how students executed a specific action or stated a specific word while reading. Emily’s comment to her student Skylar “I really like that here you made two mistakes in the sentence but you corrected them both. Umkay? Good job.” (transcription April 3, 2017) illustrates the affirming form of scaffolding. Emily affirmed the student’s ability to monitor his reading and self-correct his own errors. *Explaining* referred to describing something for the student, such as the teacher describing a strategy of how to figure out unknown words (Ankrum et al., 2014; Silliman et al., 2000). To explain the strategy of *read skip read*, Julie stated:

This is called read skip read so when you come to a word you don’t know sometimes if we skip it and you finish the sentence you can go back to it and you can try to figure out what the word is cause sometimes reading the rest of the sentence might help you figure out what that – what that word is okay? (transcription, March 28, 2017)

Scaffolding also occurred in the form of *modeling* in which teachers showed students how to do something (Ankrum et al., 2014; Silliman et al., 2000). Julie provided an example of modeling when she segmented the sounds in *sighed* aloud for Rose, “s-i-ed” (transcription, March 23, 2017), and then Rose repeated the word correctly. *Prompting* designated asking students in a suggestive manner to perform an action (adapted from Rodgers et al., 2016). Emily prompted Skylar when stating “Okay. Let’s read this again” (transcription, March 13, 2017), thus suggesting Skylar should reread the section of text.

The teachers used *questioning* as another form of scaffolding in which they asked students questions related to a concept, such as the meaning of the word, or a strategy (Rodgers, 2004). To illustrate, Lucy tried to figure out the word *weather* and Emily asked, “Have you ever seen this on tv or on the computer?” (transcription, February 28, 2017). Emily hoped that providing an understanding of where the student might have encountered the word would enable

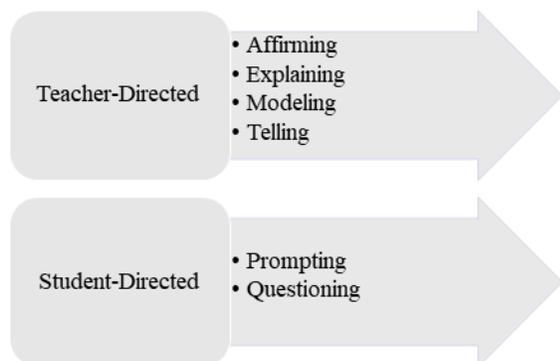
her to determine the word. *Telling*, the last form of scaffolding, indicated teachers giving a directive to students as to how to act or providing the answer (Ankrum et al., 2014; Rodgers, 2004). When Lucy did not remember the word for *train* and instead stated *choo-choo*, Emily told Lucy the word *train* (transcription, March 14, 2017).

Table 5.1

*Teacher Scaffolding Forms.*

Scaffolding Form	Definition	Examples
Affirming	Providing comments or thoughts about how students executed a specific action or stated a specific word	I really like that here you made two mistakes in the sentence but you corrected them both.
Explaining	Describing something for the student	This is called read skip read so when you come to a word you don't know sometimes if we skip it and you finish the sentence you can go back to it and you can try to figure out what the word is
Modeling	Showing students how to do something	Segmenting the sounds in <i>sighed</i> as s-i-ed.
Prompting	Asking students in a suggestive manner to perform an action	Okay. Let's read this again.
Questioning	Asking questions related to a concept or strategy	Have you ever seen this on tv or on the computer?
Telling	Directing students to perform an action or providing the answer	Telling the student the word for <i>choo-choo</i> is <i>train</i> .

Within these six forms of scaffolding, differences exist in whether the teacher or the student executes the actions. Therefore, I differentiate these scaffolds into the two categories of *teacher-directed* and *student-directed* (see Figure 5.2). Teacher-directed scaffolds are those in which the teacher completes the work and consist of the forms of affirming, explaining, modeling, and telling. When implementing these scaffolding forms, the teacher provides information to the student. In contrast, student-directed scaffolds are those in which students complete the subsequent action and include the forms of prompting and questioning. Using these scaffolding forms, the teacher directs or questions students, thus requiring the students to respond.



*Figure 5.2* Teacher and student-directed scaffolding forms.

Both Emily and Julie implemented each of the six different scaffolding forms within their small-group reading instruction. However, the frequency of and reasoning for implementing the scaffolding type varied based on the teacher. In the following section, I describe Emily's scaffolding and the subthemes of forms, directedness, and responsiveness to students' needs.

### Emily's Scaffolding Forms

When Emily engaged in scaffolding with her students, she implemented each of the six forms of scaffolding (see Table 5.1) within small-group instruction. The three specific forms of affirming, prompting, and questioning occurred most frequently. In using these scaffolding forms, Emily encouraged student actions rather than positioning students as observers of methods to figure out the word, thus providing students more opportunities to discover unknown words. The following section describes in detail how she implemented these forms within her reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading.

Table 5.2

#### *Scaffolding Forms in Emily's Classroom.*

Scaffolding Form	Quantity	Percentage Used
Prompting	74	28%
Questioning	53	20%
Affirming	51	19%
Telling	42	16%
Explaining	28	11%
Modeling	16	6%
Total	264	100%

During small-group instruction, Emily implemented specific scaffolds more often than others, which included prompting, questioning, and affirming. Prompting occurred most often in the form of asking students to reread a word or a portion of text to hopefully determine the word. Emily questioned students most frequently about the meaning of the word or the context. Finally,

affirming occurred most often in the use of phonics and reading the actual word. In the sections below, I describe in detail the methods in which Emily implemented these forms of scaffolding.

**Prompting.** Emily used the scaffolding form of prompting most frequently with her students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. This enabled Emily to suggest the next move to students in figuring out unknown words. Emily primarily prompted students to go back and reread which provided students with additional opportunities to fix any incorrect words prior to receiving further scaffolding. This form of scaffolding is illustrated with the following example in which after Rex read the word *thump* rather than the actual word of *thud* in the book *The Best Class Trip* (Burgess, 2004), Emily prompted him to return to the word. Although Rex was unable to determine the correct word with the prompting scaffold, Emily recognized prompting provided him the opportunity to attempt to read the word correctly. After Emily employed specific questioning about the final sound in the word, Rex realized the word ended with a *d* sound and stated the word *thud* (transcription, March 22, 2017). Another form of prompting for rereading occurred after the student self-corrected or learned the correct word because Emily wanted to ensure students read the newly determined words correctly in context. For example, as Lucy read the book *The Best Class Trip Ever* (Burgess, 2004), she had to figure out the word *tire*. After doing so together, Emily asked her to reread the sentence with the correct word as stated in the following scaffold segment:

Lucy: Tire.

Emily: Good. Does it have a flat tire?

Lucy: Yes.

Emily: Okay so can you start that sentence again?

Lucy: The bus has a flat tire said Mrs. Coats – Cots.

Emily: Coats. You were right. (transcription, March 22, 2017)

Emily's prompting for Lucy to reread enabled Lucy to hear the actual word in context in addition to having the opportunity to read the sentence accurately.

**Questioning.** Emily routinely used the scaffold of questioning during students' text reading. Overall, Emily often questioned the students rather than telling them information. She appeared to intend for students to engage in discovering words on their own rather than providing the answers to students. Emily conducted questioning related to the following three areas: the meaning of the word, word recognition, and the use of phonics to decode unknown words. Emily focused most of her questioning on the meaning of words and using semantic cues to ascertain an unknown word. When Lucy read the book *Measuring Time* (Burton, French, & Jones, 1999), Emily asked, "Okay. What is it called when sunny, cold, hot, and rainy. What's all of that called?" (transcription, March 7, 2017). By asking this question, Emily hoped Lucy would determine the unknown word *weather* independently. Sometimes this form of questioning led students to read the word correctly, although sometimes students needed additional support. In this interaction, Lucy required scaffolding in other formats to determine the actual word *weather*.

Another form of questioning for meaning entailed asking whether a word made sense in context. Emily encouraged students to use semantic cues to determine whether possible words were accurate. Emily noticed a particular student, Skylar, had difficulty independently determining whether a word made sense in the context of the sentence. She explained, "You know – stopping them when – Skylar especially will keep reading...when he says a word wrong. You know going back - does that make sense?" (interview, March 27, 2017). Emily specifically recognized this area of need and implemented the scaffold of questioning for meaning to help

Skylar build this ability. The following is an example of Emily’s scaffolding for Skylar during one-on-one instruction:

Emily: I wanna show you what you said. We have to use a light to see the ocean deep in the water.

Skylar: Umhum.

Emily: Does that make sense – to see the ocean deep in the water?

Skylar: I don’t know. No?

Emily: The water is the ocean.

Skylar: Oh.

Emily: So what – let’s use the photograph to help us. What word would make sense? This is what we practice when we do these [points to the strategy posters they have used before]? What word would make sense – We have to use a light to see the...?  
(transcription, April 3, 2017)

Emily wanted to emphasize the importance of reflecting on meaning rather than using phonics to decode unfamiliar words.

**Affirming.** Emily affirmed students’ responses after they read words accurately or provided further feedback when students read words inaccurately. She provided affirmation of students’ ability to read fluently, to use phonics to decode words, to recognize words, to implement decoding strategies, and to understand the meaning of words or portions of text. I share several examples of these types of affirmation below.

*Fluency.* Emily provided affirmation of students’ fluency while reading text, specifically related to their attention to punctuation and prosody because she provided explicit instruction in these two areas. When students read the text *Numbers Are Everywhere* (Burton, French, & Jones, 1999), Emily affirmed their attention to the punctuation signaling a statement or a question. For example, Rex read the text “Here is the weather. Can you find the numbers? Do you know what

they are for?” Afterwards, Emily replied, “I love how you did that question because you remembered to make your voice go up. For? It sounded really good” (transcription, February 28, 2017). On another occasion, she praised the whole reading group regarding their attention to punctuation while reading *Numbers Are Everywhere*. She stated, “I was proud of how you made your questions sound like questions” (transcription, March 1, 2017). During subsequent reading lessons, Emily continued to provide feedback on students’ attention to punctuation. After Rex read a sentence from the text *Ocean Animals* (Burton, French, & Jones, 1999), “When we go to the ocean some of the –”, Emily responded:

Do you see how that’s where the sound started and that’s where it ended? So when you see that period you wanna stop and like do a break okay? It kind of sounded like you stopped over here and you went ocean some. (transcription, April 3, 2017)

Upon hearing this feedback, Rex reread the text and correctly attended to the punctuation.

*Phonics.* Emily affirmed students’ use of graphophonemic cues to decode words. Emily instructed students about how to attend to the first letter in the word. Emily confirmed Rex’s use of the first letter to correct the word from *monitor* to *meter*. However, because attending to the first letter did not enable him to decode the word, Emily also encouraged Rex to attend to other letters in the word. She stated,

Okay so I like that when you guessed monitor m-m-m [monitor monitor] and the ending sound is the same as monitor. Monitor [stretches out the ending sound]. So I see why you guessed monitor. But when we go back and look at the letters you figured out it’s really meter didn’t you. (transcription, March 1, 2017)

In addition to affirming the correct use of phonics, she also provided feedback when students did not use letter-sound correspondences correctly to decode a word. For example, when Skylar tried to determine the word *very*, he stated the word as *erv* and Emily indicated his inaccurate sequencing of sounds by stating, “You’re putting like the e on the front.” Then, she told him the

sounds of the letters made *ver*. With this support, Skylar correctly read the word *very* (transcription, March 22, 2017).

**Less frequent scaffolding forms.** Emily used the scaffolding forms of telling, explaining, and modeling less often. These forms of scaffolding generally occurred in the later scaffold segments, after other forms of scaffolding were implemented. In other words, often these forms of scaffolds were last resorts for the students to determine the word. Emily provided the scaffold *telling* in relation to the word, the strategy to use, or the phonics rule to implement. For example, as Skylar attempted to read *dinner* in the book *Measuring Time* (Burton et al., 1999), she told Skylar to “get your mouth ready” when he tried to solve the word dinner and told him to “look at the picture” to figure out the word *doctor* (transcription, March 13, 2017). In addition to telling, she sometimes engaged in *explaining* the meaning of the word, the context, or the strategy to use. After Rex was confused about the title of the text *Measuring Time* (Burton et al., 1999), reading it as *Morning Time*, Emily corrected him by stating the title was *Measuring Time*. She explained that “Measure is a word that means to figure out how much something is” (transcription, March 7, 2017). During a specific lesson, she explained to the whole reading group how Skylar used two separate strategies to determine unknown words:

Emily: And Skylar and I used the strategy we’ve been practicing this one a lot and I actually had [one ready to practice today].

Skylar: [I want to do it again.] I want to.

Emily: But he came to a word that was pretty hard so he looked at the photograph right?

Skylar: Umhum.

Emily: And tried to figure out what could that word be?

Rex: Me [too]!

Emily: [And] once came up with an answer we put it in to see if it made sense.  
(transcription, April 3, 2017)

Although this did not occur often, Emily explicitly explained how Skylar used known strategies to determine the word. Finally, *modeling* occurred in the form of modeling blending and segmenting of words. After she told Lucy a phonics rule and asked her a question about the rule, Lucy attempted to determine the word *tire* by stating *train* and *tried*. Noting her inability to figure out the word with these prompts, Emily modeled how to sound out the word by stating “t-i-r and that’s silent [referring to the *e* in the word]”. Lucy repeated the sounds independently, Lucy and Emily chorally segmented the sounds, and finally Lucy read the word correctly as *tire* (transcription, March 22, 2017).

### **Emily’s Type of Scaffolding Directedness**

As explained earlier, I classified scaffolding forms into the two categories of teacher-directed and student-directed (see Figure 5.2). Teacher-directed scaffolds represent the teacher performing the action and taking ownership for the learning. However, student-directed scaffolds enable the student to act and thus have more responsibility in determining the word. Emily intentionally used the scaffolding forms of prompting, questioning, and affirming most frequently as these forms were student-directed. In other words, Emily intended for students to actively engage in determining the unknown word rather than the teacher doing more of this work.

Less frequently, Emily used forms of teacher-directed scaffolding in the forms of telling, explaining, and modeling. She implemented these forms only after other student-directed scaffolding forms did not result in students’ determination of words. Therefore, Emily intended for the teacher to do less of the work and the student to do more. However, the need to implement teacher-directed scaffolding forms placed the responsibility back on the teacher and

served as a directive form of scaffolding rather than a facilitation of students' independent determination of the unknown word.

### **Emily's Responsiveness to Student Needs**

In addition to determining the forms of scaffolding used and the level of directedness, I analyzed individual scaffold segments to determine whether the teacher scaffolding aligned with the student needs or needs of the particular word. Emily provided scaffolding responsive to the overall reading needs of the students. She implemented more semantic-based scaffolds in alignment with her belief that students needed to focus on meaning and monitor whether the words they chose made sense. Emily wanted to support students' development of a balanced cueing system between graphophonemic and semantic cues. Emily stated Skylar had difficulty independently determining whether a word was accurate based on semantics in the following quote, "You know – stopping them when – Skylar especially will keep reading...when he says a word wrong. You know going back - [does that] make sense?" (interview, March 27, 2017). Emily specifically recognized semantic cues as an area of need and implemented the scaffold of questioning for meaning to build this ability. In the earlier example of Skylar experiencing difficulty figuring out the word *dinner*, she implemented 11 meaning-based scaffolds in order for him to determine the word. Despite this effort, Skylar only discovered the word when Emily finally told him the graphophonemic cue to sound out the word. These scaffolded sequences addressed Emily's identification of Skylar's overall need to focus on meaning. Emily focused on this overall reading practice goal rather than on Skylar's needs in the moment. In this prior example, Skylar struggled to use meaning, yet Emily persisted in implemented semantic-based scaffolds. However, it may have been more effective to implement another scaffold earlier in the sequence to enable Skylar to ascertain the actual word. This same scaffolding approach also

occurred when Lucy tried to determine the word *weather* and Emily continued to implement questions or explanations based on meaning. Only Emily sharing the graphophonemic scaffolds of using the vowel sound and modeling how to blend and segment led to Lucy's recognition of the word. If Emily had implemented other forms of scaffolding earlier, Lucy may have figured out the word sooner.

Overall, Emily selected the forms of prompting, questioning, and affirming, while she less frequently selected telling, explaining, and modeling. This pattern illustrated the use of more student-directed scaffolds rather than teacher-directed scaffolds to support students' determination of unfamiliar words. In addition, within these overall scaffolding categories, Emily often implemented phonics-based scaffolds which aligned with the focus of small-group instruction for her students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. In the next sections, I provide detailed descriptions of the forms of scaffolding, the level of directedness, and responsiveness to students enacted by Julie.

### **Julie's Scaffolding Forms**

Within small-group instruction, Julie used the same six forms of scaffolding as Emily. However, she used the scaffolding forms of questioning, telling, explaining, and affirming most frequently. The forms of modeling and prompting occurred much less often (see Table 5.3). Many of Julie's scaffolds focused on the use of decoding strategies to determine unknown words. According to Julie, teaching students how to implement decoding strategies reflected a direct instructional focus which contrasted with other reading groups in which students independently implemented these strategies (interview, March 28, 2017). Julie's use of different scaffolding forms is presented in detail below.

Table 5.3

*Scaffolding Forms in Julie's Classroom.*

Scaffolding Form	Quantity	Percentage Used
Questioning	190	36%
Telling	97	18%
Explaining	92	17%
Affirming	91	17%
Modeling	29	6%
Prompting	29	6%
Total	528	100%

**Questioning.** Overall, Julie used the scaffold of questioning most often. She questioned students about decoding strategies, phonics rules, meaning of words, and word recognition. Since this scaffolding form occurred twice as often as others, I provide detailed examples of questioning related to the four specific areas mentioned above.

**Strategies.** Julie's small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading focused on learning and implementing decoding strategies. As a result, Julie's questioning most frequently addressed the use of specific strategies to decode words. Julie questioned students during small-group instruction for both the whole reading group and individual reading.

Julie asked questions to support students in learning new strategies or using approaches previously taught during instruction with the entire reading group. By discussing strategies over the course of many lessons, Julie ensured students understood how to apply them to decode words. For example,

Julie: And what do we do when we use the Humpty Dumpty strategy?

Griffin: We...break ap – break apart – break the word apart and then we put it back altogether.

Julie: That's right. We break the word apart and then we put it together. I wanna see you using that strategy. (transcription, March 23, 2017)

Several small-group lessons focused specifically on implementing strategies and began with students reviewing techniques to determine unknown words and understand the text. During one lesson, Julie passed out bookmarks with all the strategies taught and stated “So let's take a look at our strategy cards. What are some strategies you can use when you come to a word that you don't know?” (transcription, March 23, 2017). Students shared methods such as get your mouth ready, look for known chunks, Humpty Dumpty, and tapping out the sounds in words. Within many small-group reading lessons, Julie asked the students to share known strategies. This consistent focus on discussing approaches across small-group lessons enabled students to repeatedly hear the strategy vocabulary, explain the actions of the strategy, and implement these strategies in their reading.

Similar to the questions about strategies posed to the whole reading group, Julie asked questions about strategies when working with students individually. When Rose got stuck on the word *leaves*, Julie questioned Rose about which decoding strategy could help her determine the word as illustrated below:

Rose: Then his mane had (too) lots of

[ :07 wait time ]

Julie: What strategies can you use to figure out that word?

Rose: Ah.

[ :05 wait time ]

Julie: I know we've learned so many. Can you look for a chunk you know in this word?

Rose: Get your mouth ready.

Julie: Okay we can get our mouth ready. So get your mouth ready.

Rose and Julie: L. (transcription, March 14, 2017)

In this interaction, Julie scaffolded first with more general questioning about what strategies Rose could use to determine the word. Then, she provided Rose with wait time to determine the strategy and finally, she questioned her about how to use a specific strategy. Although ultimately Rose was unable to figure out the word, Julie provided Rose the opportunity to determine what strategy to use.

Scaffolding in the form of questioning also related to the individual steps of how to apply strategies during reading. When Rose got stuck on the word *river*, Julie asked questions about how to break the word apart and how to find known chunks in the word. This is illustrated in the following scaffold segment:

Julie: Let's break this word apart okay? So if you cover up this what does that part say [covers up part of the word]?

Rose: Riv.

Julie: Okay. So you have riv. What's that part?

Rose: Er.

Julie: Okay. Can you put that together?

Rose: River. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

Due to Julie's scaffolded questioning of the steps for the strategy of breaking the word apart and putting it back together, Rose determined the word *river* which originally she did not recognize independently.

**Phonics.** In addition to questioning about strategies, Julie provided questions about applying different phonics rules to decode words. In the book, *Cliff Can't Come* (Martin, 2003), Griffin had difficulty reading the character's name, *Mrs. Lane*. Julie questioned him about the Letterland story entitled magic e designed to enable students to recall the long vowels sounds in words. In this story, magic e shoots sparks back to the vowel which creates a long vowel sound.

Julie: Well what's – you see the word an but do you remember about magic e. What does magic e do?

Griffin: Does [:03 wait time] Lane – lane.

Julie [Nods.] Mrs. Lane. Good job. What does that magic e do to the vowel?

Griffin: It means (um) – a.

Julie: It makes the a say what?

Griffin: a [short sound] I mean I mean [covers his face] A.

Julie: Yes the magic e - the magic e turns the short a sound a into the long a sound a right? So this is Lane. Good job. (transcription, March 22, 2017)

She asked questions about sounds or patterns that students learned as a method of decoding words. When Rose experienced difficulty reading the word *anymore*, Julie questioned her about the pattern in the word by asking “What does the chunk an – what sound does that make?” (transcription, March 23, 2017). Rose produced the correct sound and eventually read the whole word correctly.

**Meaning.** Furthermore, Julie emphasized meaning when providing support to students as they read individually. If a student was unsure of a word and possibly the meaning, Julie asked about the meaning of the word. For example, Julie and Griffin discussed the meaning of *wig* as Griffin read *The Mixed Up Wigs* (Fairbrother, 2004) aloud to Julie:

Julie: A wig. That's right. Do you know [what a wig is]?

Griffin: [Laughs.]

Rose: I know what it is.

Julie: You know what a wig is?

Griffin: No?

Julie: A wig is like something – it’s hair that you [can put on your head] that makes that – that might look different from your real hair. Or sometimes if you don’t have hair you can put a wig on. Okay?

Griffin: Yeah!

Julie: ...So that’s what a wig is. It’s just like fake hair that you can put on and take off okay? I want – I wonder why he got a wig? (transcription, March 14, 2017)

Julie incorporated discussion about word meanings to ensure that the student was able to understand what happened in the text.

**Word Recognition.** A final form of questioning Julie used involved asking students to accurately identify words in text. For example, Julie questioned students about a specific word during the introduction to a strategy or to the text. “Who thinks they can figure out what word this is?” She would also ask students to identify a word when they hesitated to attempt the word on their own. She asked Rose “And then what’s this word?” when she was not sure of the *boat* in the word *riverboat* (transcription February 23, 2017). This form of questioning provided the student with an additional opportunity to review and determine the actual word.

**Telling.** Another form in which Julie scaffolded involved telling students something to enable determination of the word such as which strategies to use to figure out the word, the actual word, and the phonics rules to incorporate in decoding. The decoding strategies Julie told students to use aligned with those explicitly taught during small-group instruction. An example of stating the use of a particular strategy occurred in the following interaction when Griffin

paused at an unfamiliar word in the book *Rivers* (Michaels, 2002) and Julie supported him by telling the strategy:

Griffin: Some rivers get water then ice –

Julie: Get your mouth ready wh –

Griffin: When?

Julie: [Nods] When. That's right you said then. But remember to get your mouth ready when you see the wh the wh. So wh. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

Julie believed telling students the strategy to use and decode the words was a successful support she provided to students during small-group reading instruction. She felt that stating the strategy was more helpful than just stating the word for them. Julie hoped that eventually students would become independent in determining necessary strategies to implement during reading (interview, April 4, 2017).

When stating the strategies to use, Julie incorporated the same language that she integrated during explicit instruction on applying decoding strategies. When she taught strategies, Julie stated a specific name for the strategy and provided a visual to represent the action. She incorporated this language into her requests for students to use strategies as they read. During Shawn's reading of *Cliff Can't Come* (Martin, 2003), she told him to use the *Humpty Dumpty* strategy "Let's bring – let's use Humpty Dumpty and break it apart. So you said the 'st' blend. Now think about what that sound is?" (transcription, March 23, 2017). Shawn still needed additional assistance with phonics rules but eventually he determined the word *state* in the sentence.

In addition to telling strategies to use, she often told students the actual words on the page or used the secondary cue (Cole, 2006) of stating related phonics rules. Rose did not read the word *wasn't* accurately and Julie commented, "What's that word? Was. This word is *wasn't* and

it's the same thing as saying was not. This wasn't" (transcription, March 23, 2017). After stating the word, Rose repeated the phrase correctly. Julie only stated the word after students continued to experience difficulty decoding the word as illustrated in this example of determining the word *always*:

Rose: But his –

Julie: Umhum. Can you break apart this word? ...Let's break this word apart okay? What's that word?

Rose: A.

Julie: Okay. There's another ending - the s. What's this word?

Rose: Way.

Julie: Okay. Umhum. [A]ways.

Rose: [Way.] Always got stuck in the trees. (transcription, March 14, 2017)

Although Julie questioned the student about the proper strategy to use, she also eventually told the word. In this specific scaffold segment, she did not allow Rose the opportunity to blend word parts prior to telling the actual word. Finally, Julie often told students phonics rules to incorporate while decoding the unknown word. For example, she told Shawn "Yes the magic e turns the short a sound a into the long a sound a right? So this is *Lane*" (transcription, March 14, 2017).

**Explaining.** Julie frequently incorporated explanations in two specific forms during her instruction. She explained strategies she wanted students to use when decoding unknown words and explained the meaning of the words to students. During the introduction of the *Humpty Dumpty* strategy, Julie explicitly identified the steps of how to use the strategy in the following exchange:

Julie: So what we're gonna do when we come to a word we don't know is we're going to

use the Humpty Dumpty strategy {points to the card} and we're going to [um] look for chunks we know and we're gonna try and break apart the [words into] the different chunks.

Shawn: [Like]

Julie: [Okay and even] though Humpty Dumpty thought they couldn't put him together again in that little saying we're gonna put that word back together [brings hands together] again [okay]. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

Furthermore, Julie explained when words did not incorporate typical patterns. When Rose tried to decode the word *against* in the book *Cliff Can't Come* (Martin, 2003), Julie stated the word and how parts of the word aligned with known patterns in other words, as illustrated below:

See – see how this word doesn't have the st [points to the words]? See how? So this word is just again. And that's kind of tricky cause you know what it doesn't follow that a sound when we say it right? We don't really do that a. A-gain. A-gain. So it's kind of tricky. (transcription, March 23, 2017)

When students read individually to Julie, she explained the meaning of words. After Shawn decoded the word *lantern* in the text *Cliff Can't Come* (Martin, 2003), Julie clarified the word's meaning:

Julie: Do you know what a lantern is?

Shawn: Umhum.

Julie: [When you go camping]

Shawn: [Um.] You hold the thing by the handle.

Julie: Umhum.

Shawn: And you – And you have a lit – little light and then you have a [lantern].

Julie: [It's like a] little light that you can bring with you right? Okay? (transcription, March 22, 2017)

With Julie's explanation, Shawn gained a better understanding of what occurred in the text.

Overall, Julie's scaffolding through explanation of decoding strategies, phonics-related elements, and meaning aimed to increase students' usage of graphophonemic and meaning cues.

**Affirming.** As students responded to various forms of scaffolding, Julie affirmed students' actions and statements. Specifically, Julie provided feedback related to students' use of decoding strategies, use of phonics rules, and ability to accurately identify words. To help ensure students would apply the decoding strategies introduced into their own reading, Julie provided feedback about the students' strategy use. When Shawn self-corrected a word, Julie replied:

Good job, last time you read it you said, "He saw a big log in the way." And that kind of made sense so you used your strategy about what makes sense but then you have to think about well does that look right, right, because it has that -er at the end. Okay, so this time you read it you corrected yourself. So awesome. Keep it up. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

Furthermore, she affirmed students' strategy use and encouraged students to apply the decoding strategies during their own reading. For example, she stated "That's right. So remember when you're reading I want you to think about if what you're reading is making sense okay? Cause if it doesn't you need to go back and try to use another strategy" (transcription, February 21, 2017).

Julie used affirmation to reinforce phonics rules and rules learned during Letterland word work instruction. When Griffin was unsure of a word in *Cliff Can't Come* (Martin, 2003), she affirmed he stated the correct word as illustrated in the following interaction:

Griffin: My – "I hear – or heard?"

Julie: No you were right it's hear because do you see a d at the end?

Griffin: No [shakes his head].

Julie: Now. But re - Good job remembering that tricky word from this week. I hear – [points to the words for him]. (transcription, March 23, 2017)

Julie both affirmed Griffin was correct in addition to providing an explanation so that he understood why the word *hear* was the actual word.

**Less frequent forms of scaffolding.** During small-group instruction, Julie used the scaffolding forms of modeling and prompting less often. When modeling, she addressed how to use phonics rules and reread a word or text portion. An example of modeling graphophonemic cues occurred when Rose had difficulty correctly reading *leaves* in a text. When asking Rose to identify a known chunk and to apply the two-vowel rule did not result in determining the correct word, Julie modeled how to make the long e sound and segment the sounds in the word by stating, “So it’s l-ee-v-s” (transcription, March 14, 2017). With this support, Rose independently blended the sounds and stated *leaves*. In addition, Julie modeled rereading to provide students opportunities to use the semantic cue of context to determine the word. While listening to Shawn read independently, Julie stated, “So Ms X’s gonna read it back to you. This big owl is digging into the snow to get a t – animal it can hear” (transcription, March 27, 2017).

### **Julie’s Type of Scaffolding Directedness**

Julie implemented a student-directed form of scaffolding within her most frequent scaffolding form of questioning. With this form, she intended for students to provide the next response or action (see Figure 5.1) and engage students in determining the unknown word. However, she also implemented telling, explaining, and affirming which are all categorized as teacher-directed. In these forms, the teacher provides information, an explanation, or affirms the students’ attempts to determine the correct word. Therefore, students do not engage as much in determining the word.

Julie used the scaffolding forms of modeling and prompting less frequently; these forms are associated with both teacher-directed and student-directed prompts. In modeling, the teacher

demonstrates a behavior for students. However, with prompting students are expected to complete the next action; therefore, responsibility is balanced between the teacher and the student. Based on Julie's patterns, she appeared to focus less on the level of directedness when selecting scaffolding forms and chose to assist students' in determining words in text.

### **Julie's Responsiveness to Student Needs**

Similar to the analysis of Emily's scaffolding, I analyzed whether Julie implemented scaffolding that was responsive to her students' needs. Julie implemented scaffolding forms intended to support students' word determination within the moment and within the particular text. Julie appeared to ground her scaffolding forms not necessarily on the overall reading needs of the students, but rather the scaffold considered most effective for determining the word. For example, according to Julie, Shawn exhibited the need to practice using semantic cues to decode words. However, rather than implement a meaning-based scaffold when he could not determine the word *pole*, Julie told him to which decoding strategy to use in the scaffold segment below:

Shawn: He saw a big log in the water. "That's a big log," he said. "And it's in my way." So he poked – poked the log with a [word by word reading].

Emily: Let's use our Flippy the Dolphin strategy. Remember what does Flippy the [Dolphin] - ?

Shawn: [O!]

Julie: Pole. So he poked the log with a –

Shawn: Pole.

Julie: Pole. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

In this example, not only did Julie supply the decoding strategy, she actually told him the word. Furthermore, she did not provide him an opportunity to determine the word. Rather than focus on the cueing type he did not use, semantic, Julie continued to focus him on a strategy aligned with

using graphophonemic cues. Therefore, in this scaffold segment, she did not appear to broaden the types of cues he used to figure out unknown words.

This form of within-the-moment scaffolding appeared during scaffold segments with Rose as well. Often Rose did not attempt to use strategies or cues independently to determine unfamiliar words. However, Julie chose to implement teacher-directed scaffolds in which she questioned or told the strategy. As a result of these selected scaffolds, Rose may have become dependent on Julie doing the work rather than learning how to determine words independently. Here is an example:

Rose: Bill Brown didn't live in a house. He lived on a -

Julie: Okay let's use our strategy. Let's break this word apart okay? So if you cover up this what does that part say [covers up part of the word]?

Rose: Riv.

Julie: Okay. So you have riv. What's that part?

Rose: Er.

Julie: Okay. Can you put that together?

Rose: River. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

When Rose did not know the word, Julie scaffolded by asking her to implement a specific strategy or to identify different word parts. Rose determined the word with the support of these scaffolds, however Julie did more of the work than Rose. Despite Rose's need to decide how to approach decoding an unknown word, Julie provided assistance to read the word accurately rather than support Rose's overall reading practices.

Overall, Julie more frequently implemented scaffolds that focused on secondary cues of general decoding strategies, rather than choosing techniques that focused on the primary cues of

using the graphophonemic or semantic features of the word or text. She did not appear to encourage students to acquire a balanced system of strategies. Instead, Julie implemented several different forms of scaffolding within her small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. She favored the form of questioning most frequently, implemented telling, explaining, and affirming frequently, and engaged less frequently in modeling and prompting. Therefore, she implemented a variety of teacher and student-directed forms of scaffolding. Julie intended to implement these various scaffold forms within repeated explicit instruction and provide opportunities for students' independent reading with teacher feedback to enable students to accurately read and understand various text types.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Within their small-group instruction for students needing the most support, both teachers implemented the same six forms of scaffolding. However, differences existed in the frequency of these forms, the type of directedness, and the responsiveness of the scaffolds. Whereas Emily used prompting, questioning, and affirming most frequently, Julie used questioning, telling, affirming, and explaining. Both teachers focused their scaffolding on supporting students' determination of unknown words. In Emily's small group, she wanted students to determine words independently and thus, implemented more student-directed prompts. She rarely used teacher-directed scaffolds of telling the word or the explicit strategy students should use to determine the word. Instead, Emily attempted to have students attend to semantic cues and use a balanced cueing system. In contrast, Julie's scaffolding approach blended teacher and student-directed scaffolds. She engaged in teacher-directed prompts more often by telling students the strategy, the word, or providing significant support by modeling blending and segmenting to help students solve the unknown word.

Additionally, across both teachers' forms of scaffolding, more specific cues were used rather than general cues (Beed et al., 1991; Clark, 2000). General cues entailed asking students how they could determine an unknown word. For example, when Griffin did not know the word *Lane*, Julie prompted Griffin with "...let's see what strategy can we use to figure out what the word is" (transcription, March 22, 2017). Both teachers employed a more specific scaffolding form by telling a specific strategy, phonics rule, or the meaning of a word. By using more specific scaffolds, students may have become accustomed to receiving teacher input as to what strategies to use to determine words rather than learning how to select effective strategies independently.

Both Emily and Julie engaged in modeling less frequently than other scaffolding methods. This is an interesting finding as students who are experiencing difficulty may require more modeling to make their thinking explicit. Even when strategies were introduced or practiced in the whole-group setting, the instruction consisted of more of a guided practice format than explicit modeling of the steps to implement the strategies. As a result, students may not have fully understood how to apply the strategies on their own thus requiring more scaffolding from the teachers.

### **Theme 2: Instructional Focus**

This theme addressed the focus of instruction for Emily and Julie's small-group reading instruction with students they identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Each teacher had a clear instructional focus. In Emily's small-group instruction, she focused mainly on phonics instruction in addition to fluency and decoding strategy instruction. However, Julie's small-group instruction centered primarily on decoding strategy instruction and comprehension. Decoding strategies consist of methods of prompting students to decode unknown words such as

breaking the word apart into chunks. In this study, the teachers focused on different decoding strategies as further described in the following sections. The teachers selected specific instructional foci based upon their students' instructional needs. In the following section, I describe each teacher's individual instructional focus designed to promote the reading practices of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

### **Emily's Instructional Focus**

Emily described the focus of her small-group instruction as the incorporation of phonics, comprehension, and fluency. She stated, "I guess the focus is first on the phonics of whatever we're working on specifically that week and then on fluency and comprehension of text" (interview, March 27, 2017). Overall, Emily's small-group lessons incorporated a significant focus on phonics in addition to instruction on how to figure out unknown words and interact with the text (see Table 5.3). Emily explained that a strength of her small-group reading lessons was the students' understanding of the consistent structure of the lesson. Emily described the process she uses: "I try to always start with the phonics and go into the reading so that they knew what to expect you know" (interview, April 17, 2017). Although Emily stated three specific focal areas, her instruction focused primarily on only one of those areas, phonics. Teaching and providing opportunities to practice decoding strategies within connected text were not the prominent focus within this reading group. In the following section, I provide a detailed description of the three instructional areas Emily intentionally targeted in addition to others that emerged from her instruction.

**Phonics.** Emily's small-group instruction focused on phonics and word reading skills in isolation which aligned with Emily's belief that all three students in the reading group needed a significant amount of support with phonics as determined through reading assessments and

anecdotal observations during word work and small-group reading instruction. In all of the 21 small-group reading lessons observed, phonics instruction served as the initial and lengthiest instructional activity. During a typical lesson, phonics instruction occurred for 12 minutes and 20 seconds. Across all of the observed small-group lessons, the students spent a total of 4 hours and 18 minutes on phonics instruction (see Table 5.4). The phonics instruction extended from the whole class word work instruction taught directly before the small-group reading instruction and derived from the district-level mandated Letterland (Letterland International, 2014) program. Within the Letterland program, each week students learn a new word work pattern and a story about characters created to reinforce the rules of the English language. For example, the letter *r* is called *red robot* in Letterland and a story explains how he steals the vowels in words using *ar*, *er*, *ir*, *or*, and *ur* to help students understand why these words make a different vowel sound. Consequently, on the introductory days, the phonics portion of the small-group lessons increased in length thus enabling Emily's students to receive guided practice and feedback with the word pattern in a small-group setting.

Table 5.4

*Focus for Emily's Small Group Reading Instruction.*

Lesson Date	Focus	Phonics Time	Reading Time
2-20-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:15:38	0:03:02
2-21-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:14:08	0:05:15
2-23-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:10:37	0:06:45
2-27-17	Phonics	0:19:02	0:00:00
2-28-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:14:31	0:06:21
3-1-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:11:29	0:07:53

Table 5.4 (continued)

Date	Focus	Phonics Time	Reading Time
3-6-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:12:44	0:06:53
3-7-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:11:43	0:04:48
3-8-17	Phonics	0:17:36	0:04:33
3-9-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:12:05	0:11:16
3-13-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:06:21	0:10:57
3-14-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:05:07	0:12:36
3-20-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:06:18	0:11:06
3-22-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:09:58	0:12:59
3-23-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:15:56	0:10:52
3-27-17	Phonics/Text Introduction	0:07:24	0:08:40
3-28-17	Phonics/Text Introduction	0:13:34	0:09:02
3-29-17	Phonics/Comprehension	0:11:35	0:08:19
4-3-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:08:34	0:10:31
4-4-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:06:54	0:14:01
4-5-17	Phonics	0:27:45	0:00:00

Many of the phonics-based instructional activities can be characterized as skills-based activities focused on decoding words in isolation (Allington, 2002; McIntyre, 2010; Wiseman, 2012). Students spent a significant amount of instructional time engaged in practicing the skills of segmenting and blending sounds in words through various activities. Specifically, students

tapped out the individual sounds in words Emily presented on word cards or built with individual letter tiles. In addition to reading words, students also spelled words with individual letter cards and on whiteboards. During two lessons, students completed practice spelling tests. Lastly, students engaged in locating words aligned with featured word patterns in decodable stories or sentences available from Letterland.

**Fluency.** Emily noted that ensuring students' fluent reading of text was an additional area of focus. She addressed instruction in fluency during students' individual readings of text; however, she did not address this concept during whole- group instruction. As she listened to students read, she often prompted students to practice fluent reading by asking them to reread the text. In addition, she provided explicit instruction for how students should attend to aspects of fluency. For example, she explained to Skylar how to incorporate prosody based on punctuation as he read from the book *Numbers Are Everywhere* (Burton et al., 1999):

Emily: Can you change that to a question for this one [points to book]?

Skylar: [Read some.]

Emily: Go back. You said it like a period here. Numbers. But I want you to say numbers?

Skylar: Can you find the numbers? [Emily smiles and gives him a high five.]

Emily: Okay guys everybody stop. Some of you finished. Some of you didn't. That's okay because we're working on this book for a while til we finish. Umkay? I was proud of how you made your questions sound like questions. (transcription, February 23, 2017)

Furthermore, she provided affirmation when students incorporated attention to punctuation and other elements of fluency into their reading.

**Comprehension.** Few opportunities existed for students to engage in higher-order thinking and comprehension despite Emily's belief that comprehension was an important component of her small-group instruction. A lack of focus on meaning and critical thinking skills

often characterizes instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading (Allington, 1983; McIntyre, 2010). Based on my analysis, only one of the small-group instructional lessons focused on oral comprehension and none on written comprehension. The comprehension related activities this teacher incorporated only consisted of questioning students to share and justify their feelings about the book. One of the few times Emily asked comprehension questions occurred unintentionally. As the students read *The Best Class Trip* (Burgess, 2004), Rex stated his mom required him to answer the questions stated in the back of the book. Upon hearing this, Emily asked the students to read and answer the same questions as a group.

The students did not engage in extended discussions about what happened in narrative texts or share information learned from reading informational texts. During one instructional lesson with *Ocean Animals* (Burton, French, & Jones, 1999), Emily actually stated the information learned from the text rather than asking students to do so. Instead of sharing meaning gained from reading the text, discussion generally occurred during the introduction of the text. Emily welcomed students' comments and connections even when they resulted in tangents from the focus of the lesson. However, she asserted the difficulty of engaging these students in meaningful conversation about the book in the following conversation:

But you know – it's hard to know – it's especially hard with their comprehension because I feel like when I ask them questions I get very surface level answers...And I think especially with – Rex's got lots of background knowledge...But the other two really don't...And that makes it difficult to kind of have discussions. It's almost like I wish I could have three separate you know groups to deal with that so. (interview, March 27, 2017)

She expanded on this same sentiment in a later discussion describing the challenges of small-group instruction with these students by stating "I felt like our discussions when we had them about the book were not very effective" (interview, April 17, 2017). However, it is important for

emerging readers to have opportunities to discuss ideas presented in text (Allington, 1983; Wiseman, 2012) and engage in critical thinking skills (McIntyre, 2010).

**Strategy instruction.** In addition to the three instructional foci Emily articulated, other areas of focus emerged from instruction and the incorporation of strategy instruction was one of these areas. Often students identified as having the most difficulty with reading require instruction on the use of decoding strategies to determine unknown words. However, students in Emily's group experienced limited instruction in decoding strategies. During five of the lessons, Emily taught strategies for decoding words to the whole reading group. She engaged students in an explanation of the strategies and guided feedback while practicing a strategy rather than explicitly modeling strategies. This format of instruction is illustrated in one small-group lesson in which Emily explained how to use strategies to figure out an unknown word. Emily displayed a poster with a picture and a matching sentence and covered up a word in the sentence for students to determine. She instructed:

As we're reading our - the rest of the book today and I'm listening to you read I want you to when you get to a word you don't know to think about what word would make sense there. And then when you think of a word that would make sense try it out and see does look that like word we just said. Let's try that with this [holds up poster]. Look at the picture for just a minute. Don't worry about the words for right now. (transcription, March 1, 2017)

During this instruction, Emily intended to introduce students to a strategy not used as often by students. The strategy entailed using context to determine what word makes sense. Each student shared a potential word and stated the sentence aloud to verify whether the word made sense. Next, Emily revealed the first letter in the word in order for students to use graphophonemic cues. She asked students to justify the accuracy of their potential word. Finally, she told students she would observe their own reading for whether they implemented this strategy.

For each of the five strategy lessons, Emily used a similar format with a different strategy poster and the covered word procedure. However, in subsequent lessons, she stated the intention for students to practice strategies without explaining or naming specific strategies. She provided students with the opportunity to practice two graphophonemic strategies of getting their mouths ready and using the first letter in the word and two semantic strategies of looking at the picture and using the context to determine what makes sense. During conversations about her intended foci for instructional lessons, Emily did not specifically state a focus on strategy instruction; however, she considered strategy instruction a support, as evident in the following statement:

Well as far as getting to a word they don't know you know - I think we've done a lot of strategies over the whole year get - you know getting your mouth ready with the word, using the picture - illustration to help them. (transcription, March 27, 2017)

During each of the five lessons, Emily did not model how to implement the strategies nor did she determine the word for the students. Instead, she provided students the opportunity to engage in the use of strategies to figure out unknown words while receiving support.

Overall, based on students' assessment results and anecdotal evidence, Emily believed phonics instruction to be the most important focus for small-group reading lessons with her students identified as having the most difficulty in reading. However, on a more limited basis, she also incorporated fluency, strategy instruction, and comprehension. Although she posited the importance of students' comprehension of text, her small-group instruction included limited focus on comprehension. The characteristics of small-group reading instruction for Emily's students who experienced the most difficulty with reading aligned with skills-based instruction often implemented with students who require significant support in reading.

### Julie's Instructional Focus

Julie's small-group reading instruction centered predominantly on strategy instruction, text reading, comprehension and less frequently incorporated phonics (see Table 5.5). Julie described her most important components of small-group reading instruction as the following:

I definitely think just the phonics – definitely having them do the phonics and then their reading strategies... You know once they get that – you know really focusing on the retell too... Making sure that they're comprehending what they're reading. (interview, March 9, 2017)

Table 5.5

*Focus for Julie's Small Group Reading Instruction.*

Date	Focus	Phonics Time	Reading Time
2-21-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:08:03	0:13:11
2-23-17	Strategies/Text Introduction	0:17:57	0:07:09
2-28-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:08:20	0:10:25
3-1-17	Comprehension	0:00:00	0:28:13
3-9-17	Comprehension	0:00:00	0:19:03
3-13-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:15:21	0:09:44
3-14-17	Strategies/Text Reading	0:00:00	0:25:03
3-16-17	Comprehension	0:00:00	0:18:16
3-22-17	Phonics/Strategies/Text Reading	0:05:08	0:20:46
3-23-17	Strategies/Text Reading	0:00:00	0:20:22
3-27-17	Phonics/Text Introduction/Text Reading	0:08:22	0:18:34
3-28-17	Strategies/Text Introduction/Text Reading	0:00:00	0:21:59
3-29-17	Phonics/Text Reading	0:12:28	0:12:35
3-30-17	Written Comprehension	0:00:00	0:19:53

The following sections provide a more detailed description of each of these foci.

**Strategy instruction.** Julie's small-group instruction focused heavily on teaching strategies for decoding words. Additionally, due to the instructional time period, Julie felt strategy instruction was especially important in helping students reach end of the year grade-level assessment benchmarks (interview, March 9, 2017). Julie selected specific strategies based on those students neglected to use and those which she believed were most effective in determining an unknown word. She stated she chose focal strategies in the following manner:

The...ones that I notice that you know when they come to a word and they don't know and they're not using that strategy...Like the breaking the words apart and putting them back together you know I know that they have trouble sounding out the words and putting it back together...Just some of those strategies that I know that if they're using them it would be easier for them to figure out or you know or decode words that they don't know. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

In addition, prior to independent reading, Julie often provided strategy instruction to the entire reading group. Julie introduced students to a specific set of decoding strategies including names to reinforce the action such as *Mr. Cross Checker* (considering whether the word looks or sounds right and whether it makes sense) or *Flippy the Dolphin* (changing the vowel sound in the word). In the following dialogue, Julie described how Title 1 teachers introduced these word decoding strategies across classrooms and grade-levels and the benefit of commonality in the language for implementation:

We have a school wide strategy that we use so that they learn them in kindergarten and we continue with them in first grade and those are the strategies that just got from our literacy – you know our Title 1. And we don't have Title 1 anymore...But when we did have Title 1 there the ones who kind of introduced us you know that's what they were using...So we wanted to make sure we were all you know using the same [strategies] so. So it kinda of goes from kindergarten to first...So they're...hearing the same strategies. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

The specific decoding strategies primarily related to graphophonemic and semantic cues, with one strategy incorporating syntactic cues. The strategies related to graphophonemic cues

included the following: get your mouth ready, tap out the word, look for known chunks, look for known endings, break the word apart and put it back together, determine if the word looks like another known word, and flip the vowel sounds. The strategies related to semantic cues consisted of looking at the picture and skipping the word and rereading the sentence. The final strategy integrated all the cueing systems—graphophonemic, syntactic, and semantic—by asking students to determine if the word looked right, sounded right, and made sense.

To introduce a strategy, Julie shared a visual of the strategy, stated the strategy name, and explained the strategy. Then, either using sentences written on a whiteboard or a poster with a picture and sentence, she questioned students about how to determine an unknown word incorporating the new strategy. She followed questioning with discussion of how to use different strategies such as breaking the word apart or determining what made sense to figure out words as needed. In addition, several small-group lessons during the observation period began with a review of strategies and how to apply them to determine unknown words. In addition, Julie provided students with strategy visuals to reinforce application during their independent reading.

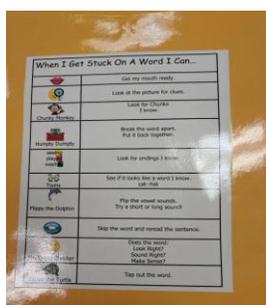


Figure 5.3. Strategies to decode unknown words.

When asked about the strengths of her small-group instruction, Julie felt confident in her ability to model strategies for students. Julie explained that she wanted students to eventually

learn to apply the strategies independently; however, she decided to tell students which strategies to use rather than just telling the actual word (interview, April 21, 2017). Therefore, rather than co-creating the knowledge of how to figure out the word, she acted in a more directive role of telling students the strategy.

**Comprehension.** Julie also focused on incorporating comprehension instruction into small-group lessons for the students who had more difficulty with reading. Throughout the 18 observed lessons, oral comprehension was a significant focus. Based on an increase in the students' reading levels and required assessments at that level including written responses, Julie asserted the need for students to work on answering comprehension question in writing. She shared,

But you know I didn't focus much on that that written – like the written comp more but now I need to like get into that. That's why like Ms. K is pulling them too to help because now they're – they've been reading that [level] where in mCLASS requires the written comprehension...So it's definitely a strong focus too. (interview, March 28, 2017)

Thus, Julie incorporated practice in how to write effective written comprehension responses during two of the final small-group lessons. Julie aligned the activity with the practice these students received in several lessons with the schoolwide literacy coach. In each first-grade classroom at Springville, the literacy coach worked with students who were considered “on the bubble” or close to achieving proficiency in written comprehension responses. The literacy coach used the mentor text from whole-group instruction and a specific written comprehension rubric to support student learning of how to independently answer comprehension questions in a written format. Julie used this same rubric to support students' development as described in a later section in the chapter on instructional materials.

To address oral comprehension in small-group instruction, Julie asked students literal comprehension questions about different story elements after reading narrative text. After

students read informational text, she asked them what they learned. In addition, students wrote answers to the questions or recorded their learning from informational text. By selecting this instructional focus and incorporating these activities, Julie reinforced the importance of understanding text as opposed to solely decoding the words accurately in text.

**Phonics.** Julie also felt that phonics instruction was an essential element of small-group instruction. However, this instruction did not occur as often. She expressed,

And then you know on top of that is trying to also incorporate the phonics piece into it...So being able to you know – our Letterland unit – being able to incorporate that you know is also really important too. (interview, March 9, 2017)

Phonics instruction was incorporated into 10 of the 18 small-group lessons observed. Typically, students spent 4 minutes and 57 seconds on phonics with a total of 1 hour and 24 minutes engaged in phonics instruction over all the lessons (see Table 5.5). The phonics instruction aligned with the word patterns featured in whole-group instruction derived from the Letterland program (Letterland International, 2014). The students either created words with letter cards or read and sorted words according to featured word patterns. Julie encouraged segmentation and blending by asking students to tap individual sounds on their fingers and state the whole word. She also shared the words in a sentence to promote students' understanding of word meaning.

In summary, Julie implemented instruction focused on decoding strategies and comprehension in addition to less frequent instruction on phonics. These foci derived from Julie's analysis of students' reading abilities and the need to especially concentrate on strategies and written comprehension skills. Julie provided ample instruction on decoding strategies to ensure students' understanding. In addition, Julie emphasized the importance of not only decoding the words accurately in text, but the larger goal of understanding text.

## **Cross-Case Analysis**

Although both Emily and Julie implemented small-group reading instruction, meaningful differences in their instructional foci existed. Emily focused on word work and phonics instruction during small-group lessons for her students identified as having the most difficulty with reading which aligned with instruction typically experienced by students identified as having the most difficulty in reading (Allington, 2002; McIntyre, 2010; Wiseman, 2012). In contrast, Julie focused on teaching and providing opportunities to practice strategy instruction. Julie's instruction included an explicit focus on decoding strategies to provide an understanding of strategy names and descriptions, and how to apply the strategies in reading. Although Emily and her students engaged in some strategy instruction, they practiced strategies rather than receiving explicit instruction and modeling of specific strategies. In addition, Emily did not often use specific strategy language or review strategies as Julie did with her students. Overall, the majority of Emily's small-group instruction focused more on working with words in isolation.

In comparing the teachers' instructional focus, the extent of comprehension instruction differed. Emily's students lacked meaningful opportunities to discuss what they read and learned from text, even in the oral form. Discussion about texts generally occurred during the introduction of a text or related to students' connections to texts. In contrast, the students in Julie's small-group experienced more opportunities to respond to text in both verbal and written formats. Several lessons focused solely on comprehension activities related to discussing story elements or information learned in the texts. In addition, Julie's students received several lessons on written comprehension from the literacy coach. Julie completed each small group lesson with a text-based discussion and explicitly shared with students the importance of understanding the text in addition to just reading the text.

However, Julie acknowledged differences in the types of comprehension questions and activities implemented within small-group reading instruction for the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and students in other reading groups. She explained that students in other reading groups may have experienced higher-order comprehension questions and “digging deeper” into texts (interview, March 9, 2017). Similarly, Emily noted this difference between her small group for students having the most difficulty with reading and her other reading groups in explaining differences in types of discussion about the texts (interview, March 27, 2017).

### **Theme 3: Engagement with Connected Text**

This third theme highlights the two teachers’ beliefs and instructional decisions related to engagement with text for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. The following discussion presents findings related to the frequencies and types of text implemented in small-group instruction. Additionally, this section describes factors affecting the teachers’ text selection process.

#### **Emily’s Use of Connected Text**

Student reading of connected text did not appear as the focus of Emily’s small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Overall, limited opportunities and instructional time were devoted to reading and discussion of connected text. Emily explained her desire to provide scaffolding in the form of ensuring students read text aligned with their instructional level everyday by stating, “And that was my goal – was that they were reading every day with me... Something they can read. So I guess that’s a scaffold or support was that the text were picked to their level” (interview, April 17, 2017). However,

Emily's intended instructional focus did not match the actual instruction during small-group reading lessons.

**Frequency.** Emily's three students identified as having the most difficulty with reading engaged in some connected text reading, but not as frequently as they completed phonics activities. Specifically, the students read text individually during only six of the 21 lessons as compared to engagement in phonics instruction in each of the 21 lessons. The amount of time students spent interacting with text aligned with Emily's belief that phonics instruction was the most important component of small-group reading instruction for these students (interview, February 16, 2017). As the lessons continued, Emily noted her concern with the phonics portion of the lesson taking increasingly longer, leading to decreased time available for students to read text. As a result, completing work with an individual text extended to additional lessons. Emily shared, "And I think that that's not a conscious decision to take more time on the books. It's more – I think the phonics have gotten so difficult that – that's taking up more time" (interview, March 27, 2017).

Furthermore, Emily explicitly explained the struggle of balancing phonics and literacy instruction within small-group reading instruction and asserted that getting "the right balance of phonics instruction and working on a text" (interview, March 27, 2017) was challenging. She further elaborated that:

I feel like...that's not the way I would like it to be and it's difficult because no other group is in their situation. So it's not something I'm just doing with everybody so it's smooth sailing. (interview, March 27, 2017)

Overall, students spent a total of 2 hours and 45 minutes on text reading which averaged to 7 minutes and 53 seconds per lesson (see Table 5.3).

As a result of less instructional time devoted to reading text, fewer teacher-student interactions occurred and consequently, fewer opportunities existed for Emily to observe how students attempted to decode unknown words and to provide scaffolding. Without these student-teacher interactions while reading text, the co-construction of knowledge was less evident within this small-group instructional format. A diminished opportunity to read text resulted in students reading fewer words during their instruction, aligning with previous research findings in which students of higher ability reading groups read approximately three times more words each reading group than those in reading groups identified as having the most difficulty (Allington, 1983; 1982). With less time spent on students' reading of connected text, fewer opportunities existed for students to read independently and for Emily to provide scaffolded support. Instead, the students spent more time experiencing direct instruction related to phonics, working with words in isolation, and scaffolding related to word work instruction rather than scaffolding pertaining to decoding and strategies to use during reading of connected text. In addition, this lack of emphasis on students' reading of connected text may have sent a message that phonics instruction was more important than gaining meaning from text.

**Modeled reading.** In addition to providing fewer opportunities to read text, Emily also engaged in a practice of modeled reading of novel texts while the students followed along with their fingers. Upon completion of reading the text aloud, Emily provided some opportunities for students to read the text independently. Although students listened to expressive, fluent reading modeled, this teacher reading detracted from time for students to read text independently. The following is an example of Emily's modeled reading for the students in which she explains what to do when reading a book for the first time

Okay. Let's listen ... – the first time we read a book [passes out finger pointers] I read to you and you follow...So I'm on the front cover. That's where you should be...Ocean

Animals. [Turn pages] Ocean Animals. [Reading aloud to students and points to the words]. We like going to the ocean. We see many animals when we got to the ocean Some of the animals - . (transcription, March 28, 2017)

Furthermore, without the ability to observe students' first experiences in encountering the words independently, Emily had fewer opportunities to determine whether the student would accurately read the word or what types of strategies students used to discover unknown words.

**Type.** In selecting text for small-group reading instruction, Emily determined whether the focus for the mentor text in whole-group instruction was literary or informational and then selected a text for the reading group of the same genre and at the students' reading levels. She also examined texts to determine which ones matched the students' interests or aligned with their previous experiences, as shown in the following example:

And I look through what I have...(I) I think you know then I look, you know, which would they be more interested in you know a thing about ducks or a thing about snow...Well, we just (you know) had a snow day...We'll do the snow one. (interview, February 16, 2017)

Over the course of the lessons, Emily selected six different texts. These texts were leveled readers from either the Early Connections Series from Benchmark Publishing Company or the Houghton Mifflin Leveled Reader Series. These texts were selected from her classroom materials (see Table 5.6). According to the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) used school-wide as the local school district recommended, these texts were on the level of D 5-6 or F 9-10. Of note, the text benchmark for the end of first grade is a level I 15-16.

Table 5.6

*Texts Used for Instruction in Emily's Small-Group Reading Instruction.*

Title	Publisher	Genre	Text level
Numbers Are Everywhere	Benchmark Education	Informational	D 5-6
Measuring Time	Benchmark Education	Informational	D 5-6
Mr. U's Spelling Class	Letterland	Narrative	Not leveled
The Best Class Trip	Houghton Mifflin	Narrative	F 9-10
The Smart Dog	Letterland	Narrative	Not leveled
Ocean Animals	Benchmark Education	Informational	F 9-10

As a result of Emily's selection and access, she leaned heavily on informational texts for students having the most difficulty with reading. The students read three informational texts and one narrative text in the format of leveled readers. Emily asserted the importance of students reading informational text due to both expectations at the school and at the district level, in addition to the students' ability to gain knowledge from these texts. She explained,

And I did try to do – I would always try to do more informational than literary...with them. Number one because that's more – you know – that's more of what we're expected to do...And number two to build more knowledge you know?

Researcher: ...Thinking about content and building that and building their background knowledge on other topics and that kind of thing.

Emily: So I guess - you know - whereas in my other groups do more...pull whatever book and we'll just start from scratch practice our reading. With them I think it's more consistent effort to make the text richer – science related. Try to pull for those or social studies related. (interview, April 17, 2017)

Emily's whole-group instruction incorporated the use of mentor texts featuring informational titles. Therefore, she wanted students reading in small-group to align with the whole-group reading mentor text type. In addition, the students read two decodable stories featuring words with the letter sounds and patterns emphasized during whole-group word work instruction: one consisted of sentences containing *uw*, *ui*, and *ue*, whereas the other incorporated sentences with incorporating with *ar* and *or* words (see Figure 5.4). Of note, during one instructional lesson, the students did not engage in any text reading and instead, solely worked on phonics.

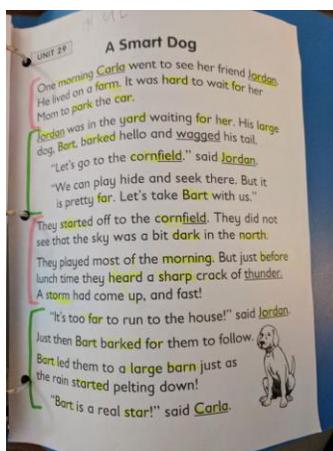


Figure 5.4 Letterland (Letterland International, 2014) decodable story.

### Julie's Use of Connected Text

Julie provided many opportunities for students to engage in independent reading of text to themselves thus allowing her many opportunities to listen to students read and provide support. She described this intention for ample text reading in an interview in which she stated, "I would like for the, you know, the group that you watch – I like for them to get a chance to read different books...because I wanted em to be exposed to as much text as they can" (interview, March 9, 2017). Implementing support as individual students read was a prominent focus in

Julie's small-group instructional reading lesson. She wanted students to apply strategies learned to their own reading to decode unfamiliar words independently.

**Frequency.** Julie regarded students' ability to engage with the same text over multiple lessons and to spend time in text as important components of her small-group instruction. She asserted:

And just reading a familiar story you know. You know not just reading one book but I feel like when they read a book for like a week or you know they read it at least a few different times you know it helps them you know get more fluent with it so that helps with their fluency. (interview, April 21, 2017)

Julie understood the benefits of students spending time in text as a necessary component of reading instruction, especially for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading (Allington, 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). As research has shown, students who engage in reading more connected text over two years achieved better results on assessments in reading than students who read less connected text (McIntyre, 2010; McIntyre et al., 2006).

Julie's small-group instruction devoted a significant amount of time for student reading of connected text. In 10 of the lessons, Julie's students had opportunities to read text independently. In a typical lesson, the students spent 17 minutes and 48 seconds on reading and in total, the students spent 5 hours and 2 minutes of instruction related to text reading (see Table 5.7). During each of these occurrences in which students read text independently, Julie observed each student reading and provided scaffolding as needed. With this focus on text reading, Julie had ample opportunities to understand how students approached unfamiliar words and the types of strategies used to determine these words. Additionally, this provided many instances in which Julie and the student co-constructed knowledge of how to determine unknown words through the use of a variety of scaffolds to support decoding. Furthermore, in each of the 18 lessons, students discussed text, thus emphasizing the importance of understanding text.

**Type.** Julie wanted students to read a variety of types of books. The students read five narrative texts and two informational texts (see Table 5.7). During one lesson, students read a decodable text featuring words with the *ed* ending addressed in whole-group word work instruction. Julie’s belief in the importance of providing opportunities to read narrative and informational books on the same topic resulted in paired texts selected for instruction. She also tried to select texts representative of students’ interests. She explained this in the following statement:

Definitely the reading level that they’re at...And then try to find something that’s interesting to them. You know try to find like a nonfiction and a fiction book that kind of go together like we did this past week. (interview, March 9, 2017)

For example, students read a narrative text titled *Riverboat Bill* (Miles, 2004) about a man named Bill who traveled on various rivers across the world. Subsequently, Julie intentionally selected the informational text titled *Rivers* (Michaels, 2002) which shared information about rivers to incorporate into small-group instruction. Julie prompted students to identify the type of book, the purpose of the genre, and similarities and differences about the books.

Table 5.7

*Texts Used for Instruction in Julie’s Small-Group Reading Instruction.*

Title	Publisher	Genre	Text level
Miss Joan and the Moat	Wright Group McGraw-Hill	Narrative	H 13-14
Riverboat Bill	Wright Group McGraw-Hill	Narrative	H 13-14
Rivers	Wright Group McGraw-Hill	Informational	H 13-14
I Planted	Houghton Mifflin	Decodable	Not leveled

Table 5.7 (continued)

Title	Publisher	Genre	Text level
The Mixed Up Wigs	Houghton Mifflin	Narrative	H 13-14
Cliff Can't Come	Houghton Mifflin	Narrative	H 13-14
Many Kinds of Birds	Houghton Mifflin	Informational	I 15-16
Kenny's Big Present	Houghton Mifflin	Narrative	I 15-16

Across all the observed lessons, Julie selected eight different texts to implement in instruction (see Table 5.7). She selected leveled readers texts from either Wright Group McGraw-Hill Publishing Company or Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company found in her classroom or the school bookroom. However, to match students' reading ability and interest, Julie selected Houghton Mifflin leveled readers or books from the school's book room most frequently (interview, March 9, 2017). Aligned with the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system utilized by the school and required by the local school district, the level of texts used in instruction were H 13-14 or I 15-16. Therefore, these students interacted with texts close to the school district's grade level benchmarks.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Students' opportunities to engage with connected text during small-group instruction differed substantially across the classrooms observed in this study. In Emily's classroom, students were exposed to less text reading overall as evidenced by the number of texts introduced. However, and more importantly, the students received fewer opportunities to read text independently. Emily often read the new text first thus providing students a prior

opportunity to hear the words. Fewer opportunities to read text also resulted in fewer opportunities to determine how students attempted to decode unknown words.

In her small-group instruction, Julie prioritized students' text reading. Julie implemented more texts and intentionally paired the reading of informational and narrative texts featuring the same topic. In addition, she ensured all students received scaffold segments, or opportunities to read and determine words in the text with her independently. These scaffold segments enabled Julie to determine how to best support each student in figuring out unknown words. Furthermore, this format created more opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge between Julie and her students.

Although they differed in the amount of text engagement they offered students, both teachers experienced similar challenges in locating appropriate texts for instruction that addressed both students' reading abilities and their interests. Even with access to texts in the school-wide book room, the teachers expressed limited amounts of books existed for these particular students and instead, they used texts available within their classrooms. During small-group instruction in both classrooms, most often students read leveled texts aligned with their instructional reading levels. Julie's students encountered exposure to a greater number of texts and to the formats of both informational and narrative text. In contrast, Emily's students read fewer texts and all were informational except one. With these differences in opportunities to engage with text, students may have received specific messages about the importance of reading and comprehending text.

#### **Theme 4: Students' Determination of Unknown Words Through Scaffolding**

The information presented in this section addresses how both teachers supported their students' development of their reading practices. The students in both Emily and Julie's small-

groups determined unknown words more often with teacher scaffolding using graphophonemic, or phonics-based scaffolds, than meaning or strategy-based scaffolds. In this section, I present descriptions of how teachers supported students' abilities to determine unfamiliar words using graphophonemic scaffolds and discuss differences in the types of phonics-based scaffolds used, based on teacher and student characteristics.

### **Emily's Students**

To determine how students responded to Emily's scaffolding in small-group instruction, I analyzed each scaffold segment during instruction with the students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Emily's students solved the unknown word 21 of 23 times when the students received individual scaffolding while reading text. In two of the 23 interactions, Emily implemented multiple forms of scaffolding. However, students were unable to figure out the word resulting in Emily telling the students the word. With the exception of these two instances, students determined the unknown words as a result of Emily's implementation of various scaffolding forms.

During scaffold segments while reading connected text, Emily intentionally implemented scaffolding related to semantics, specifically the meaning of the text. Despite these scaffolds, students often could not figure out the unknown word. In contrast, students succeeded in determining the word most often after Emily incorporated graphophonemic or phonics-based scaffolds. In one scaffold segment, Skylar read the following sentence in the book *Measuring Time* (Burton et al., 1999) as: *We go home to eat breakfast*; however, *dinner* was actually the last word in the text. Emily tried to support Skylar's inability to decode a word with a semantic scaffold, specially questioning about the meaning of the word and the pictures in the text. However, Skylar did not determine the word until Emily implemented a graphophonemic

scaffold of telling him to sound out the word. Her emphasis on semantic scaffolds is illustrated in the following dialogue:

Emily: Do you have breakfast after soccer practice?

Skylar: I don't have soccer practice.

Emily: Well kids who have soccer practice.

Skylar: Um.

Emily: What's – look out the window? What does it look like outside?

Skylar: Hmm. Night.

Emily: Okay do you eat breakfast at night?

Skylar: [Nods.]

Emily: You do?

Skylar: [Nods.]

Emily: You do? What do you eat when you wake up in the morning?

Skylar: Um. Um. When I go to school I just ate peanut butter and jelly.

Emily: So what is that called? You might eat peanut butter and jelly. I might eat eggs. Somebody else might eat waffles. What is that meal called?

Skylar: Um. Breakfast.

Emily: Okay so what is the meal called at the end of the day? When you – it's night time?

Skylar: Lunch.

Emily: The one we have at school. In the middle of the day.

Skylar: Um. Snack?

Emily: Is snack a meal?

Skylar: Umhum.

Emily: No. It's a little food when you are hungry. Let's try it sound out. D.

Skylar: D-iner. Dinner. (transcription, March 13, 2017)

Although Emily tried to align the scaffolding with cues she believed Skylar could implement more often to successfully determine words, Skylar did not determine the word until he received graphophonemic scaffolds.

Lucy also experienced difficulty determining unknown words through semantic scaffolds. When Lucy did not know the word *kitchen* in the book *Numbers Are Everywhere* (Burton et al., 1999), Emily first employed semantic scaffolds to help Lucy understand the context as stated below:

Emily: Now look at the picture. The photograph. Where do you have those things in your house?

Lucy: [Shakes head.]

Emily: You don't have any of those things in your house? [Wait time.]

Skylar: [Points to her picture] I got this.

Emily: I think she has some of those. You cook with them. And measuring things when you're cooking.

Lucy: [unable to determine].

Emily: Okay so where is that in your house? [Lucy does not respond.] Could this be kitchen? (transcription, February 21, 2017)

Although Emily attempted to support Lucy in using meaning and activating her background knowledge, she eventually resorted to asking whether Lucy agreed that the word Emily stated matched the word in the text. This question caused Lucy to look at the letter-sound correspondence to confirm the word. Scaffolds based on semantic cues did not enable Lucy to determine the word.

### Julie's Students

Similar to my examination of Emily's case, I analyzed each scaffold segment that transpired during small-group reading instruction in Julie's classroom. Because Julie provided students with more opportunities to read individually, more instances existed to provide scaffolding during reading. Overall, 64 interactions occurred in which Julie provided support for students to determine unknown words. Julie's students determined the unknown word 44 of 64 times the students received individual instruction while reading text. In 14 of the 64 interactions, Julie resorted to telling the students the word. However, she implemented several other scaffolds first and this scaffold segment occurred more often with one particular student.

Students most often determined words when Julie implemented graphophonemic scaffolds in the form of questioning or modeling how to blend and segment words. Across scaffold segments and to state the actual word, students often required Julie's modeling of segmenting word parts as evident in the following interaction:

Julie: Can you read this to me?

Shawn: We can – can't for-get the l-an l hmm.

Julie: Hmm. Let's break this word apart. What is that? [Puts finger on word.]

Shawn: Lan.

Julie: Lan.

Shawn: T-eer-n. Tawn.

Julie: Remember what the er says that we spoke about before?

Shawn: T-ar

Julie: The er like we hear in ladd-er. Remember that? So we have [lan-tern].

Shawn: [Lan-tern.] Lantern. (transcription, March 22, 2017)

In this scaffold segment, first Julie prompted Shawn to use the specific strategy of breaking the word apart; however, Shawn had difficulty determining the second chunk in the word. Although Shawn was unable to implement the strategy of breaking apart the word to read the word correctly, scaffolding in the form of telling a phonics rule and modeling how to sound out the parts of the word enabled Shawn to eventually state the whole word.

In other situations, students required questioning or explanations of graphophonemic rules to assist in reading the word. In the example that follows, these two scaffolding forms allowed Griffin to determine the unknown word:

Griffin: I ran back to help park?

[ :02 wait time]

Julie: [Points to the word.] Do you hear the ar chunk in the word that we've been saying makes the ar sound? Do you see that ar?

[Griffin nods.]

Julie: You do?

[Griffin shakes his head.]

Julie: You don't see the ar right so it can't be park. Let's try it again [makes mouth with p sound].

Griffin: P – pack! (transcription, March 22, 2017)

The focus on the graphophonemic cue of the vowel pattern finally enables Griffin to determine the actual word in the sentence.

In Julie's small-group, students often read the word correctly after she explained a phonics rule and implemented a question about how to use a graphophonemic cue. The following scaffold segment is an additional example:

Shawn: I'll just break it apart.

Julie: You wanna break it apart?

Shawn: T-i-n

Julie: This y at the end of the word – remember we learned about how y at the end of the word can make the e sound sometimes? This is one of those words where the y makes the e sound. So, what word do you think it is?

Shawn: Ti [long I sound].

Julie: ne.

Shawn: Tiny.

Julie: Tiny good.

Shawn: Tiny ducks for a swim. (transcription, March 29, 2017)

Additionally, sometimes the students required modeling of how to blend and segment the word.

Providing this model reflects the highest level of scaffolding without telling the word, and

consequently, students determined the whole word as evident in this scaffold segment:

Julie: [To Rose] Can you read this page?

Rose: Some rivers get water from lakes on -.

Julie: Let's break this word apart. M-ou-n-t. Mount-ains. I know that's a big long word and it's hard to sound that word out.

Rose: Mountains?

Julie: Umhum.

Rose: Some rivers get water from :05 [wait time] springs on mountains. (transcription, March 9, 2017)

Because Julie provided a model of how to segment the parts of *mountains*, Rose determined the word. Rose exhibited uncertainty about whether she was correct, but received affirmation from Julie. Usually this high level of phonics-based support offered later in the scaffold segment resulted in students figuring out the unknown word.

## **Cross-Case Analysis**

Although differences existed in students' opportunities to determine words, students in both Emily and Julie's small-groups solved unknown words more often with teacher scaffolding based on phonics than meaning or strategies. However, the specific forms of phonics-based scaffolds resulting in recognition of words differed for students in both classrooms. Emily's students determined words after receiving scaffolds telling them to sound out the word or after she inserted the word and asked students to affirm the word. Julie's students determined unfamiliar words after modeled blending and segmenting of sounds, hearing phonics rules explained, and being prompted to break the word into meaningful chunks. In addition, Emily's students received both meaning and phonics-related scaffolds to solve words. Julie's students more often received scaffolds based on decoding strategies learned during small-group instruction. However, Julie's students also needed meaning-based and phonics-based scaffolding to determine the words. Overall, the scaffolds implemented aligned with student needs or the instructional focus of the small-group instruction.

### **Theme 5: Teachers Provided Varied Levels of Scaffolding**

During scaffold segments in both Emily's and Julie's small groups, students required different levels of support to determine unknown words in text. Overall, the students in both small groups engaged in multiple attempts to determine the words without showing signs of frustration to figure out the unknown word. Both of the teachers provided specific students in their small groups with either minimal scaffolding, scaffolding dependent on the particular text and student, or a high level of scaffolding. In other words, students required varying levels and forms of scaffolding. In the section below, I describe the types of support the teachers provided

each student in their small group to support their ability to figure out unfamiliar words encountered in text.

### **Emily's Students**

To support students' reading practices, Emily provided different amounts and types of scaffolding for each of her three students. One student more independently decoded words in text than the other two students. Consequently, the other two students required much more scaffolding to decode unfamiliar words in text. However, these two students exhibited differences in their individual scaffolding needs. The following discussion provides more detailed information about the types of scaffolding provided to each of these students.

**Rex.** Rex did not often need scaffolding to determine unknown words. He exhibited a strength in decoding words and therefore, was able to read text at a higher level. Rex experienced more difficulty with comprehending text than decoding text. However, when he was unsure of a word, he sought affirmation from Emily. As demonstrated in the following interaction, Rex exhibited uncertainty about the word. However, he was able to determine the actual word and explain why he self-corrected:

Rex: Mon – Moni – mock – monitor?

Emily: Okay. Why did you guess monitor?

[ :05 wait time ]

Rex: Because. [ :02 wait time ] Meter! Meter!

Emily: Okay why did you change to meter?

Rex: Because magic e is here and has magic back to e. And he's saying e [shakes hand in agreement].

Emily: Okay so I like that when you guessed monitor m-m-m monitor monitor and the ending sound is the same as monitor. Monitor [stretches out the ending sound]. So I see why you guessed monitor. But when we go back and look at the letters you figured out

it's really meter didn't you. Can you read this whole page to me again now?  
(transcription, March 1, 2017)

Although Rex determined the word, Emily provided an explanation of how to check to make sure the word was correct in order to support his use of monitoring in Rex's future reading.

**Skylar.** In contrast to Rex, Skylar and Lucy experienced more difficulty determining words independently. Consequently, Emily provided much more scaffolding focused on decoding for Skylar and Lucy. As previously explained, Skylar often needed support with implementing semantic cues to determine words. He often inserted any word in place of the actual word of the text without monitoring for meaning. Although Emily implemented semantic scaffolds, Skylar often needed multiple iterations and forms of scaffolding within each scaffold segment as illustrated while reading the book *The Best Class Trip Ever* (Burgess, 2004):

Skylar: *The class went inside the tall elevator.*

Emily: Try that one again.

Skylar: Oh, the elevator.

Emily: Get your mouth ready. B.

Skylar: B. Oh!

Emily: Where are they? The class is inside the tall?

Skylar: Building.

Emily: Kay start that sentence again.

Skylar: *The class went inside the tall building.* (transcription, March 22, 2017)

By prompting students to reread the inaccurate word or text portion, Emily provided students opportunities to independently solve the word. However, despite this opportunity, Skylar needed further support. In this previous exchange, Skylar required additional scaffolding in the forms of

telling the strategy, modeling the first sound, and questioning about semantics to discover the word.

**Lucy.** Whereas Skylar had difficulty with semantic cues to determine words, Lucy encountered challenges independently blending and segmenting words. In addition, she appeared more hesitant to take risks and determine unknown words. Therefore, Emily provided multiple layers of graphophonemic scaffolding. The following example presents this need:

Lucy: *“We can take the train,” Joan said. The class climbed on the train. Soon the train was going very flat.*

Emily: f-a [pointing to word].

Lucy: t. f-l-at. Flat?

Emily: Okay you’re putting an l sound in there. Look Lucy. Look at my fingers. F-a-s-t [finger taps it].

Lucy: Flast.

Emily: No. F-fff. F-a

Lucy: A. a-s-t. Fast.

Emily: Okay. Can you start right here again? (transcription, March 22, 2017)

As illustrated in a previous example, Lucy experienced difficulty reading the word accurately based on inserting letters and sounds not in the actual word. In addition, Lucy lacked awareness of whether the word made sense in context. In the scaffold segment, Emily initially scaffolded by modeling how to segment the beginning sounds. However, Lucy sounded out and stated the same inaccurate word. Even after stating what was incorrect and modeling how to segment the whole word, Lucy still guessed an inaccurate word. After Emily modeled the beginning sounds in the word again within several phonics-related scaffolds, Lucy finally decoded the actual word.

Lucy exhibited the same difficulty when reading a subsequent sentence in the same book which stated “‘How will we get there?’ asked Mrs. Coats. We can go in a X” (Burgess, 2004). Lucy stated the last word as *cad*; however, the actual word was *cab*. Therefore, Emily asked

Lucy to identify the last sound. Lucy stated the sound as *d*, and Emily corrected her. Then, they sounded out the word together. However, Lucy continued exhibiting inaccuracy by stating *clab*. Lucy was unaware of the mismatched letter-sound correspondence and whether the word made sense. After Emily modeled the two beginning sounds again and they segmented the sounds chorally, Lucy determined the actual word (transcription, March 22, 2017). Emily's multiple scaffolding iterations enabled Lucy to finally ascertain the actual word.

Overall, the three students in Emily's small group solved the unknown words. However, Emily provided the students with different forms and amounts of scaffolding. Rex decoded independently most of the time whereas Skylar and Lucy required much more scaffolded support. Emily provided Rex with affirmation of his decoding, Skylar with support in using semantic cues, and Lucy with support in using graphophonemic cues. In the next section, I present findings about the responses of the students in Julie's classroom to the scaffolding forms implemented to support students' word recognition ability.

### **Julie's Students**

Within Julie's small-group reading instruction, overall students possessed greater ability to describe and apply decoding strategies to discover unknown words in text. During whole-group instruction, students received multiple opportunities to specifically name and provide explanations of decoding strategies. Thus, students did so more often in their own reading of text. In addition, Julie confirmed how students applied these strategies during their independent reading. However, Julie still needed to implement scaffolding to support their reading. Similar to Emily's students, she provided them with varying types and amount of support. For one student, Julie provided only two instances of scaffolding as he exhibited a strength in decoding. However,

scaffolding for the other three students varied. In the following section, these scaffolding patterns are described further.

**Curry.** He required limited scaffolding for word recognition and independently determined most words in the text. Julie provided scaffolding in only two scaffold segments. First, while reading the book *Rivers* (Michaels, 2002), Curry did not know the word *ouch*. Julie referred to the poster on the wall with a picture of an object making the *ou* sound. She specifically questioned him about the *ou* sound and he replied with the actual word. Second, Curry read the word *wide* as *wid*. After Julie’s questioning of what strategy to use, he corrected the sounds and determined the word. Second, during the last small-group lesson observed, Curry read the word *surprise* instead of *present*. After prompting him to review the word and reread, Julie asked him if the word looked right. He then corrected the word to *present*.

Despite these few times Julie provided scaffolds, overall Curry decoded words independently. Julie described his reading as “I mean definitely notice with Curry like he’s definitely become a fluent reader. He’s definitely reading a lot more fluently” (interview, March 28, 2017). Similarly, after Curry read aloud during one small-group lesson, Julie shared how well she thought he read. In fact, in the following quote, Julie discussed the need to move him to another group but wondered whether he would experience difficulty in another reading group:

No I definitely need to move him...You know it’s just – I just don’t really have a place right now you know? My other groups...it’s going be tricky. So I might have to do just some little individual things with him. Maybe keep him in the group and individually try to get him to do a little bit more for me...Or work with Ms. X [the teacher assistant]. (interview, April 21, 2017)

**Griffin.** During reading, he often attempted to implement taught strategies to decode words and made progress in decoding. Julie praised Griffin for his ability to use strategies independently. She stated, “and I’ve mentioned that with Griffin that I love him using those

strategies.” However, she further alluded to the need for other students to continue practicing how to apply strategies, “I guess what I’m trying to say is that they’re not very consistent you know?” (interview, March 28, 2017). Julie furthered conveyed his ability during instruction with the whole reading group. In the following exchange, Julie chose Griffin to explain a strategy and then, she confirmed his usage of the strategy in his own reading:

Julie: Yes?

Griffin: [Looks at card.] Humpty Dumpty.

Julie: Okay the Humpty Dumpty strategy. And what do we do when we use the Humpty Dumpty strategy?

Griffin: We...break ap – break apart – break the word apart and then we put it back altogether.

Julie: That’s right. We break the word apart and then we put it together. I wanna see you using [that strategy].

Griffin: [I will.]

Julie: You use that strategy a lot Griffin. So good. (transcription, March 23, 2017)

Griffin effectively explained the strategy and Julie shared he consistently used this strategy in his own reading practices. For example, Griffin used the strategy of breaking words apart to locate known chunks while attempting to figure out a word:

Julie: Hmm. I see you’re trying to break apart that word. What’s that chunk we learned this week?

Griffin: Ar.

Julie: Umhum. And what sound does “ar” make?

Griffin: A – I mean er.

Julie: Not.

Griffin: Er.

Julie: Not er. I know you were absent on Monday and Tuesday. I know you haven't had that much practice but remember "ar" makes the "ar" sound that you hear in –

Griffin: Car.

Julie: Car. Good job.

Griffin: Started...So started?

Julie: Good yes. Dad started.

Griffin: Dad started to close the trunk. (transcription, March 23, 2017)

By finding known parts in the word, Griffin stated the actual word. As Julie stated above, his difficulty with this particular word may have been his absence from learning about the *ar* sound introduced to the rest of the class earlier in the week during word work instruction.

In contrast to Curry and Griffin, Julie provided more scaffolding for decoding words to the two other students, Shawn and Rose. Julie explained, "The other two like Shawn – I feel like he's like hit [or miss] some days... You know? Some days he's got it. Some days he doesn't... It's kind of the same thing ... with the other one also" (interview, March 28, 2017). The students' ability to decode and implement strategies depended on the particular word, the specific text, and the environment. Julie often gave support in the form of telling the strategy or the word.

**Rose.** Out of all four of the students, Julie provided the most decoding support to Rose. Although Julie implemented many types of scaffolds which varied based on the unknown word, Rose often continued to experience difficulty determining the word. Furthermore, Rose did not appear eager or able to implement taught strategies or figure out the words on her own. Julie provided wait time; however, this often resulted in Julie providing another scaffold rather than Rose figuring out the word. When Julie implemented scaffolds such as questioning about different parts of a word or modeling of how to segment and blend, Rose more frequently solved unknown words as demonstrated in this scaffold segment:

Rose: That's why

Julie: Umhum.

Rose: He was

Julie: You can break apart this word too. [Points to the word.] What's that word?

[:02 wait time]

Julie: Remember we learned about giant "all".

Rose: Call.

Julie: And add an "ed" and what word do you get?

[:02 wait time]

Julie: Call-ed. Right? [Points to words and reads.] That's why he was called.  
(transcription, February 23, 2017)

In this interaction, Rose's inability to determine the word even with multiple scaffolds is evident. Julie resorted to telling Rose the word and rereading the sentence. Julie's use of telling scaffolds occurred frequently with Rose during scaffold segments as illustrated in this additional example:

Julie: Let's break it apart. What's that word?

[:07 wait time]

Julie: Do you know what that word is? What does the chunk an – what sound does that make? [R shakes her head.] An. And then the y makes the e sound at the word so it's any. And then what's that?

Rose: More.

Julie: Anymore. Good job. Alright continue to read and remember to use those strategies okay? (transcription, March 23, 2017)

At the end of scaffold segment, Julie often reminded Rose to use her strategies; however, the need for Julie to provide further scaffolding for Rose remained constant across the instructional lessons.

**Shawn.** Lastly, as Julie stated, Shawn demonstrated inconsistency in using strategies to determine unknown words. During certain interactions, he selected a strategy independently and tried to apply it. However, he often needed further scaffolds from Julie to determine the words. He preferred using graphophonemic cues to solve unfamiliar words without attending to semantic cues as illustrated during this interaction:

Shawn: They are help – helpy. Helpy?

Julie: Hmm. Does that sound like a word you know? Helpy? Hmm.

Shawn: Hmm.

Julie: Try it again.

Shawn: Help.

Julie: Let's take a look at all the letters.

Shawn: H-a [long a sound].

Julie: Okay happy does that make sense?

Shawn: No.

Julie: Is that a word you know? Alright let's use flippy the dolphin and let's flip that vowel sound.

Shawn: h-a [short vowel sound]-p-y. Happy?

Julie: Happy. They are happy –

Shawn: In the water.

Julie: Does that make sense? Does it look right?

Shawn: Yes.

Julie: Does it sound right?

Shawn: Yeah.

Julie: Alright good job. Keep reading. (transcription, March 29, 2017)

Julie wanted Shawn to focus on attending to meaning cues. Therefore, at the beginning of the scaffold segment, she intentionally used semantic scaffolds. Although Shawn did not solve the word as a result of this scaffolding form, he eventually determined the word. Furthermore, she prompted him to attend to semantic cues in his future reading. During certain scaffold segments, he demonstrated the desire to apply strategies independently. For example, after learning the *read skip read* strategy consisting of skipping the unknown word and reading to determine what makes sense based on context, Shawn attempted to use this strategy:

Shawn: The present is not for you. It's for en {looks at Julie}. Maybe I can skip that word...birthday {looks at Julie}.

Julie: Oh that's a lot of skipping. Alright let's go back to this part. There's like a...little comma there so...let's read up to this – this part. Now do you remember what the little baby's name was?

Shawn: K-en. Ken.

Julie: Umhum. And then there's a y at the end. Sometimes the y –

Shawn: Kenny.

Julie: Yep. You got it. Let's start this sentence over again.

Shawn: The present is not for you. It's for Kenny's birthday. (transcription, April 4, 2017)

As evident above, Shawn intended to implement the taught strategy independently to figure out the unfamiliar word. Although Julie needed to provide support in using this strategy and an additional graphophonemic scaffold, Shawn wanted to apply what he learned to his own reading practice and he determined the word.

Overall, Julie provided the students in her small group with differing amounts and types of scaffolding. Curry required the least amount of scaffolding. In addition, Griffin and Shawn often implemented decoding strategies learned during small-group instruction. However, they

were not always successful in doing so and therefore, Julie still provided scaffolding. Overall, Shawn exhibited more inconsistency in this ability than Griffin. Finally, Julie provided Rose with the most scaffolding because she infrequently determined unknown words independently. In addition to providing multiple scaffolds, Julie often resorted to telling Rose the word.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Both Emily and Julie provided their students identified as having the most difficulty with reading with different amounts and forms of scaffolds during small-group reading instruction. One student in each small group, Rex in Emily's small group and Curry in Julie's small group, independently decoded words more often than other students and rarely required teacher scaffolding. In fact, both teachers discussed the possible need to reconsider the group placement for these two students. Characteristics of the text determined Julie's scaffolding forms for her two students, Griffin and Shawn. However, both of these students often implemented decoding strategies featured during small-group instruction and wanted to determine unknown words. Emily and Julie both had students, Skylar and Lucy in Emily's group and Rose in Julie's group, for whom they implemented high levels of scaffolding because the students less often attended to unknown words or used strategies independently.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the findings from this qualitative cross-case study that addressed research questions focused on describing the forms of scaffolding two first-grade teachers implemented in small-group reading instruction for students they identified as having the most difficulty with reading, and how the two teachers supported their students' development of reading practices. Both teachers implemented the following six forms of scaffolding in different methods: affirming, explaining, modeling, prompting, questioning, and telling. Emily's

scaffolding focused on prompting in student-directed forms whereas Julie's scaffolding most often focused on questioning related to decoding strategies in both teacher and student-directed forms. Students in both Emily and Julie's small groups experienced more difficulty solving words with semantic scaffolds and required differing levels and types of scaffolding. Julie's students implemented more decoding strategies independently. In Chapter 6, I situate these findings within the existing literature and present implications for future policy, practice, and research.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*“Teacher guidance and support appear to be critical components of successful reading practice for developing readers” (Gambrell, Marinak, Brooker, & McCrea-Andrews, 2011, p. 150).*

#### **Introduction to the Chapter**

The purpose of this instrumental qualitative multi-case study was to examine how teachers scaffolded reading during small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty, and, in turn, how this scaffolding affected students’ reading practices. I was interested in further examining teacher scaffolding practices within small-group instruction since this instructional format is often employed to support students experiencing difficulty in reading, yet limited research on this subject exists (Rodgers, 2004; van de Pol et al., 2010). Teachers in primary classrooms enact small-group instruction and scaffolding; however, they may use different formats. Therefore, my specific interest was in examining how two first-grade teachers in an elementary school with a diverse student population scaffolded during small-group instruction to support the reading practices of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading, as well as how teacher scaffolding affected students’ reading practices.

This study comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 presented the problem and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provided social constructivism as the theoretical framework grounding this study and a review of relevant literature on instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading and the concept of scaffolding. Chapter 3 described the qualitative multi-case study methodology for both within-case and cross-case analysis. Chapter 4 presented an overview of the context and the teachers’ pedagogical approach. Chapter 5 described the thematic findings both within each individual case and across the cases. In this sixth chapter, I

summarize the research study and situate the findings within previous literature on instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading and scaffolding. Finally, I conclude by presenting implications from this study's findings for practice, policy, and research.

### **Summary of Methodology**

This qualitative instrumental (Stake, 1995) multi-case study included a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013) examining how teachers scaffolded small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading and how teacher scaffolding affected students' reading practices. The principal selected two first-grade teachers to participate in the study. Both teachers identified the small group needing the most support consisting of students considered to have the most difficulty with reading. Of the eight students identified, seven students received consent to participate. The site of the study, Springville Elementary, was an elementary school located in an rural town near a large city in the Southeastern United States. I collected the following forms of qualitative data: participant observations, field notes, audio and video recordings, semi-structured interviews of the teachers and the students, student reading assessment results, and instructional artifacts. For analysis, I conducted First and Second Cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014) to determine descriptive codes, categories, and five overall themes to address the following overarching research questions:

1. How do two first-grade teachers scaffold within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading?
2. How does teacher scaffolding support students' reading during small-group instruction?

## **Summary of Findings**

All data were collapsed into five themes, which I summarize below. The first three themes focused on how the teachers provided scaffolding during their small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. The last two themes addressed how the teachers' scaffolding supported the reading practices of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Additionally, for each of the five themes, I explained findings from a cross-case analysis. In the sections below, I present overall summaries of the within-case and cross-case analyses for each theme.

### **Theme 1: The Role of Scaffolding**

Both Emily and Julie implemented six forms of scaffolding which consisted of affirming, explaining, modeling, prompting, questioning, and telling; however, each teacher practiced different scaffolding patterns. Emily used prompting, questioning, and affirming most frequently, whereas Julie used questioning, telling, explaining, and affirming. Both teachers relied heavily on scaffolding in the form of questioning. Emily incorporated more student-directed scaffolds and selected scaffolding forms based on students' overall needs as determined from their reading practices. In contrast, Julie employed a combination of student and teacher-directed scaffolds and selected scaffolds in response to students' needs within the moment. Both teachers implemented more specific scaffolds rather than general scaffolds.

### **Theme 2: Instructional Focus**

Emily described phonics, comprehension, and fluency as the essential components of small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. For this small group, she provided extensive phonics instruction, some fluency instruction, some instruction on decoding strategies, and very limited comprehension instruction. Julie described

the important components of small-group instruction as phonics, teaching decoding strategies, and comprehension. In practice, Julie incorporated strategy and comprehension instruction most often with some phonics instruction. Both teachers acknowledged that less comprehension instruction occurred with students identified as having the most difficulty with reading than with students in other reading groups.

### **Theme 3: Engagement with Text**

Both teachers selected leveled texts aligned with students' instructional reading levels determined from students' mCLASS TRC assessment results. The students in Emily's small-group received limited opportunities to read connected text independently. Emily used six different titles during instruction, five of which were informational texts. Additionally, she read these six new texts to students prior to their independent reading of the text. Consequently, students had less opportunity to read and Emily had fewer opportunities to scaffold. In contrast, the students in Julie's small-group instruction experienced ample opportunities to read text. Julie explicitly stated her intention for her students identified as having the most difficulty with reading to frequently engage in text. The students read 10 different titles that consisted of both narrative and informational texts. As a result of frequent opportunities to read text, Julie provided more frequent scaffolding. Finally, both teachers mainly used text aligned with the Fountas and Pinnell (1996) leveling system and expressed difficulty in locating appropriate leveled texts for instruction which matched students' instructional reading levels.

### **Theme 4: Students' Determination of Unknown Words Through Scaffolding**

The students in both Emily and Julie's small-groups determined unknown words more often when their teachers used graphophonemic scaffolds. Emily's students attempted unknown words 23 times and determined the word 21 of those times. Julie's students attempted words 64

times and determined the word 44 of those times. Students in Emily's small group often received semantic scaffolds; however, this form of teacher scaffolding did not allow them to figure out the word. Although both teachers implemented graphophonemic scaffolds for support, the students in Emily's group solved words after modeling how to blend and segment words, whereas Julie's students determined unknown words after modeling or questioning about phonics rules.

### **Theme 5: Teachers Provided Varied Levels of Scaffolding**

The students in both small groups required varied amounts and types of teacher scaffolding to determine unknown words in text. Two students, Rex in Emily's small group and Curry in Julie's small group, required minimal scaffolding. Julie provided scaffolding dependent on the particular text for two students, Griffin and Shawn, who often applied taught decoding strategies while reading. In both small groups, the teachers provided much more scaffolding support to certain students, specifically Lucy and Skylar from Emily's small group and Rose from Julie's small group. Emily provided semantic scaffolds for Skylar and graphophonemic scaffolds for Lucy. Julie provided the most scaffolded support by telling the strategy, parts of the word, or the whole word to Rose who was hesitant to attempt words independently.

### **Discussion**

After providing a summary of the methodology and the thematic findings, I transition to situating the findings within the existing literature. In this section, I present the discussion of the findings from each guiding research question in addition to implications for practice, policy, and research. It is important to note that the guiding research questions consider an investigation of scaffolding from the perspective of the teacher. However, the act of scaffolding occurs within interactions between the teacher and the student and therefore, the context of and the interrelationships that exist within scaffolding interactions must be considered. Examining and

describing the context is essential in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Specifically in examining scaffolding, separating the two perspectives of the teacher and the student poses difficulties. Teacher scaffolding depends on student responses and, similarly, how students respond depends upon teacher scaffolding. This entanglement, referred to as *contingency* (Maloch, 2002; Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol., 2010), is an important aspect explored in prior research, and future research should continue to examine scaffolding with the inclusion of both teacher and student lenses in addition to the contingent interaction between the two (Rodgers, 2004; van de Pol et al., 2010).

**Research Question 1: How do two first-grade teachers scaffold within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having difficulty with reading?**

Although little research exists on scaffolding within small-group reading instruction (Rodgers, 2004; van de Pol et al., 2010), the findings of this study support previous research on teacher scaffolding types used during reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Specifically, the findings demonstrate both first-grade teachers used six different scaffolding types, five of which align with previously determined forms within Reading Recovery or classroom small-group reading instruction. Emily and Julie used the following scaffolding forms during their small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading: *explaining* (Ankrum et al., 2014; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Silliman et al., 2000; Wong et al., 1994); *telling* (Ankrum et al., 2014; Rodgers et al., 2016; Rodgers, 2004; Wong et al., 1994); *modeling* (Clark, 2000; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Silliman et al., 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wong et al., 2014), which is also called *demonstrating* (Rodgers et al., 2016; Rodgers, 2004); *prompting* (Clark, 2000; Rodgers et al., 2016; Rodgers, 2004); and *questioning* (Rodgers, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

In addition to these five forms of scaffolding, an additional form of *affirming* emerged in this study. Existing research established similar categories such as *verification* defined as “confirmation of valid or correct response” (Ankrum et al., 2014, p. 43) or *verification/clarification* defined as teacher responsiveness which researchers furthered classified as *supportive* or *directive* (Silliman et al., 2000). However, the category of *affirming* determined in this study is broader in nature. I defined this scaffolding form as “providing comments or thoughts about how students executed a specific action or stated a specific word.” Therefore, this scaffolding extended beyond just word recognition. Additionally, this scaffolding form appeared as one of the most frequently used by both Emily and Julie. The findings of teacher scaffolding forms address the need to understand how teachers provide support for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading within the small-group instructional format (Rodgers, 2004; van de Pol, 2010).

In this study, I did not intend to focus solely on scaffolding forms implemented for word recognition during connected text reading. Instead, I sought to determine an overall understanding of how the teachers scaffolded within small-group reading instruction. During my analysis, I determined whether the six scaffolding forms employed during scaffold segments of students’ text reading related to word recognition or comprehension. Results indicated most of the two teachers’ scaffolding during scaffold segments focused on word recognition rather than comprehension. The teachers used a variety of the six forms of scaffolding for word recognition. Emily scaffolded most often using prompting, questioning, and affirming, whereas Julie scaffolded most frequently with questioning, telling, explaining, and affirming. Although little research exists in comparing multiple teachers’ scaffolding forms within small-group instruction, these differences in scaffolding amounts and format align with previous research findings of

teacher variation in interruption patterns (Allington, 1983; Chinn et al., 1993; Mertzman, 2008) and scaffolding in small-group instruction (Clark, 2000).

Additionally, the findings suggest the two teachers exhibited differences in the type of scaffolding directedness. Although the scaffolding category of directedness emerged within this study, the teachers exhibited differences in the level of scaffolding completed to support students' ability to determine unfamiliar words. In addition to directedness, the findings also revealed how teacher scaffolding aligned with the use of general or specific cues (Beed et al., 1991; Clark, 2000), as both teachers appeared to utilize more specific cues rather than general cues. These findings support Clark's (2000) determination that only one of six teachers used general cues within scaffolding. For example, when a student could not determine a word, Julie questioned, "Can you get your mouth ready?" (transcription, March 29, 2017) thus providing the specific problem solving action. In contrast, a general cue focused on students' determination of the method to solve the unknown word. The following is an example of a general cue: "What do you think you can do to figure out the word?" A specific example of a general cue used during instruction in this study is unavailable as both teachers used specific cues rather than general cues. As a result, the students may have become more dependent on the teacher providing the word solving method rather than assuming responsibility for determining words.

In contrast to prior research findings in which teachers less often considered students' needs when scaffolding (Chinn et al., 1993; Silliman et al., 2000; Mertzman, 2008), both teachers in this study intentionally aligned scaffolding forms with students' reading practice needs. However, the students' specific needs varied. In alignment with miscue analysis determining whether students use graphophonemic, semantic, and syntactic cues to solve unknown words (Clay, 1993; Goodman, 1977), Emily selected scaffolding types based on cues

students did not use to decode words. In contrast, rather than supporting students' balanced use of cues, Julie used scaffolding to support word recognition in the moment. Overall, both teachers demonstrated domain contingency by determining scaffolds based on students' needs or the unknown word (Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol, 2010).

At the beginning of the school year and again just prior to the start of the study, both teachers analyzed their students' results on mCLASS DIBELS and TRC literacy assessments. The local school district and state mandate the administration of these assessments beginning in kindergarten. The mCLASS assessments primarily measure phonics-related skills and TRC assessments indicate students' instructional text levels with minimal understanding of comprehension ability. Therefore, most likely students' results and the grade-level specific benchmarks associated with the assessments affected teachers' instructional grouping methods and foci for small-group reading instruction. Furthermore, as directed by the local district and state, if students do not achieve targeted grade-level benchmarks, they are required to have an intervention plan, receive specific targeted intervention, and complete frequent progress monitoring to determine whether students attain grade-level benchmarks. Furthermore, students' ability to master grade-level benchmarks on these literacy assessments are considered to determine teachers' overall instructional effectiveness.

Based on her three students' mCLASS and TRC assessment results, Emily determined their need as phonics instruction. Consequently, a majority of small-group instruction consisted of engaging students in word work and phonics-based skills. This finding supports existing research that students identified as having difficulty in reading tend to participate in instruction focused on foundational reading skills rather than comprehension and higher-order thinking skills (Allington, 2002; McIntyre, 2010; Paris, 2005; Wiseman, 2012).

Emily's significant instructional time devoted to phonics and isolated word work activities provided less time for students' reading of connected text and determination of unknown words in context. As a result, Emily observed students' reading practices and implemented scaffolding less frequently. Without this knowledge, Emily had fewer opportunities to determine students' needs and ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). This decreased level of scaffolding further supports Clark's (2000) determination that scaffolding occurred less than anticipated in classrooms. Overall, Emily's small-group instruction tended to be more directive (Silliman et al., 2000) rather than providing opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997).

In contrast, based on her four students' mCLASS and TRC assessment results, Julie selected the instructional focus of supporting students in understanding and applying decoding strategies to solve unknown words. Most of these strategies incorporated the use of graphophonemic cues such in which students separated a word into parts and then blended them together. However, she did focus on two specific semantic strategies: *read skip read* and cross checking as to whether a possible word looked right, sounded right, and made sense. Incorporating these strategies aligned with building students' use of a balanced cueing system to determine unknown words (Clay, 1993; Goodman, 1977). Additionally, based on students' instructional reading levels and district determined grade-level expectations for proficiency on end of the year literacy assessments, Julie desired to provide students with ample opportunities to read and comprehend text of different genres. In addition, scaffold segments occurred within almost every instructional lesson which created numerous opportunities for scaffolding, further determination of students' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), and the co-construction of knowledge (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997) for problem solving unfamiliar words. Julie's inclusion of extensive

time for students to read text and encounter unfamiliar words supports prior research stating teachers are deliberate in allowing students to have opportunities focused on discovering words (Rodgers, 2004).

The differences in students' determined needs, students' instructional reading levels, and the teachers' selected instructional focus also created variations in the two small-group instructional formats. Emily's small-group instruction resembled small-group word work instruction in addition to some decoding strategy instruction and text reading. However, Julie's small-group instruction focused on decoding strategies, text reading, and comprehension with the inclusion of some phonics-based instruction. Julie's small-group instructional format more closely aligned with guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), a format for reading instruction prevalent in many primary classrooms and reflected the stated instructional method of the teachers as recommended by the local district. Overall, the descriptions of small-group instruction in both classrooms extend understandings of how small-group instruction and also guided reading instruction are implemented in primary classrooms (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Maloch et al., 2013; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). However, further research is still required to determine the effectiveness of this small-group format. Furthermore, despite studies illustrating the effectiveness of scaffolding for comprehension within small groups (Jadallah et al., 2011; Maloch, 2002; Palinscar & Brown, 1984), these teachers did not prioritize comprehension instruction or implement scaffolding focused on making meaning of text within scaffold segments.

### **Research Question 2: How does teacher scaffolding support students' reading during small-group instruction?**

In general, students in this study often determined unknown words with the support of teacher scaffolding. This finding highlights the importance of the role of scaffolding (Allington,

2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Students identified as having the most difficulty in reading in both classrooms determined words more often with phonics-based scaffolds rather than with meaning-based scaffolds. This finding aligns with research stating students should focus on the graphophonemic cues to determine words rather than scaffolding students to incorporate a balance of cues or focus on semantic cues to determine words (Adams, 1998; Seidenberg, 2017; Shanahan, 2017). This finding is similar to previous research findings in which students exhibited difficulty using semantic cues to determine words (Adams, 1998; Seidenberg, 2017; Shanahan, 2017; Stanovich, 1990). Furthermore, the findings revealed teachers needed to provide differing levels and types of scaffolding to students. Scant research exists examining students' responses to teacher scaffolding in small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. Therefore, situating results about how teachers scaffolding affected students' reading practices within prior research is more difficult. Instead, more research is needed on the students' responses (Rodgers, 2004) and effectiveness of scaffolding (van de Pol et al., 2010).

Similar to Rodgers (2004), the two teachers in this study provided multiple forms of scaffolding to support students' determination of words. Rodgers explained:

It seems that effective scaffolding might not be about selecting just the right move (focused on the right content with the right amount of help) but upon trying a move, observing the student's response, and then trying another move to provide a better fit to what the student is presently able to do. (p. 528)

The teachers provided several students in their small groups with scaffold sequences implementing various scaffold forms. With students' differing reading practices, it is not surprising that the students within both cases required different scaffolding amounts and forms. The teachers provided two students, one in each small-group, with little scaffolding, two students

with small amounts, and three students with the highest level of scaffolding. These varied scaffolding levels illustrate that even though the teachers grouped students for reading instruction based on their instructional reading levels using leveled text, great variation existed in their need for scaffolding to decode words. This finding aligns with researchers who argue that creating groups and determining instruction based on instructional text level is not the most effective approach (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hoffman, 2017; Shanahan, 2016).

The findings also illustrate the teachers' struggle with appropriately grouping students for small-group reading and the difficulties of using students' instructional reading levels to determine groups. Specifically, both teachers discussed having a student whose comprehension needs did not align with the instruction, which focused on decoding. However, both teachers did not feel changing the group was possible based on the grouping practice by text level and consequently, these students remained in the small groups identified as needing the most support. This finding demonstrates the complexities of forming instructional groups for small-group reading instruction based on students' instructional reading level. In addition, this finding aligns with prior research demonstrating that although teachers do not intend to maintain student participation in the same reading group extensively, the reading groups remained stable rather than flexible (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Fountas & Pinnell; 2012). Of note, the teachers in this study may have maintained student participation in established groups due to the research study.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research has implications for practice, specifically the formation of student groups for small-group literacy instruction. The teachers in this study identified students who had the most difficulty with reading and grouped them together for instruction. However, this need was not solely determined by the teacher's observations. The teachers also used students' literacy

assessment results and instructional reading levels to form homogeneous groups (Barr, 1975). The homogeneous grouping practices further impacted the type of instruction delivered, opportunities for text reading, and the scaffolding forms implemented. This grouping practice adheres to the requirements of the district and the state in which students' assessment results on mCLASS DIBELS and TRC are used to determine students' reading levels and areas in which students identified as having the most difficulty with reading are progress monitored. Furthermore, students' assessment results serve as an indication of teacher effectiveness as evidenced within annual teacher evaluations. Therefore, this additional pressure may influence teachers to align instructional groups with students' assessment results. Based on the strong focus on assessment, teachers may also experience a lack of autonomy in making instructional decisions about grouping students, focus of instruction, and text type. In this study, Emily explicitly addressed the pressure of using instructional level text aligned with assessment results within small group reading instruction (interview, April 17, 2017).

Teachers should consider the methods used to identify students as having the most difficulty with reading and the ensuing effects on both reading instruction and the students themselves. Using the results of single assessments, even if mandated at the district and state level, does not present a comprehensive understanding of students' strengths and areas of need. Specifically, teachers should reflect on what assessment results indicate about students' reading practices and the effect of homogeneously grouping students for instruction based upon these results. The two teachers in this study conducted homogeneous grouping practices and, in particular, noticed how the grouping and instructional practices did not reflect the needs of all their students. Furthermore, an implication in recent research investigating the effect of accuracy level on reading progress for students who have difficulty with reading is to consistently monitor

students' progress in reading connected text within small-group reading instruction (Rodgers et al., n.d.).

Despite this knowledge, the teachers did not make changes to group participants, echoing findings on static grouping literacy practices identified in prior research (Ford & Opitz, 2008; 2011; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Maloch et al., 2013). However, as alluded to earlier in the findings, the teachers may have thought groups needed to remain the same for research purposes. Additionally, in this study, the students displayed varying levels of need. However, the teachers implemented specific instructional components not necessarily aligned with the students' individual needs. Teachers should consider how to incorporate flexible grouping methods (Barr, 1975) to refrain from perpetuating ability grouping within small-group instruction (Ford & Opitz, 2011; Maloch et al., 2013). In addition, teachers should analyze their instructional focus in small-group instruction, how this focus reflects students' literacy needs, and how it corresponds with the need to engage all students in comprehension and higher-order thinking.

This research also has implications for engagement with text. The findings indicated the number of opportunities students received to read text varied by teacher, which affected the amount of teacher scaffolding. Students identified as having the most difficulty with reading should have ample opportunities to interact with a variety of types (Allington, 2013). These text forms should include narrative and informational as well as instructional level (Allington, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Morris, 2015) and more challenging texts (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Hoffman, 2017; Shanahan, 2016). Teachers should consider how students can engage in more challenging text beyond the student's instructional reading level within small-group instruction.

Further implications from this research include opportunities for teachers' examination of their own small-group instructional practices and scaffolding methods. The teachers in this study

did not explicitly identify scaffolding as an important part of small-group instruction or a specific form of support. Instead, they discussed more specific areas such as phonics, decoding strategies, comprehension, and fluency. Since scaffolding is an essential component of small-group instruction (Allington, 2002; Pressley et al, 2001; Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2002; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998), it is important for teachers to possess a greater understanding of scaffolding forms. Without knowledge of different forms of scaffolding provided in this study and previous research (Ankrum et al., 2014; Clark, 2000; Rodgers et al., 2016; Rodgers, 2004; Silliman et al., 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wong et al., 1994), teachers may be unaware of what forms of scaffolding they incorporate into instruction. Therefore, teachers should receive opportunities to determine their own scaffolding patterns and how these scaffolds affect students' reading practices. With similar opportunities, the teachers in this study may have altered instruction further promoting the development of students' reading practices. Of note, this examination of scaffolding should focus on both word determination and comprehension as instruction for meaning should occur alongside of decoding instruction.

The findings of this research have implications for professional development for teachers. The two teachers in this study did not appear aware of different scaffolding forms and did not discuss this instructional practice as important in small-group reading instruction. Therefore, opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge of scaffolding forms and practices is warranted. Reading specialists or literacy coaches may provide professional development opportunities as workshops or co-teaching experiences to build teacher knowledge of scaffolding, model different forms of scaffolding to implement in small-group instruction, and allow teacher investigation of their scaffolding practices. In addition, opportunities for teachers to observe each other's instruction and scaffolding methods may further teachers' own investigation of their scaffolding

patterns and small-group instruction. Finally, Emily explicitly shared another area of need in that she felt unprepared to deliver effective literacy instruction to students identified as having the most difficulty in reading. Future professional development should address providing teachers with knowledge of effective instructional methods, activities, and resources in meeting the literacy needs of students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

### **Implications for Policy**

This research has additional implications for policies related to the use and interpretation of literacy assessments. An important consideration is how literacy assessments mandated at local and state levels affect instructional grouping practices, including the instructional focus, text selection, and forms of scaffolding used in small-group reading instruction. In this study, required literacy assessments provided information about students' performance mainly on phonics-related skills or constrained skills (Paris, 2005) and resulted in the determination of students' instructional reading levels and instructional focus. Based on students' results, teachers may decide further instruction on these constrained skills and the use of leveled text on students' instructional reading levels is warranted. Consequently, this may limit opportunities for scaffolding, text reading, and comprehension. However, these assessment results do not consider additional reading practices which provide a full understanding of students as readers. In this study specifically, the findings suggest Emily focused on phonics instruction due to the students' lower level of proficiency on the mCLASS DIBELS assessments measuring constrained skills. However, since Julie's students demonstrated proficiency on the mCLASS DIBELS assessments, she focused on decoding strategies and comprehension to ensure students obtain the required benchmark on TRC text reading assessments. Both of these teachers solely used instructional

leveled text as determined by this single assessment with their students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

Policymakers should reexamine literacy assessment practices to develop or require the use of literacy assessments that focus on more than constrained skills (Paris, 2005) and yield results that portray a broader picture of students' reading practices. In this study, as required at state and district levels, the teachers analyzed students' DIBELS mCLASS and TRC assessments to determine students' needs and form instructional groups. Additionally, movement of students within the small groups depended upon progress monitoring assessments completed with DIBELS and TRC assessments after benchmark periods. Without the pressure of students meeting these standards, teachers may engage in more flexible grouping of students (Flood et al., 1992; Jeanne, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000) and allow students currently identified as having the most difficulty with reading more opportunities to engage in a variety of instructional activities and types of text requiring higher-order thinking skills.

### **Implications for Research**

Although this study provides new insights about scaffolding, particularly in small-group instruction and from two different perspectives of the teacher and the student, more research on scaffolding is necessary in the field of literacy. This study has implications for future research on teacher scaffolding. This particular study answered two questions: 1) How do two first-grade teachers scaffold during small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty in reading? 2) How does teacher scaffolding support students' reading during small-group instruction? The findings of this study reveal teacher scaffolding methods for determining unknown words. In general, more research is required to determine how scaffolding for word solving transpires in the small-group instructional format. However, further research

investigating teacher scaffolding methods for comprehension within small-group reading instruction is needed. In addition, the findings raised questions about teachers' knowledge of scaffolding practices. In future studies, teachers might assume the role of co-researchers to examine their own scaffolding practices and the impact of their reading instruction, especially for students identified as having difficulty with reading. These studies should also measure teacher learning and effects on students' reading practices and compare participant-researchers with teachers who do not receive the co-researcher opportunity. Finally, additional scaffolding studies should examine how teacher expectations and beliefs about student learning impact scaffolding within small-group reading instruction.

Within this study, I examined both the role of the teacher and how the teacher's actions affected students' reading practices. Although the findings provide more understanding, a lack of extensive knowledge persists regarding how students respond to teacher scaffolding. Therefore, more research examining the student perspective of scaffolding is warranted. Scaffolding occurs within a cycle involving the teacher and the student and consists of several forms of contingency (Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol et al., 2010). Further examinations of the interactions between the language of the teacher and the student and instances of various forms of contingency within small-group instruction are necessary (Rodgers et al., 2016; van de Pol et al., 2010). Finally, to truly advance the field and the concept of scaffolding, future studies should determine methods to measure the effect of scaffolding on student reading outcomes (van de Pol et al., 2010), especially within small-group reading instruction and for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Both Emily and Julie desired to provide instruction positively impacting the progress and the reading practices of their students identified as having the most difficulty. At the end of the study, Emily stated that the students in her small group exhibited growth and for the end of the year, she wanted students to read on grade level or at least achieve grade level proficiency on the mCLASS DIBELS assessments (interview, April 17, 2017). Similarly, Julie expressed that the students in her small-group demonstrated progress and attempted to implement decoding strategies taught in small group to determine unknown words (interview, April 21, 2017). Despite differences in the amount and types of teacher scaffolding provided, overall students in both small groups showed growth in reading practices.

In summary, this study illustrates how first-grade teachers implemented scaffolding within small-group instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. The findings demonstrate two first-grade teachers used six different scaffolding forms within small-group reading instruction for students identified as having the most difficulty with reading. However, the teachers demonstrated differences in the types of scaffolds they implemented most frequently, the use of student or teacher directed scaffolds, the level of scaffolding specificity, and their responsiveness to student needs. The findings add to the scant research on how teachers scaffold during small-group literacy instruction, as well as how this scaffolding affects students' reading practices. Additionally, the findings demonstrate students' abilities to decode words with specific scaffolding types and the need for various scaffolding forms. These insights provide further understanding of scaffolding supports students' reading practices, an area explored minimally in literacy research.

**REFERENCES**

- Allington, R. L. (1980). Teacher interruption behaviors during primary-grade oral reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 72*(3), 371.
- Allington, R. L., McCuiston, K., & Billen, M. (2015). What research says about text complexity and learning to read. *The Reading Teacher, 68*(7), 491-501.
- Alvermann, D. E. (2001). Reading adolescents' reading identities: Looking back to see ahead. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*(8), 676-690.
- Amplify Education, Incorporated. (2015). mCLASS: Reading 3D. Brooklyn, NY.
- Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Center for the Study of Reading.
- Ankrum, J. W., & Bean, R. M. (2008). Differentiated reading instruction: What and how. *Reading Horizons, 48*(2), 133-146.
- Ankrum, J. W., Genest, M. T., & Belcastro, E. G. (2014). The power of verbal scaffolding: “Showing” beginning readers how to use reading strategies. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 42*(1), 39-47.
- Au, K. H. (1997). A sociocultural model of reading instruction: The Kamehameha Elementary Education Program. In S. A. Stahl & D. A. Hayes (Eds.), *Instructional models in reading* (181-202). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Au, K. H. (1998). Social constructivism and the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Literacy Research, 30*(2), 297-319.
- Barr, R. (1975). How children are taught to read: Grouping and pacing. *The School Review, 83*(3), 479-498.
- Beed, P. L., Hawkins, E. M., & Roller, C. M. (1991). Moving learners toward independence: The power of scaffolded instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 44*(9), 648-655.
- Benchmark Education Company (1999). Early Connections Curriculum. New Rochelle, NY.
- Betts, E. A. (1946). *Foundations of reading instruction, with emphasis on differentiated guidance*. Oxford, England: American Book Co.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, England: Pearson.
- Bond, G. L., & Dykstra, R. (1967). The cooperative research program in first-grade reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 5*-142.

- Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily five: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Burgess, R. (2004). *The Best Class Trip*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Burkins, J. M., & Croft, M. M. (2010). Preventing misguided reading: New strategies for guided reading teachers. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Burton, M., French, C., & Jones, T. (1999). *Measuring Time*. New Rochelle, NY: Benchmark Education.
- Burton, M., French, C., & Jones, T. (1999). *Numbers Are Everywhere*. New Rochelle, NY: Benchmark Education.
- Burton, M., French, C., & Jones, T. (1999). *Ocean Animals*. New Rochelle, NY: Benchmark Education.
- Cazden, C. (1979). Peekaboo as an instructional model: Discourse development at home and at school. *Papers and Reports on Child Language Development*, No. 17.
- Chinn, C. A., Waggoner, M. A., Anderson, R. C., Schommer, M., & Wilkinson, I. A. (1993). Situated actions during reading lessons: A microanalysis of oral reading error episodes. *American Educational Research Journal*, 30(2), 361-392.
- Clark, K. (2000). *Instructional scaffolding in reading: A case study of four primary teachers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 9975752)
- Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2005). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(6), 570-580.
- Clay, M. M. (1993). *Reading recovery: A guidebook for training teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Education.
- Clay, M. M. (2002). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Company.
- Cole, A. D. (2006). Scaffolding beginning readers: Micro and macro cues teachers use during student oral reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(5), 450-459.
- Cowen, J. E. (2003). *A balanced approach to beginning reading instruction: A synthesis of six major US research studies*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Denton, C. A., Fletcher, J. M., Taylor, W. P., Barth, A. E., & Vaughn, S. (2014). An experimental evaluation of guided reading and explicit interventions for primary-grade students at-risk for reading difficulties. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 7(3), 268-293.
- Dudley-Marling, C., & Murphy, S. (1997). A political critique of remedial reading programs: The example of Reading Recovery. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(6), 460-468.
- Duffy-Hester, A. M. (1999). Teaching struggling readers in elementary school classrooms: A review of classroom reading programs and principles for instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 52(5), 480-495.
- Durkin, D. (1978). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 481-533.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case* (Vol. 76). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fairbrother, (2004). *The Mixed Up Wigs*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). Scaffolded reading instruction of content-area texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(5), 347-351.
- Flood, J., Lapp, D., Flood, S., & Nagel, G. (1992). Am I allowed to group? Using flexible patterns for effective instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 45(8), 608-616.
- Foorman, B. R., Francis, D. J., Fletcher, J. M., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (1998). The role of instruction in learning to read: Preventing reading failure in at-risk children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(1), 37-55.
- Foorman, B. R., & Torgesen, J. (2001). Critical elements of classroom and small-group instruction promote reading success in all children. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 16(4), 203-212.
- Ford, M. P., & Opitz, M. F. (2008). A national survey of guided reading practices: What we can learn from primary teachers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47(4), 309-331.
- Ford, M. P., & Opitz, M. F. (2011). Looking back to move forward with guided reading. *Reading Horizons*, 50(4), 225-240.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2012). Guided reading: The romance and the reality. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(4), 268-284.
- Gambrell, L. B., Wilson, R. M., & Gantt, W. N. (1981). Classroom observations of task-attending behaviors of good and poor readers. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 74(6), 400-404.
- Gambrell, L. B. (2011). Seven rules of engagement: What's most important to know about motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(3), 172-178.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Discourse and sociocultural studies in reading. *Handbook of Reading Research*, 3, 195-207.
- Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2008). Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide. (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides>.
- Good, R.H., & Kaminski, R.A. (Eds.). (2002). Dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills (6th ed.). Eugene, OR: Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement.
- Greenwood, C. R., Carta, J. J., Goldstein, H., Kaminski, R. A., McConnell, S. R., & Atwater, J. (2014). The Center for Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Developing Evidence-Based Tools for a Multi-Tier Approach to Preschool Language and Early Literacy Instruction. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 36(4), 246-262.
- Guthrie, J. T., Hoa, A. L. W., Wigfield, A., Tonks, S. M., Humenick, N. M., & Littles, E. (2007). Reading motivation and reading comprehension growth in the later elementary years. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 32(3), 282-313.
- Handsfield, L. J. (2015). *Literacy Theory as Practice: Connecting Theory and Instruction in K-12 Classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hiebert, E. H. (1983). An examination of ability grouping for reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 18(2), 231-255.
- Hiebert, E. H. (2014). Changing readers, changing texts: Beginning reading texts from 1960 to 2010. Santa Cruz, California: Text Project, Inc.
- Hiebert, E. H., & Mesmer, H. A. E. (2013). Upping the ante of text complexity in the Common Core State Standards examining its potential impact on young readers. *Educational Researcher*, 42(1), 44-51.

- Hoffman, J. V. (2017). What if “just right” is just wrong? The unintended consequences of leveling readers. *The Reading Teacher*, *0(0)*, 1-9. doi:10.1002/trtr.1611
- Hoffman, J. V., Roser, N. L., Salas, R., Patterson, E., & Pennington, J. (2001). Text leveling and “little books” in first-grade reading. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *33(3)*, 507-528.
- Hogan, K. E., & Pressley, M. E. (1997). *Scaffolding student learning: Instructional approaches and issues*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, Inc.
- Hong, G., Corter, C., Hong, Y., & Pelletier, J. (2012). Differential effects of literacy instruction time and homogeneous ability grouping in kindergarten classrooms: Who will benefit? Who will suffer?. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *34(1)*, 69-88.
- Jadallah, M., Anderson, R. C., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., Miller, B. W., Kim, I. H., Kuo, L. J., . . . Wu, X. (2011). Influence of a teacher’s scaffolding moves during child-led small-group discussions. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48(1)*, 194-230.
- Jang, B. G., Conradi, K., McKenna, M. C., & Jones, J. S. (2015). Motivation: Approaching an elusive concept through the factors that shape it. *The Reading Teacher*, *69(2)*, 239-247.
- Jeanne, S. S., Moody, S. W., & Vaughn, S. (2000). Grouping for reading instruction: Does one size fit all? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *33(5)*, 477-88.
- John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, *31(3-4)*, 191-206.
- Jones, J. S., Conradi, K., & Amendum, S. J. (2016). Matching interventions to reading needs: A case for differentiation. *The Reading Teacher*, *70(3)*, 307-316.
- Juel, C., & Roper-Schneider, D. (1985). The influence of basal readers on first grade reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *20(2)*, 134-152.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, *34(3)*, 159-165.
- Lantolf, J. P. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Learned, J. E. (2016). “The behavior kids”: Examining the conflation of youth reading difficulty and behavior problem positioning among school institutional contexts. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53(5)*, 1271-1309.
- Lee, P. A., & Schmitt, M. C. (2014). Teacher language scaffolds the development of independent strategic reading activities and metacognitive awareness in emergent readers. *Reading Psychology*, *35(1)*, 32-57.

- Letterland International (2014). Letterland Grade One program. Surrey, England.
- Lutz, S. L., Guthrie, J. T., & Davis, M. H. (2006). Scaffolding for engagement in elementary school reading instruction. *The Journal of Educational Research, 100*(1), 3-20.
- Maloch, B. (2002). Scaffolding student talk: One teacher's role in literature discussion groups. *Reading Research Quarterly, 37*(1), 94-112.
- Maloch, B., Worthy, J., Hampton, A., Jordan, M., Hungerford-Kresser, H., & Semingson, P. (2013). Portraits of practice: A cross-case analysis of two first-grade teachers and their grouping practices. *Research in the Teaching of English, 47*(3), 277-312.
- Martin, L. (2003). *Cliff Can't Come*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Mathes, P. G., Denton, C. A., Fletcher, J. M., Anthony, J. L., Francis, D. J., & Schatschneider, C. (2005). The effects of theoretically different instruction and student characteristics on the skills of struggling readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40*(2), 148-182.
- McIntyre, E. (2010). Sociocultural perspectives on children with reading difficulties. *Handbook of Research on Reading Disabilities, 41-56*.
- McIntyre, E., Kyle, D. W., & Moore, G. H. (2006). A primary-grade teacher's guidance toward small-group dialogue. *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*(1), 36-66.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and interpretation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertzman, T. (2008). Individualising scaffolding: Teachers' literacy interruptions of ethnic minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Journal of Research in Reading, 31*(2), 183-202.
- Mesmer, H. A. E. (2010). Textual scaffolds for developing fluency in beginning readers: Accuracy and reading rate in qualitatively leveled and decodable text. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 49*, 20-39.
- Michaels, J. (2002). *Rivers*. Foundations Wright Group.
- Miles, L. (2004). *Riverboat Bill*. London, England: Macmillan Education.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- Moll, L. C. (1990). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: Rethinking its instructional implications. *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 13(51-52), 157-168.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- Morris, D. (2015). Preventing early reading failure. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 502-509.
- Palincsar, A. S. (2005). 12 Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. In H. Daniels (Ed.). *An introduction to Vygotsky* (285-314). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Palincsar, A. S. & Brown, A. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1(2), 117-175.
- Paris, S. G. (2005). Reinterpreting the development of reading skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40(2), 184-202.
- Pearson Education Company (2017). ReadyGen Literacy Program. London, England.
- Pressley, M. (2002). Effective beginning reading instruction. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(2), 165-188.
- Pressley, M., & Allington, R. L. (2014). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Pressley, M., Allington, R. L., Wharton-McDonald, R., Block, C. C., & Morrow, L. M. (2001). *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first-grade classrooms*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Puntambekar, S., & Hubscher, R. (2005). Tools for scaffolding students in a complex learning environment: What have we gained and what have we missed?. *Educational Psychologist*, 40(1), 1-12.
- Rasinski, T. V., & Hoffman, J. V. (2003). Oral reading in the school literacy curriculum. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38(4), 510-522.
- Rodgers, E. M. (2000). When is a scaffold really a scaffold? In T. Shanahan & F. Rodriguez Brown (Eds.), *Forty-ninth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 78-90). Chicago: National Reading Conference.
- Rodgers, E. M. (2004). Interactions that scaffold reading performance. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 36(4), 501-532.

- Rodgers, E., D'Agostino, J. V., Harme, S. J., Kelly, R. H., & Brownfield, K. (2016). Examining the nature of scaffolding in an early literacy intervention. *Reading Research Quarterly*. doi:10.1002/rrq.142
- Rodgers, E., D'Agostino, J. V., Kelly, R. H., & Mikita, C. Oral reading accuracy: Findings and implications from recent research. *The Reading Teacher*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/prox.lib.ncsu.edu/doi/10.1002/trtr.1686/full/>
- Roehler, L. R., & Cantlon, D. J. (1997). Scaffolding: A powerful tool in social constructivist classrooms. In K. Hogan & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Scaffolding student learning: Instructional approaches and issues* (6-42). Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, Inc.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reutzel, D. R. (2011). Organizing effective literacy instruction: Differentiating instruction to meet student needs. In L. B. Gambrell, L. M. E. Morrow, & M. E. Pressley (Eds.), *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction* (412-435). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Routman, R. (1994). *Invitations: Changing as teachers and learners K-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rupley, W. H., Blair, T. R., & Nichols, W. D. (2009). Effective reading instruction for struggling readers: The role of direct/explicit teaching. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 25(2-3), 125-138.
- Scott, S., & Palincsar, A. (2013). Sociocultural theory. Retrieved from [www.education.com](http://www.education.com)
- Shanahan, T. (2017, July 9). Language at the speed of sight—On cueing systems, phonemes, speed Reading, and sequences of learning [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <http://shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/language-at-the-speed-of-sight-on-cueing-systems-phonemes-speed-reading-and-sequences-of-learning#sthash.XZ2PuEgz.dpbs>
- Shanahan, T. (2013). Letting the Text Take Center Stage: How the Common Core State Standards Will Transform English Language Arts Instruction. *American Educator*, 37(3), 4-11.
- Shannon, P., & Edmondson, J. (2010). The political contexts of reading disabilities. *Handbook of Reading Disability Research*, 3-24.
- Silliman, E. R., Bahr, R., Beasman, J., & Wilkinson, L. C. (2000). Scaffolds for learning to read in an inclusion classroom. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 31(3), 265-279.
- Sipe, L. R. (2002). Talking back and taking over: Young children's expressive engagement during storybook read-alouds. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(5), 476-483.

- Slavin, R. E. (1987). Ability grouping and student achievement in elementary schools: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 57(3), 293-336.
- Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N. A. (2011). Effective programs for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis. *Educational Research Review*, 6(1), 1-26.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(4), 360-407.
- Stone, C. A. (1998). The metaphor of scaffolding its utility for the field of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31(4), 344-364.
- Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Clark, K., & Walpole, S. (2000). Effective schools and accomplished teachers: Lessons about primary-grade reading instruction in low-income schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 121-165.
- Taylor, B. M., Peterson, D. S., Pearson, P. D., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2002). Looking inside classrooms: Reflecting on the "how" as well as the "what" in effective reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(3), 270-279.
- Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1991). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. New York, NY: University Press.
- Tracey, D. H., & Morrow, L. M. (2012). *Lenses on reading: An introduction to theories and models* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Triplett, C. F. (2007). The social construction of "struggle": Influences of school literacy contexts, curriculum, and relationships. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 39(1), 95-126.
- Tyner, B. (2004). *Small-group reading instruction*. Delaware: International Reading Association.
- van de Pol, J., Volman, M., & Beishuizen, J. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher-student interaction: A decade of research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 22(3), 271-296.
- Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., Sipay, E. R., Small, S. G., Pratt, A., Chen, R., & Denckla, M. B. (1996). Cognitive profiles of difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor readers: Early intervention as a vehicle for distinguishing between cognitive and experiential deficits as basic causes of specific reading disability. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(4), 601.

- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In M. Gauvain & M. Cole (2004). *Readings on the Development of Children* (pp. 29-36). New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Warschauer, M. (1997). A sociocultural approach to literacy and its significance for CALL. In K. Murphy-Judy & R. Sanders (Eds.), *Nexus: The convergence of research & teaching through new information technologies* (pp. 88-97). Durham, NC: University of North Carolina. Retrieved from [http://education.uci.edu/person/warschauer\\_m/sociocultural.html](http://education.uci.edu/person/warschauer_m/sociocultural.html)
- Wertsch, J. V. (2009) *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Hampston, J. M. (1998). Literacy instruction in nine first-grade classrooms: Teacher characteristics and student achievement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101-128.
- Wiseman, A. M. (2012). Resistance, engagement, and understanding: A profile of a struggling emergent reader responding to read-alouds in a kindergarten classroom. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 28(3), 255-278.
- Wong, S., Groth, L., O'Flahavan, J., Gale, S., Kelley, G., Leeds, . . . , Steiner-O'Malley, J. (1994). Characterizing teacher-student interaction in Reading Recovery lessons. *Reading Research Report*, 17, 9-35.
- Wood, D. (2003). The why, what, when and how of tutoring: The development of helping and tutoring skills in children. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 7(1&2), 1-30.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89-100.
- Wood, D., & Middleton, D. (1975). A study of assisted problem-solving. *British Journal of Psychology*, 66(2), 181-191.

**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: IRB Approval

1/18/2017

North Carolina State University Mail - Grifenhagen - 11630 - IRB Protocol approved

The logo for North Carolina State University, featuring the text "NC STATE" in white on a red rectangular background.Jill Jones <[jsjones7@ncsu.edu](mailto:jsjones7@ncsu.edu)>

---

### Grifenhagen - 11630 - IRB Protocol approved

---

IRB Administrative Office <[pins\\_notifications@ncsu.edu](mailto:pins_notifications@ncsu.edu)>  
Reply-To: [debra\\_paxton@ncsu.edu](mailto:debra_paxton@ncsu.edu)  
To: [jsjones7@ncsu.edu](mailto:jsjones7@ncsu.edu)

Thu, Jan 12, 2017 at 11:37 AM

Dear Jill Jones:

IRB Protocol 11630 has been approved

Title: Examining Small-Group Reading Instruction for Students Who Have Difficulty Reading: A Case Study

PI: Grifenhagen, Jill Freiberg

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on 01/12/2018 and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:

1. You must use the approved consent forms (available in the IRB system with the documents for your protocol) which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton  
919.515.4514

IRB Administrator  
[dapaxton@ncsu.edu](mailto:dapaxton@ncsu.edu)  
NC State IRB Office

Jennie Ofstein  
919.515.8754  
IRB Coordinator  
[irb-coordinator@ncsu.edu](mailto:irb-coordinator@ncsu.edu)  
NC State IRB Office



## Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

### Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Protocol #1 Beginning of the Study

Teacher:      Date:              Time:              Location:

#### Introductory Script:

Hello. My name is Jill Jones. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me one-on-one to learn more about your background and small-group reading instruction. Before we begin, I would like to share some ground rules with you. First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in learning more about your personal perspectives and experiences. Second, if any time you would like to stop the interview, please say so. You may also choose not to answer a question. Lastly, I would like to let you know that I will be audio recording this discussion to help me transcribe the conversation later. Will this be alright with you? I will now begin with our interview questions.

1. First, I would like to start with learning more about you as a teacher. Please share your name and share your professional background.
2. Can you describe how or why you decided to teach first grade?
3. Please share any background or experiences you have had that helped you learn more about reading instruction.
4. Are there any other experiences that have helped you learn about teaching reading that you have not mentioned yet?
5. What do you feel are the most important components of small-group reading instruction?
6. Can you describe your small-group reading instruction?
7. How do you select the students in your small-group instructional reading groups?
8. What students are having most the difficulty with reading and how would you describe these students as readers?
9. What do you feel is important to consider when planning lessons for small-group reading instruction for students identified as having difficulty with reading?
10. How do you support students who have difficulty with reading in small-group reading instruction?
11. How do you select instructional focuses for your small-group reading lessons?
12. How do you select texts for small-group reading instruction?
13. How do you assess students' reading progress?
14. Where do you locate the texts for small-group reading instruction?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your small-group reading instruction that I have not asked?
16. Is there anything else that I have not asked that you would like to share with me?

### Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Protocol #2 Mid-Study

Script: Hello. Thank you for meeting with me today. Now that we are midway through the study, the purpose of this second interview is to hear more about your perspective regarding your small-group reading instruction and how your students are developing as readers. Before we begin, I would like to remind you of some ground rules with you. First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in learning more about your personal perspectives and experiences. Second, if any time you would like to stop the interview, please say so. You may also choose not to answer a question. Lastly, I would like to let you know that I will be audio recording this discussion to help me transcribe the conversation later. Will this be alright with you? I will now begin with our interview questions.

1. How would you describe the focus of your small-group reading instruction?
2. What has gone well with your small-group reading instruction?
3. What are some challenges with your small-group reading instruction?
4. What has been the focus of your small reading group?
5. What types of support have you tried to provide in your small-group reading instruction?
6. How you describe your small-group reading instruction? Are there any changes you have made to the instructional format?
7. What are the instructional focuses of your small-group reading instruction?
8. How would you describe the students as readers?
9. Can you describe the students' progress in reading?
10. Can you describe the students' challenges as readers?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?

### Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Protocol #3 End of the Study

Script: Hello. Thank you for meeting with me today. Now that the study is coming to an end, the purpose of this last interview is to hear more about your perspective regarding the small-group instruction you have provided students over the last nine weeks and how you would describe the students as readers. Before we begin, I would like to remind you of some ground rules with you. First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in learning more about your personal perspectives and experiences. Second, if any time you would like to stop the interview, please say so. You may also choose not to answer a question. Lastly, I would like to let you know that I will be audio recording this discussion to help me transcribe the conversation later. Will this be alright with you? I will now begin with our interview questions.

1. What are components of your small-group instruction that you feel helped your students develop as readers and why?
2. Are there any components that you feel were not as effective and why?
3. Is there anything you would change with your small-group reading instruction?
4. What was your biggest teaching strength in small-group reading instruction with these students?
5. What was your biggest challenge in small-group reading instruction with these students?

6. How would you describe the support you have provided these students during small-group reading instruction?
7. What types of support were essential to providing your students in the reading group?
8. How would you describe the students as readers?
9. How do you feel about your students' progress in reading?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## Appendix D: Student Interview Protocol

### Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol #1 Beginning of the Study

Student:            Date:            Time:            Location:

#### Introductory Script:

Hello. My name is Jill Jones. I am studying about reading in your classroom. Thank you for talking with me so I can learn more about you as a reader. I also want to learn more about the reading activities you do in your classroom.

I want you to know there are no right or wrong answers. I just want to learn what you think. If you want to stop the interview at any time, you can. You also can say you do not want to answer a question. I would like to audio record this discussion to help me remember what you say. Is that okay? I will now ask you some questions.

1. What do you think about reading?
2. What can you tell me about your reading?
3. What kinds of books do you like to read?
4. How often do you get books in your classroom?
5. Do you read outside of school? (If yes) What do you read?
6. What do you do in your reading group with your teacher?
7. What do you think about (activities named)?
8. Is there anything you like about the reading group?
9. Is there anything you do not like about the reading group?
10. What do you want to learn in the reading group?
11. Is there anything else you want to share about the reading group?
12. Do you have a goal with reading? (If yes) Can you explain your goal?
13. What do you do when you get to a word that you do not know?
14. What do you do when you do not understand what you are reading?
15. Can you explain how you read on your own in the classroom?
16. What other reading activities do you do in the classroom that you like?
17. What other reading activities do you do in the classroom that you do not like?
18. Is there anything you want to share with me about the other reading activities in the classroom?

Thank you for sharing with me about your reading. I have learned a lot from listening to you.

## Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol #2 End of the Study

Student:            Date:            Time:            Location:

## Introductory Script:

Hello. Thank you for talking with me again so I can learn more about you as a reader. I also want to learn more about the reading activities you do in your classroom.

Just like last time we talked, I want you to know there are no right or wrong answers. I just want to learn what you think. If you want to stop the interview at any time, you can. You also can say you do not want to answer a question. I would like to audio record this discussion to help me remember what you say. Is that okay? I will now ask you some questions.

1. What do you think about reading?
2. What can you tell me about your reading?
3. What books do you like reading?
4. What have you done in your reading group?
5. What do you think about (activities named)?
6. What have you learned in your reading group?
7. Is there anything you still want to learn?
8. What have you liked about the reading group?
9. What have you not liked about the reading group?
10. Is there anything else you want to share about the reading group?
11. If child stated a goal in the last interview, I will state the following: You told me last time your goal was (state the goal). Can you share with me about whether you met the goal and how you know?
12. What do you do when you get to a word that you do not know?
13. What do you do when you do not understand what you are reading?
14. Can you explain how you read on your own in the classroom?
15. Can you share with me what other activities in the classroom have helped you learn?  
(follow-up) How do you know?
16. What other reading activities do you do in the classroom that you like?
17. What other reading activities do you do in the classroom that you do not like?
18. Is there anything you want to share with me about the other reading activities in the classroom?

Thank you for sharing with me about your reading. I have learned a lot from listening to you.