

## ABSTRACT

SPIVEY, DONNA SUSAN. Characteristics of Teachers Who Are Consistently Successful With Economically Disadvantaged Students. A Qualitative Study About Successful Fourth and Fifth Grade Teachers. (Under the direction of Dr. Paul Bitting.)

The purpose of the research was to identify personal and professional strategies in fourth and fifth grade teachers who are continuously successful with economically disadvantaged students. This qualitative study involved two fourth and two fifth grade teachers. An initial and a follow-up interview were conducted with each teacher participant. In addition, two classroom observations were completed recording the data on observation charts, scripting, and field notes. Participants' lesson plans, continuous dialogue through email and before and after each observation, as well as classroom photographs were also examined to support data triangulation. Their principals were also asked why they thought these teachers had been successful with this student population.

Data analysis revealed that these four teachers used similar personal and instructional strategies in their classrooms. In addition, data revealed that common personal characteristics of these teachers coupled with their philosophies, enhanced their abilities to make personal connections with students, which all four teachers felt to be most important to their academic and school success with economically disadvantaged students. Without the personal connections and understanding of individual students' needs and experiences, the teachers would not have known how to help them make connections with their instruction and academic content.

Students' personal needs also had to be addressed in such a way as to enhance self-esteem and provide material resources for participation in daily activities, and special activities such as field trips. All four teachers emphasized the importance of providing experiences for students to build a general knowledge base and expressive vocabulary from which students could draw to make successful academic and social connections and have a deeper understanding of their newly gained knowledge.

Listening to these teachers' voices and observing them with their students has revealed information that can be useful for teachers and administrators who work with economically disadvantaged students. The implication of this study is that the personal and instructional characteristics identified in these four teachers can enhance not only teacher and administrator

knowledge of how to successfully educate this student population, but also increase the number of educators being consistently successful with disadvantaged children.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS WHO ARE CONSISTENTLY SUCCESSFUL  
WITH ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS**

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY ABOUT SUCCESSFUL FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE  
TEACHERS**

**by**

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## Biography

Donna Susan Spivey is a native North Carolinian. She was born in Pinehurst, December 1957. Susan was the second of four children, having one older sister and a younger sister and brother. Her childhood began in Moore County. She loved the outdoors, sports, music, and fell in love with school and learning when she began her schooling in a neighbor's private kindergarten and then Pinehurst Elementary for first grade. Her family then moved to Lee County, Sanford, North Carolina where her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins also resided.

Susan continued her schooling in public elementary, junior high school, and high school in Lee County. These school experiences were a great joy to Susan because she was able to go to school with her sisters, uncles and cousins as well as friends and neighbors who were to become lifelong special friends. Her grandmother was the librarian for the junior high school she attended. Susan's family then moved to Wilmington, North Carolina where she completed high school. Her love of music, sports and learning continued through high school and earned her scholarships in all three areas.

Deciding to accept a scholarship offer from the University of North Carolina in Wilmington, Susan graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Education. She began teaching general music and band as well as coaching in New Hanover County. When given the opportunity, Susan left the ocean climate and went to New York University to begin her graduate studies, teaching and assisting in coaching the women's basketball team. She then moved back to the piedmont area of North Carolina to Wake County and began teaching and coaching at a private school. After five years, Susan continued her graduate studies and return to the public school setting that she loved.

Susan entered North Carolina State University and earned her Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Administration. She continued

her teaching career in Wake County for a brief time and was then named as an assistant principal at Sherwood Githens Middle School. Three years later, Susan returned to Wake County as assistant principal at Wendell Gifted and Talented Magnet Elementary School. During Susan's last year at Wendell G. T. Magnet School she was chosen as one of five Wake County finalists for Assistant Principal of the Year.

Her career then led her to the western area of Wake County where she was named assistant principal for Cary Elementary School. She was selected as an Assistant Principal of the Year finalist three more times while serving at Cary Elementary. In 2005, Susan was named Wake County Public Schools' Assistant Principal of the Year. This was a major highlight of her education career! In January, 2006 after eight years of serving Cary Elementary School's community, she was appointed principal of Douglas Creative Arts and Science Magnet School. This was a lifetime goal and dream come true for Susan.

One of Susan's personal goals in life has been to earn her doctorate in education and to have the opportunity to spend time with and conduct research on the teachers who are so wonderful and successful with disadvantaged children. This exciting experience and journey is now coming to a close. She would have never accomplished this special experience without the love, support and cheerleading of her family, friends and colleagues. Susan can be contacted at [dspivey@wcpss.net](mailto:dspivey@wcpss.net).

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Last, but not least, I want to thank my wonderful family (all of you), my very special friends (you know who you are), and my pets (Zach, Katie, and Rudi) for supporting me in this lifetime dream and goal even when it meant I would not have as much time with you as I had before this endeavor and hope to have after its completion. I dearly love you all.

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## Chapter One Introduction

Teachers work hard each day to successfully educate every child. However, achievement gaps are still painfully obvious between certain populations of students. For example, the achievement gap between the populations of economically disadvantaged or low-income students and economically advantaged or middle-high income students is widening (Summary of the Nation, 2001; Haycock, 2001; Lindjord, 2000; Carey 2002). Conscientious educators are concerned both that this gap exists and how this gap can be closed. With the student achievement accountability measures of the North Carolina ABC and the federal “No Child Left Behind” legislations, there is added pressure for teachers and administrators to not just close the achievement gap, but to close it quickly. If teachers, teacher performance assessors (who are most always their administrators), school administrators, and teacher educators were to have answers to the questions – Why are certain teachers consistently successful with the free and reduced lunch student population? Who are these teachers? Do these teachers have common characteristics, personally and/or professionally, that can be identified? – they could add this information to their knowledge base on how to be successful with this large population of economically disadvantaged students. This knowledge could possibly contribute to closing the achievement gap between these students and their middle-high income counterparts.

Two terms need to be defined as to their use in this study. The term, *successful*, for the purpose of this study, is synonymous with the descriptor of *scoring Level 3 or Level 4 on the North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) Reading and Math tests for two or more years consecutively*. The term *economically disadvantaged* is synonymous with the student population descriptors of *low-income* and *free and reduced lunch (F/RL)*.

In my years of experience as an elementary school administrator, I have observed only a few third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who are successful year after year with their economically disadvantaged students. I have observed many more third, fourth and fifth grade teachers experiencing difficulty understanding how they can be successful with their F/RL students daily in the classroom and at the end of each year on the EOG tests. Relieving teachers of some of their daily stress by enhancing their knowledge of how to be more successful with more students is one of the motivating factors for me in this study.

Enhancing education administrators' and teacher performance assessors' knowledge of what to look for in teachers who might be successful with F/RL students is of great motivation to me as well. Teachers and administrators are constantly under stress to measure up to all the accountability programs for all their students to be successful. With this stress comes burn out and with burn out comes the loss of strong members of the education profession. My hopes are that the findings of this study will lessen the stress and burnout of teachers and administrators, therefore encouraging them to remain in education.

***Purpose***

With the previous thoughts in mind, the primary purpose driving this study is to identify the instructional strategies used and personal characteristics possessed by those teachers who consistently provide successful educational experiences for economically disadvantaged students. Do these teachers use similar instructional strategies, have similar teaching styles, similar personal characteristics, or similar teaching philosophies?

Specific instructional and personal strategies, used by those teachers successful with economically disadvantaged students, if identified, could be used by any teacher who works with F/RL students to enhance his or her performance with this student population. This information might also contribute to the development of stronger teacher performance appraisal instruments by identifying instructional practices successfully used in educating the F/RL student population.

Identifying specific instructional and/or personal strategies used successfully with F/RL students could enhance the implementation of these strategies by making them more focused with F/RL students. In turn, closing the achievement gap between low-income and middle-high income students might occur more quickly. Closing this achievement gap would also address the performance standards accountability of a specific subgroup of students identified in the federal legislation "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) as the economically disadvantaged student population (Haycock & Jerald, 2002). This low-income student population is defined by the NCLB as students with free and reduced lunch status (F/RL).

***Research Question***

The research question to be considered is:

What instructional and personal strategies are used by teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students?

The following chapter will provide the background literature that served as the framework for my study. The themes to be reviewed are achievement gap, at-risk students, teacher knowledge and teacher excellence, and perceptual theory.

## Chapter Two Literature Review

### *Introduction*

The focus of my study is why some teachers are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged (E.D.) students while others are not. What instructional and personal strategies are they using to accomplish this success with this specific student population? In conducting this literature review, four areas related to my study emerged: (a) the achievement gap between low-income and middle-high income students, (b) at-risk students of low socioeconomic status, (c) tacit and practical teacher knowledge and teacher excellence with at-risk students, and (d) Perceptual Theory.

### *Achievement Gap*

With last winter's passage of the federal "No Child Left Behind" act, congress fundamentally redefined what it means to be a successful school. From now on, schools will be judged not only on their average standardized test scores, but also on their ability to improve achievement among all groups of students. This law promises to lift the veil on achievement gaps in many communities. It will call upon us as educators to confront the many ways in which we ourselves have contributed to the gaps (Haycock & Jerald, 2002, p. 20).

For years the term and the phenomenon of an "achievement gap" has received much attention through studies such as *Racial and Gender Gaps in Academic Achievement: An Updated Look at 1993-1994 Data* (Banks & Dulaney, 1995); *Closing the Gap* (Baker & Linn, 2002); *Narrowing the Educational Achievement Gap: Minority and Disadvantaged Families at Risk of Failure* (Lindjard, 2000); *Closing the Achievement Gap* (Haycock, 2001, 2002); and *School Strategies That Close the Gap* (Bell, 2003). With state and federal legislations mandating more accountability measures of student achievement, more sophisticated means of data collection for individual student achievement have emerged. These more clearly report where achievement gaps exist, e.g., between genders, races, cultures and socioeconomic levels of students. The more sophisticated reporting methods of this disaggregated data also demonstrate how wide the gaps are and whether these gaps are closing over time.

As a result of more sophisticated and available disaggregated data, a major focus of



educational research and literature has been on the achievement gap between black students and white students. More recent research on identified achievement gaps has included studies on the gaps between not only black and white students, but between students of diverse colors and white students (Feldman, 1997; and Haycock, 2001). By the 1980s, the achievement gaps closed considerably between African American and Latino students and white students (Haycock, 2001). After this time, the achievement gaps began to widen again.

The literature most often identifies race as the significant variable contributing to development of an achievement gap (Marchesi, 1998; Lindjord, 2000; Howard, 2002; Jerald & Haycock, 2002). Many studies have combined both race and income as factors contributing to achievement level gaps, e.g. low-income, minority students to white students (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Haycock, 2001; Dulaney, Baenen, Banks, Yaman & Burch, 2002; Howard, 2002). However, studies on achievement gaps between low- and middle-high income students, in which economic status is the only variable, are less prevalent. A significant portion of children from low-income families make up a student population whose academic performance is lower than their counterparts, students from middle to high-income families. This disparity creates an achievement gap between these groups. For the purpose of this study, the achievement gap between students of low-income families (those students eligible for free and reduced meal rates at school) and students of middle-high income families will be the focus.

The achievement gap between low-income and middle to high-income students is not only painfully obvious to me as an educator, but is also obvious in local, state and national level studies (Christie, 2002; Dulaney, 2002; Feldman, 2001). There is much evidence in the literature demonstrating that this achievement gap between low-income students and middle-income students exists. As early as 1979, Creamer and Lorentz looked at reading scores of high socio-economic status (SES) students versus low SES students while also studying teacher behavior with students of different SES. They did not find the teacher behavior to be important, but did find a significant difference in reading scores as the high SES students' scores were higher than the low SES students' or economically disadvantaged students' scores (Creamer & Lorentz, 1979). Shakiba-Nejad and Yellin (1981) found there was a strong positive correlation between a student's SES and academic achievement. Carey, (2002) Groves, (2002) and Lindjord, (2002) found in their funding, federal policies, and

testing studies that economically disadvantaged students performed consistently lower than their economically advantaged peers.

The teachers' implementation of specific instructional and/or personal strategies with economically disadvantaged students to provide successful educational experiences for them has been discussed to a lesser extent in the literature. Zeichner (2003) discusses teaching methods and personal strategies he found to be successful with poor ethnic and language minority students, as well as the importance of teachers having an understanding of their students' cultures. So and Chan (1982) found in their bilingual studies a relative impact of language background and SES on reading achievement. They also observed teaching strategies with non-English speaking students. Stice and Bertrand (2000) conducted studies on early literacy instruction and providing successful literacy and content rich classrooms.

There appears to be a gap in the literature linking specific personal or instructional strategies to educational success for economically disadvantaged students. Addressing this gap in the literature will allow us to enumerate specific instructional strategies and personal characteristics of teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students. The dissemination of this information through teacher education and evaluation tools could help not only close the achievement gap, but to also close it more quickly. The resulting growth in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students or free and reduced lunch status students would also address the accountability of the achievement of this student population in the federal legislation No Child Left Behind. What can school districts, communities, schools, and teachers implement to successfully close this gap? The achievement gap between low-income students and middle to high-income students is real.

### ***At-Risk Students***

There is evidence that suggests low-income students are also at-risk students.

Race, culture, ethnicity, language, and economic status continue to be powerful predictors of school failure. Whether the measure is grades, test scores, . . . Those students who differ most from mainstream White middle/upper class, English speaking America, are also most vulnerable to being mis-served by our nation's schools. . .If race, ethnicity, language and socioeconomic status continue to be significant predictors of school failure,

then we as a nation that is growing rapidly in these very dimensions of difference will certainly lose the productive engagement of increasingly larger portions of our young people (Howard, 2002, p.1).

Howard's reflections on the achievement gap are representative of what I observed about the growing number of low-income (low socio-economic status) students in our schools. The needs of this specific at-risk population must be understood so that we can successfully educate them. Knowing what commonalities, professionally and personally teachers who consistently provide successful school experiences have with F/RL students is key to closing the achievement gap between these students and those of middle-high income. This population of students, defined in my study as students eligible for free and reduced meals in school, is a rapidly growing population in our school system (Wake County Public School System) and our state. In our school system alone, there has been a 57.2% increase in our FR/L student population (see Appendix A). This group is also one of the specified school populations required to meet performance accountability measures in the recent federal legislation, No Child Left Behind ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Conference report to accompany H.R. 1", 2001) and in NC, the ABC (Public Schools of North Carolina, 1999) legislation. My study will contribute information to understanding what teachers with F/RL fourth and fifth graders do to be successful with these children. This information could also add to the knowledge of teachers previously unsuccessful with low-income students and help them become successful with these students to help close the achievement gap for them at the state and local levels.

Literature on at-risk students is abundant. However, literature on the population of economically disadvantaged (as the only factor) at-risk students is not as plentiful. Additional terms used in the literature for "economically disadvantaged" include low income, low socio-economic status, poverty level and free and reduced lunch status. Two themes that emerged from the literature directly relate to my research. First, how have school districts and schools successfully narrowed and closed the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and advantaged students (Cole-Henderson, 2000)? Second, what are the instructional and personal strategies teachers use to close this achievement gap (Calcagno & Trinchero, 1977; Creamer & Lorentz, 1979; Johnson, 1998; Chapell & Overton, 2002)? A third theme, although not directly related to this study, was the level of resiliency of low-

income students and its effect on the level of educational success and how teacher beliefs and attitudes foster this resiliency (Krovetz, 1999; Read, 1999; Borman & Rachuba, 2001).

Most of the literature predates the passage of NCLB. Earlier studies of the achievement gap between low-income students in conjunction with other risk factors and white students were conducted studying the at-risk students as one population versus several specifically identified populations because of the differences in federal funding initiatives and accountability measures then and now. There are many examples in literature that address successful academic achievement programs and teaching strategies used to raise the achievement levels of low-income at-risk students (Boals, 1990; McGill & Pallas, 1990; Knapp & Shields, 1991; Anderson, 1993; Connell, 1994; Knapp et al, 1993; Natriello, Renchler, 1993; Haberman, 1995; Payne, 1998). Many studies also acknowledge the achievement gap between low-income and middle-income students as mentioned earlier, but usually in conjunction with another at-risk factor such as race, language or culture (Delpit, 1995; Johnson, 1998). But literature on what professional and personal strategies are used by teachers who are successful with low-income students is lacking, as is more current literature (2000 – 2005) on successful teaching strategies and achievement programs for low-income students. This observation identifies another gap in the literature.

The most recent federal legislation the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), requires accountability measures of academic performance or adequate yearly progress for specific at-risk populations of students for school systems and schools in order to receive federal funding. Historically, receipt of federal funding was based on the number of at-risk students enrolled in schools or school systems. Now, as a result of NCLB accountability measures, federal funding is designated for how well students in specific populations are performing academically. As educators, we know of the glaring achievement gaps between low and middle-high income students (Anderson & Pellier, 1998; D'Agostino, Borman, Heges & Wong, 1998; Borman & Rachuka, 2001; Carey, 2002) and the importance of closing these gaps quickly. Carey (2002) argues for significant additional funding to educate low-income students. She suggests both federal and state governments be mindful of this when adopting funding policies to provide the needed money to school districts based on their poverty rates. Feldman (2001) contends the achievement gap between poor and middle-class students is still “unacceptably large, and federal investment over the years has been

grossly insufficient to solve the problems of poverty” (p. 7). Lindjard (2002) argues that “recent federal legislation will not eliminate unequal funding, school performance inequities, and student achievement gaps that have persisted in the poorest school districts . . . And the slight increases in federal education spending will not address the disparities” (p. 5). Because educational funding is mostly the responsibility of state and local government, the seven percent the federal government contributes to educational funding is not adequate to make an equitable difference in dollars for the poorest school districts. The probability of the poorest school districts having increased money to spend per student even with the federal funds provided is very low. This disparity of funds is usually due to these poorer areas having lower state and local property taxes to draw from, which are the dollars that fund the schools and determine the per pupil spending dollar amount. Therefore, these districts would require a higher percent of federal education funding to make up the difference in the amount spent per student in the poorest school districts and for the federal educational funding to be more equitable.

Furthermore, the achievement gap between low-income students and their counterparts is of great concern for many of these school districts. Finding resources in any form, financial, human or instructional, is very difficult when state and local budgets are stretched so thin. The federal government is requiring more and more achievement initiatives be implemented without providing any additional federal dollars for the necessary resources to successfully implement these initiatives, which makes it even more difficult to find the needed resources for all school districts, especially those districts with high poverty levels.

Additional studies of how teachers are consistently successful with low-income students could contribute information that would help local and state education administrators invest more wisely in human and material resources for their schools. First, knowing the teaching philosophy and instructional strategies these teachers use successfully with their low-income students would help in knowing types of teachers to recruit when hiring. Second, knowing what type of climate is established in the instructional spaces of these successful teachers could be information transferred to all teachers to help them be successful with this population of children. Third, data gathered could be shared with schools of education to add to general teaching knowledge. Fourth, if specific traits observed

in these successful teachers can be applied by other teachers who teach low-income students, then a case can be made to add these traits to teacher performance appraisal instruments for school administrators to enhance their knowledge of assessing teacher performance. Fifth, instructional materials used successfully by these teachers could be documented for cost-benefit analysis, giving support for additional funding requests.

Federal legislation, such as NCLB, should stimulate and encourage more research on specific groups of at-risk students and how to raise their achievement levels. The studies on low-income students' achievement in combination with the continued studies on the achievement level of minority students will be critical in helping find what, how and who it will take to successfully and quickly narrow, then close, these achievement gaps. NCLB standards are quite specific, as are the timelines to meet these standards. Currently, there is little literature on closing these achievement gaps as required by NCLB (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Haycock & Jerald, 2002). Borman and Rachuba say that, "minority students from low SES backgrounds were exposed to greater risks and fewer resilience-promoting conditions than otherwise similar white low-SES students" (2001, p. 6). Haycock and Gerald (2002) found after the passage of NCLB, that "children - especially those of color or from low-income households - lack fundamental academic skills. By fourth grade, nearly two out of three African American and Hispanic students are reading below the basic level of achievement, compared to one in three Asian fourth graders and only one in four whites."

### ***Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Excellence***

Teachers who are successful year after year with economically disadvantaged children, I believe, have tacit knowledge or craft knowledge that contributes to their success with this population of students. But teachers have to believe in themselves to be able to convey to students to believe in themselves that they can and will be successful. Bell states this well:

In light of all the talk in education today about the complex factors contributing to the achievement gap, many teachers may doubt that they can do much to ensure success for poor and minority students. All the strategies in the world will not help close the achievement gap if you don't believe it can be done (2003, p. 32).

“Practical” or “tacit” teacher knowledge and teacher excellence are related in the

literature. “Practical” teacher knowledge is defined and described by Brown and McIntyre (1995) as “craft knowledge” or “personal practical knowledge.” It is “that part of their professional knowledge . . . which guides their day-to-day actions in classrooms, which is for the most part not articulated in words and which is brought to bear spontaneously, routinely and sometimes unconsciously on their teaching” (1995, p. 17). Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt and Driel (1998) defined tacit teacher knowledge as “an amalgam of all teachers’ cognitions, such a declarative and procedural knowledge, beliefs and values that influence their pre-active, interactive, and post-active teaching activities that underlies the visible teaching behavior” (p. 16). I contend that having a wide base of *craft knowledge* is a characteristic shared by teachers who are consistently successful with low-income children. This knowledge positively influences teacher excellence and is related to success in raising achievement levels of at-risk students, especially those students of low socioeconomic status (SES) (Ornstein, 1995; Beijaard & Verloop, 1996; Golombek, 1998; Black & Halliwell, 2002).

From the perspective of a teacher assessor and trainer, several previous studies described successful strategies and programs for teachers and teacher trainers to implement with at-risk students. Some of these strategies and programs were: prospective teachers of at-risk children as mentors of these children (Haberman, 1992; Fresko & Wertheim, 2001); the Governor’s Teacher Scholar Initiative to send high quality teachers to the state’s poorest children (Oakes, 2001); using accelerated learning groups to enhance supplemental instruction for at-risk students (Stansbury, 2001); assessing teacher competence for working with diverse populations (Hollins, 1993); and using direct instruction to increase reading achievement (Carlson & Francis, 2002).

Exploration of teacher craft knowledge was found in studies by Broudy (1979), Beijaard and Verloop (1996), Feldman (1997), Black and Hollowell (1998), Golombek (1998), Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt, and Driehl (1998), Jordan and Johnson (2001-2002). For example, Feldman (1997) looked at teaching “as a way of being...how teachers act within their educational situations to improve their practice and to come to understand it better. There is *wisdom of practice* ...the *deliberate wisdom* that grows through reflection, and the *wisdom-in-practice* that develops through authentic being in educational situations” (p. 47). Golombek saw “personal practical knowledge” as being important in informing

teacher practice in English-as-a-Second Language teachers and Broudy saw the potential for “tacit knowing” contributing to a rationale for liberal education. “It may seem odd to be searching for such a rationale when, ever since Aristotle, everyone has known that beyond specialized training for an occupation there is education for man as man” (Broudy, 1979, p. 446). Zanting et. al (1998) saw *practical knowledge* as being important for mentor teachers to have in their roles.

Other factors to be taken into consideration include the rate of teacher burnout from working with at-risk students found in studies by Friesen, Finney and Krentz (1999) and Nieves and Hartman (2002) and the acknowledgment of the importance of having language and literacy-rich classrooms (Stice & Bertrand, 2000; Tyler-Wood & Carri, 1993; Chan & So, 1982). These additional factors highlight the importance of implementing programs that are sustainable and foster enhanced learning environments.

The more recent research such as Feldman (2001), Haycock (2001), Christie (2002), Lindjord (2000, 2002), and Bell (2003), like previous research such as Calcagno and Trinchero (1977), Cramer and Lorentz (1979), Ford (1980), Chan and Alvin (1982), and Grippin (1989) demonstrates there are risk factors that effect student performance and achievement, but unlike the previous research, the newer, more sophisticated research shows that it is not just poverty or family background that determines student achievement, but that what students experience in schools does matter (Jerald & Haycock, 2002). This concept is the basis for my study – that more research is warranted to find why some teachers are consistently successful with low-income students. What instructional strategies they use? Do they have similar personal characteristics? Are there commonalities in the instructional strategies these successful teachers use and/or personal strategies these teachers have? This would add to the knowledge of what is happening at school that matters for those low-income students to have positive, successful elementary school experiences.

### ***Perceptual Theory***

How are these teachers connecting with their F/RL students to make them successful in their school experiences? One body of literature describes *Perceptual Models* which, if teachers are astute in their application of these models, may understand how to develop a social climate that supports these children. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe perceptual models as being “related in some fashion to the individual student’s perception



and interpretation of the external world, whether behavioral or psychosocial. While each student's perceptions are subjective and particular to that individual, in the aggregate they theoretically become and define the culture or environment in which the individual lives and that is presumed to influence in various ways that individual's psychosocial development in a range of areas" (p. 40). Further light is shed on Pascarella and Terenzini's Perceptual Theory through reexamination of the models they used to constitute their theory.

Pascarella and Terenzini adopted the idea of three dimensions of social climate from the perceptual model originally described by Rudolf Moos. These three dimensions of Moos's model are: a relationship dimension of the interpersonal relationships of those people in the environment; a personal development dimension which includes opportunities of growth from the environment; and a system dimension which includes behavioral expectations in the environment, control over its occupants, and how it responds to change. Pascarella and Terenzini go on to discuss George Stern's model as it also emphasizes interactions between the people in an environment and how there may be "situational pressure to behave in certain ways, manifested by the collective activities and interpersonal interactions of the individuals who occupy the environment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.41). This perceptual model literature also overlaps Ruby Payne's research of students being successful when they understand the hidden rules among classes, the discipline expectations, and the role of language in the environment (Payne, 1998).

Also found in Pascarella and Terenzini is Lawrence A. Pervin's description of his perceptual model based on "transactional" theory. Pervin's definition of *transactional* is that behavior is both a cause and effect relationship as well as a reciprocal relationship between the student /person and the environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 41). He states that this model is based on a phenomenon of how the individual perceives himself as an actual or ideal self and if there is an imbalance between the actual and the real self and between this *self* and other students, faculty (their elementary teachers), and administration. If there is an imbalance between students' self perceptions, this may cause lower performance or dissatisfaction in their environment. If their actual and ideal self are more in tune with each other, these students may experience improved performance in these environments.

Whereas the application of perceptual model theory in studies examining economically disadvantaged students is relatively rare, another overlap of perceptual model

theory that has received considerable attention in the literature is in that of *culturally responsive teaching*. “Culturally responsive teaching infuses family customs-as well as community culture and expectations-throughout the teaching and learning environment. By providing instruction in a context meaningful to students and in a way that values their culture, knowledge, and experiences, culturally responsive teaching fosters student motivation and engagement” (Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, Stuczrski, 2005). While perceptual theory focuses on developing a social climate to support children based on the individual child’s perception of his or her world, defining the culture or environment the child lives in, culturally responsive teaching overlaps this theory by emphasizing the individual cultural references as a starting point for teachers making personal connections with their students. It is acknowledged that there can be an intersection between E.D. and multicultural populations, however this study specifically focuses on economic status as the defining characteristic of the population.

In conclusion, answers to who are these successful teachers and what instructional and personal strategies are they using to be successful with E.D. students would enhance the body of literature provided by previous studies of how to teach low-income children in a public school culture. It would also enhance the knowledge of teacher performance appraisal, in that teacher appraisers would know more of what to expect and look for in teachers of this growing high needs population of students.

Who are these teachers? What instructional and personal strategies are they using? In the next section, I will describe how the study of these successful teachers was conducted.

## **Chapter Three Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

My goal, as the researcher, was to investigate, identify and analyze what personal and instructional strategies fourth and fifth grade teachers used to be successful with economically disadvantaged students. The investigation was done through interviews and classroom observations of teachers identified as successful with low-income students. From the interviews and observations, I identified and analyzed personal and instructional strategies these teachers implemented successfully with this student population. *Success* is defined as at least seventy-five percent of the free and reduced lunch students in these teachers' classes scoring a level 3 or 4 on the North Carolina End of Grade (NC EOG) tests in reading and math for two or more years consecutively. Schools were identified that met the criteria of having at least a 50% free and reduced lunch population, that had a performance composite of at least 80%, and that operated on a ten-month calendar with a traditional, non-magnet curriculum.

The terms used in my study - economically disadvantaged (E.D.), free and reduced lunch (FR/L), and low-income - are synonymous and are used interchangeably throughout this study. The population of F/RL students is one of the populations recognized in the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The F/RL population under the NCLB standards is one whose academic growth is to be monitored for improvement each year until academic achievement is that of grade level mastery or above. Thus the goal of this legislation is that no child be left behind academically from their academically successful peers no matter what population these children are part of, e.g., economically disadvantaged, non-English speaking, learning disabled and all racial populations. The number of F/RL students who score level 3 or level 4 on the NC EOG reading and math tests will measure success of the teachers to be selected. One of the criteria for teacher selection was at least seventy-five percent of his or her F/RL students scored level 3 or level 4 on the NC EOG tests for two consecutive years.

### ***Participants***

The design of this study was a multiple case study of four fourth and fifth grade teachers in the Wake County Public School System. Two teachers from each grade level

were selected. These teacher participants were chosen using the following criteria: Their rating on the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument (NC-TPAI) was *standard* or *above standard* consistently; they taught fourth or fifth grade in a traditional (10 month school year) calendar and non-magnet public elementary school; at least 75% of their free and reduced lunch (FR/L) students had scored level 3 or level 4 on the North Carolina End Of Grade tests in reading and math for two or more years consecutively; and their student classroom population was made up of at least 45% percent F/RL students. Based on these criteria, principals were asked to recommend teachers to participate in the study. The teachers were given an Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) to complete before participating in the study.

Permission forms were sent to parents for video taping their children's teacher. If the majority of parents did not agree to the video taping or did not return the permission forms, then field notes and charting were the only forms of data collection used for the classroom observations.

After acquiring permission from Wake County Public School System to conduct my research study, principals of schools that met the school criteria were contacted. Initially, principals were contacted by a letter or email explaining my study and requesting permission to complete the data collection for my research in their schools. I then followed this initial contact with a phone call and email to explain the principals' role in identifying the teachers and answered any questions they had about the study. The principals were asked to answer this question: Why do you think this teacher is so successful with economically disadvantaged students? With my awareness of how very busy principals and teachers are, I had planned to be sensitive in asking for as little possible of their time necessary to complete the study.

Other participants needed to complete this study were employees in the Wake County Public School System's (WCPSS) Evaluation and Research Department, who approve and monitor research studies conducted in the WCPSS. They also assisted me in identifying the schools and principals who met the selection criteria of my research study. These gate keepers will also be given a final report of the study within one year's time of the completion.

I, the researcher, am an assistant principal at a traditional public elementary school. My administrative experience includes nine years as an assistant principal at the elementary

level in traditional and magnet settings and three years at the middle school level. My teaching experience includes ten plus years in kindergarten through the university level in both private and public school settings. I obtained a bachelor's degree in education from an in-state public university (North Carolina). My master's degree and six-year advanced degree in Education Leadership and Administration were obtained from a different in-state public university and I am currently working towards a doctorate in Education Leadership and Administration.

### ***Procedures***

A case study design was chosen based on the main question of the study being a "why" question as to the success of teachers with economically disadvantaged students. This study will also be used to contribute knowledge to teachers and teacher assessors as to why these teachers are successful with this population of students, the causal links being identified between the personal and professional strategies used by these teachers. Also, the two primary sources of evidence were collected from semi-structured interviews and direct observations in the form of participant-observations. Triangulation of the data from the ten formal interviews, eight observations, and informal settings was critical in strengthening the validity of my findings.

A multiple case study design was used to strengthen the construct validity of the study (Yin, 2003). I chose face to face interviews as part of the study design so I could observe the teachers' behaviors and body language and work on building a trusting relationship with them to improve the opportunities for collecting data from formal and informal meetings. As Hatch (2002) states, "qualitative interviews are special kinds of conversations or speech events that are used by researchers to explore informants' experiences and interpretations .... And to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation."

A case study model as described by Yin (2003) was also chosen as the design for my qualitative study because it best supported my research methods to answer the research question being considered: What instructional and personal strategies are used by teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students?

A case study design also supported my study of contemporary events in their real-life

settings (the behaviors and techniques observed between teachers currently successful with low-income students), as it uses multiple sources of evidence to enrich the study using triangulation of data for analysis, from field notes, charts, video tapes of direct classroom observations and interviews of the teachers (Yin, 2003) and allows for flexibility in continuous revisions as data were compiled. In this study, instructional and personal strategies used by these teachers were identified. This information could be used by other teachers of low-income students or F/RL students to improve their performance with this student population. It could also be used by teacher performance assessors of teachers of F/RL students to improve their assessment of these teachers' performance as well as adding to their professional knowledge of best practices implemented with FR/L students. Therefore this study lent itself to a qualitative, multiple-case study design in the traditional, elementary, and public school classroom setting. Multi-case study designs, as this one with four teacher participants in multiple class settings, also enhanced descriptions of the participants and settings and range of participants and settings for which the findings might be generalizable and applicable with further study and data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Data were collected from multiple sources using a variety of techniques. Semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) using open ended and probing questions were implemented. The approximate length of the interview was one to one and a half hours, conducted with each teacher in her classroom setting. Interviews were audio taped with the participants' permission and written notes taken. Interview information was transcribed and analyzed for themes and commonalities found in the answers and observed by me during the interviews using qualitative research software and coding techniques. The interviews were scheduled at the teachers' convenience being sensitive to hold the interviews when the teacher felt most comfortable at the beginning of the school year and end of the third quarter as well as confirming the principals' approvals.

Questions for the interview guide were developed from readings of relevant literature and suggestions from other professional educators who are my colleagues or classmates in the doctoral program and have completed previous educational qualitative research. Prior to this study, the interview questions were also reviewed by three experienced qualitative researchers (see Appendix C for Interview Guide).

After the initial interview, two direct or participant observations were also completed

for each participant during language arts instruction. Observations were videotaped and accompanied by proximity and interaction charts and partial scripting to compliment the video tape. Data from the observations' field notes, charts and videotapes were analyzed and compared to the interview data. Teachers' classroom observations were videotaped to enrich the simple or direct observation by the researcher. Pictures were taken of all classroom settings to support the interview responses concerning the physical set-up or design of the teachers' classrooms. Documents such as lesson plans and written communication between the teachers and students were also collected.

The observations were scheduled for the second quarter of the school year and the end of the third quarter. From my experience, I knew teachers began the school year by stating their expectations of the students and developing a class structure with the students. By the end of the third quarter or beginning of the fourth quarter, the students and teachers would have firmly established relationships and class climates built on the beginning established expectations. These two critical times of the year revealed a wealth of information on how the teachers worked and if the teachers did as they said they did in their interviews.

After the schools and their principals were identified, I then contacted these principals with a letter explaining my study and requesting their participation. They were asked to recommend teachers in their schools who met all the criteria for the participant selection. I then contacted the teachers to request their consent to participate in the study. Requests of the teachers were made formally with a Participant Consent Form from the IRB process. This method of recruiting teacher participants prevented the need for me to see confidential information on teachers' performance appraisals. The disadvantage to this method was that I needed to trust the principals to recommend only teachers who met the criteria without any way for me to verify this information.

### ***Analysis***

The time frame for collecting data was the length of a traditional public elementary school year, ten months. During this time, data were collected and shared with colleagues in a consultative setting. As interviews were completed and transcribed, they were analyzed and coded, again in collaboration with colleagues. Participants were asked to proofread the transcriptions for accuracy. Notes were taken on the participants' body language as well as

articulated key words and emphasized phrases. The coding system used to help organize the interview transcriptions and literature was a combination of the family coding system suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and in-vivo coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Data were collected and analyzed throughout the study.

Throughout the data collection words and ideas emerged in the speech used by the teachers in their interviews. These words and ideas provided the starting point for the list of words and phrases searched using an advanced “Find” feature in Microsoft Word. This feature was used to search the interview transcriptions and field notes for specific words and phrases. The results of this search provided the number of occurrences indicating the relative importance of the themes in the text. Each occurrence was highlighted in the texts so that it could be examined in context to ensure consistency of meaning or usage. This helped initially to identify the major themes in the data.

Further examination of these themes in the context in which they appeared in the transcriptions and field notes, suggested other major themes or sub-themes. I pursued each of these themes until I discovered there was insufficient data to support it as a major theme or until I reached saturation of data presenting new themes or data supporting existing themes.

Alongside the Word search, I was hand searching the data to identify additional themes. These themes emerged from some of the more descriptive passages in the data that could not be found using a single word or phrase in a word search. I also conferred with two colleagues who read the transcripts and shared words, phrases, and themes they noticed in the data.

From individual occurrences I organized these themes under broader headings. For example terms such as “computer”, “SMART Board”, “internet”, “website” were grouped under the larger heading of “technology” for the purposes of discussion. This provided the major organizing themes for the discussion section of the study.

Formal and informal findings were recorded in journals during the research. The total process of the study was recorded in narrative form until the data collection had been completed. Completion of the data collection was determined by the completion of the fieldwork and saturation of data. Arrangement and completion of the interviews and observations occurred within one ten month school year. A longer period of time in the field might have been required if it had been difficult to recruit participants.



As for knowing which students in each class were F/RL students, I trusted the teachers and principals to identify these students and to confirm the percent of these students in each class and specifically who these students were for my observation records. I did not need to know the students' names, only which students they were in the classroom, so that I could observe the teachers' interactions with these children. These students were identified on a seating chart provided to me by the teacher by placing the letter "B" for "Boy student," "G" for "Girl student," "BE" for "Boy student – economically disadvantaged," and "GE" for "Girl student – economically disadvantaged."

In order to strengthen the veracity and rigor of this study, multiple forms of data were gathered. The data were then analyzed for consistency of responses from each teacher to the interview questions, for patterns or irregularities between the interview data and the observation data and for evidence to support the findings from teacher quotes and actions. In the observation process, I was consistent in scheduling the same classes and instruction, using the same form of recording information in charting teacher movement and interactions, and in the length of time the observations were conducted. Participants were also asked to review the interview transcriptions for any mistakes made during the transcribing, to correct any responses where they might have misspoken, to add to responses they thought needed clarification or information they wanted to add after the interviews were completed. Participants were reminded throughout the study that they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time should it become inconvenient for them.

I communicated at length with the participants to assure their understanding of the project and earn their trust as an education researcher so they would be comfortable sharing information in recorded interviews and in consenting to videotaped observations. Communication with the participants throughout the study was in person, and by e-mail, phone and regular mail. Open and continuous dialogue with the teachers was important to build their trust and for me to get a richer picture of their teaching philosophies and how they thought and felt about low-income children.

The proposed time frame of one school year to collect data through observations and interviews proved not to be too short. Extra effort was made to communicate with the participants in person, in addition to time in the field, to enhance the information collected. Assuring the accuracy of the data collected from the teachers was important to clearly

communicating the participants' voices in the study.

### ***Ethics***

Ethical considerations in this study were: protecting the identity of the participants and their schools; protecting the identity of any free and reduced lunch status students referred to in the interviews; collecting information from observations and interviews as a researcher, not as a school administrator (who would be observing teachers for their required observations for performance assessment); including teachers who work with the researcher in the same school; including teachers who knew each other; informing the participants of all the reasons for the study and previewing the draft of the final product for any information that might have led to their identities being disclosed and for any information they felt was misrepresented in the findings.

To protect the identities of the participants, identifiers such as P1, P2 and P3 or Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C were assigned to their interview transcriptions and other written evidence for this project. Specific identifiers were intentionally excluded to lessen the risk of identifying the participants or their schools. Participants were given a copy of the interview transcriptions and observations notes. Participants were also given the option to remove themselves and the information collected from the project at any time. Every effort was made to choose teachers who did not know each other. Because the principals were recommending teachers based on their success with low-income students and their positive performance ratings on the TPAI, the risk of noting any inappropriate actions of these four teachers during the observations was slim. Had any inappropriate actions or behaviors of the teacher participants occurred during the observations, the researcher would have felt obligated to report them to a school administrator. This would have changed the role of the researcher. The ethical choice a researcher would need to make in a situation such as this is one that should be considered before committing to using teacher observation as a data collection tool.

### ***Conclusion***

In summary, my study sought to find answers to the question: "What instructional and personal strategies are used by teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students?" I used a multiple case study design and methods of inquiry to compliment this design. Recorded interviews, videotaped classroom observations as well as

participant, direct and simple observations were used to collect data. The observations were conducted in the teachers' classrooms. My study proceeded based on the assumptions that these teachers: have specific similar personal and instructional strategies they use to be successful with economically disadvantaged students, but may or may not be able to identify these specific strategies; are teachers who know they interact in specific ways with this population of children and can verbalize these ways; are teachers who cannot verbalize what they do and may be using tacit teacher knowledge or working from a perceptual model theory to meet the needs of these children; may have similar philosophies of teaching that drive their implementation of strategies with specific populations of children or with all children.

## Chapter Four Findings

### *Introduction*

This was a multiple case–study (Yin, 2003, p. 46; Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 63) of two fourth grade teachers and two fifth grade teachers who have been consistently successful with economically disadvantaged (E.D.) students. (*Success* has been defined as at least 75% of their E.D. students having scored Level 3 or Level 4 on North Carolina End of Grade tests for at least two consecutive years.) It is also important to remember in addition to understanding the definition of *success* that the terms *economically disadvantaged*, *free and reduced lunch (FR/L)*, and *low-income* are synonymous in describing the student population in this study.

This study was conducted in two traditional calendar elementary schools in four separate classrooms. These schools met the criteria for the study, which consisted of having a performance composite of 80% or higher and a FR/L student population of 50% or higher. The classes of the teachers participating in the study were composed of 46% - 76% FR/L students.

### *Teacher Participants*

The teachers agreed to participate in two interviews and two videotaped classroom observations (see Appendix B for Informed Consent Form for Research). The initial interview was structured using questions from an Interview Guide (see Appendix C for Interview Guide) and was scheduled before the first classroom observation. A follow-up interview was held after the second classroom observation. During this interview, the teachers were able to add information to what was given in the first interview, discuss corrections in the transcriptions of their interviews and receive feedback from me on their observations if they requested it. Parental permission for the students in the four classes to be observed had to be obtained before the teachers' instruction and interactions could be videotaped by the observer. Three of the four teachers' classroom observations were able to be videotaped.

The teachers' ages ranged from thirty-one to sixty-four years. Two of the four teachers had children of their own, three daughters and two daughters respectively. All four teachers were female, three white and one black/West Indian. Three of the four teachers had

parents who were teachers. Their teaching experiences ranged from eleven to twenty-eight years. All four have graduate degrees. One is National Board Certified; one is working on her National Board Certification. Previous teaching experience included positions both inside and outside the United States as well as inside and outside the state of North Carolina. They also have varied experiences between public and private schools. Table 1 summarizes the personal characteristics of the four teachers in this study.

**Table 1**  
**Personal Characteristics of Teachers A, B, C, D**

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	African American	Caucasian
Age	38	54	64	31
Educational Attainment	Master's, NBCT	Master's	Master's	Master's
Total Teaching Experience (in years)	16	11	28	6
Experience at current grade level (in years)	16	5	5	4.5
Current grade level	4 <sup>th</sup>	4th	5th	5th
Current class size	23	22	24	23
Number of F/R L students	11	11	19	11
Previous careers	No	No	Police officer	Social worker Construction, Ed. Admin.
Skills, Interests	Drama, music, storytelling, marksman	Not Available	Athletics, government	Bilingual
Parents were educators	Both	Neither	Mother	Father

Multiple emails and phone calls were made throughout the study between the participants, principals and researcher to schedule interviews and observations and to share information from reflection on the interviews as well as to address questions concerning the study. All four teachers were enthusiastic in their email communications, interviews, and observations.

During the initial interviews, the teachers were nervous at first and concerned if they were answering the questions correctly. After a brief discussion and assurance there were no right or wrong answers to the interview questions, they relaxed and were forthcoming with their responses. The teachers were also open in casual conversations between interviews and observations when we were not meeting formally. The following information is the data and summaries of the four participating teachers' interviews and observations.

***Teacher I – Ms. A.***

Enthusiasm, motivation, integrating her personal love for music, drama, and literature into her daily class experiences and her desire to make a long-lasting difference in her students' lives are only a few of the reasons I found to be of importance about this first teacher. She will be referred to as Ms. A. "I want them to love books and I want them to be excited about reading and I want them to love school and learn to write and love to write and read stories and be a better person!" This quote is from Ms. A, who is 38 years old, has been a fourth grade teacher for 16 years, and recently found out she was named a National Board Certified Teacher. She currently teaches at a traditional elementary school with a free and reduced lunch (FR/L) student population of 51%. Her homeroom class consists of 48% FR/L students.

***Interviews for Ms. A.***

Ms. A's, enthusiasm for teaching and learning was obvious in her interviews. She was animated in her body language and excited in her voice inflection when talking about her own school experiences, teaching experiences, and her students' learning experiences and responses to her classroom and school experiences with them. Ms. A began to cry twice during the first interview when reflecting on some of her economically disadvantaged students' difficult home lives and how she thought she could make a positive and safe difference in their lives through their school experiences. In reflecting on her personal school experiences and her teaching experiences, she made statements such as: "School was fun for me;" "My high school years were great – I did socially very well and academically well;" "This is my sixteenth year and it's all been in fourth grade which is my love;" "This is the first year I've actually only taught reading, writing and social studies and I love it!! It's great!" (this being the first year she has team taught – her teammate taught math and science

while she taught reading, writing and social studies); “I’ve had a wonderful experience here!;” “I love focus lessons!;” “It’s a writing program that we are very excited about!”

In response to describing her teaching style, she said, “I think it’s fun. If I am enjoying it and I’m having fun, then they’re [her students] having fun. And I am enjoying it and they are enjoying it!” Ms. A got more excited as she described her style of teaching. She said she tries hard for her style to be fun, exciting, enthusiastic and motivating. She felt that through modeling her love of literature, books and North Carolina history to her students, she stayed upbeat and kept her instruction enjoyable and engaging for her students. Ms. A also felt showing her love for and skills in storytelling, music and drama in her instruction made learning experiences more engaging and authentic for her students. She said, “That’s always fun for them to sit on the floor and I do some storytelling.”

She also talked about her sensitivity to students who, for special reasons, might be disadvantaged in their educational experiences through no fault of their own. Ms. A shared that she was absent a lot from school as a child because of numerous surgeries to her ear. The end result for her was deafness in one ear. The absences and deafness made school difficult for her, but she enjoyed school. She feels that whatever situation life hands her or her students, such as being economically disadvantaged or disabled in some way, these situations should be addressed, but should not be used or accepted as excuses. As a teacher, she said she considers the fact that many of her students are economically disadvantaged with difficult home lives, but she still has high expectations of them. “I expect a lot out of them, but not to use their home situations as excuses,” she says. She knows this may affect whether they have their homework or not and what clothes they have to wear, but “does not change what is in their minds and what is in their heads.”

She described *L.D.* students as “learning different” versus *learning disabled* and *economically disadvantaged* students as students who lack resources (human, material and financial) to provide opportunities and experiences (educational and social) that we often take for granted, e.g. going to museums, restaurants or the movies. She told me of two experiences that brought these realizations to light for her as a teacher and why it is so important for her to be sure she provides what each child needs to be successful in life and school experiences. One experience was when she was on a field trip (which she learned early that most of her FR/L students were unable to attend unless provisions were made to

cover their field trip costs) where the students ate dinner at a restaurant. She realized most of her economically disadvantaged students had no idea how to order their dinner. They were unsure of what was expected of them at the restaurant as far as what was socially appropriate. She said she then learned from these students that they just had not had any prior experiences in this type of situation. The other experience, she later learned from her students, was that many of them had never had the opportunity to go to a movie or to the theatre. She has since made going to the movies with her an incentive or reward for earning a certain number of points for reading.

Ms. A spoke of personal experiences that have been both special and influential to her as a successful educator. The fact that her parents were both high school teachers, her father taught math and coached and her mother taught English, was a positive influence for her. She said school was very important in her household. She taught in the high school where her parents taught, actually teaching one year in her mother's original classroom. "This was very neat for me," she said.

Second, the principal she had for fourth through eighth grade was the first principal to hire her. Her mentor teacher at this school had been a student of her mother and father. This teacher was also Teacher of the Year in that county. Ms. A said, "She is my hero, my mentor and actually when I was having difficulty this year, I called her." When Ms. A started teaching, this teacher left her fourth grade classroom and went to a lab experience so Ms. A could have her position. Ms. A felt honored this teacher would do this for her.

The school system and school were very small which required all staff members to be involved in many committees and leadership positions. Ms. A taught eleven years at this school and has now taught five years at her current school. Her current school is much larger, as is the school system. She has been very involved in her current school on committees, the Student Support Team, as grade chair, and as field trip organizer for her grade level. She has been the field trip organizer for her teams for the duration of her 16 years of teaching.

Because her teachers made school enjoyable and provided opportunities for her, Ms. A wants her students to enjoy school and life through the experiences and quality instruction she provides for them. "My high school years were great! I did well. Socially very well but academically well." Ms. A was Outstanding Senior, in all the drama productions, the chorus



and president of many clubs throughout her high school experience. She also is a competitive marksman. Years ago she competed in barrel racing and still dresses in her cowboy attire as one of the characters for her storytelling and literature studies with her students.

Lastly, Ms. A originally attended a private junior college for women (church supported) to be a music and drama major. She transferred to a private four-year college (also church supported) to continue her music and drama degree, but then changed to elementary education and completed graduate work at this same college. Ms. A feels all these experiences, personal and professional, have positively influenced her professional success.

***Observation 1 of Ms. A.***

Ms. A's first classroom observation was interesting because many parts of the classroom and instruction she described in her interview were obvious during her observation. She also had a bad cold, which she apologized to the students for because it affected the volume of her voice.

This observation began as school started. She had music playing (music from North Carolina musicians or about North Carolina) as the students entered the room. North Carolina history is one of her passions. Her room is decorated with items depicting information about North Carolina and with current and former student projects. She also tries to coordinate with the theme being studied transforming her room into a stage filled with objects and props to create a cultural or literary "habitat" for her students. She also dresses in costume to portray historical, contemporary, or literary figures they may be studying at that time. She said that she tries to add a costume each year. When her grandmother was living, she would make or help Ms. A make costumes to use with her students.

She greeted the students as they came in with a very pleasant "good morning" and one of the girls with a "good morning, beautiful!" The students responded with "good morning, Ms. A" or had a short conversation with her. All students came in, unpacked their book bags and prepared for class to begin. Ms. A had shared in her interview that she is a strict disciplinarian. Also, she is serious about how time is spent in her class. "My class earns incentives for coming in and quickly starting their morning work. They can also earn

incentives for transitioning quickly from one activity to the next,” she said. She spends the first few days at the beginning of school teaching expectations and routines for her class. They then began work in their math journals. She complimented the class by saying, “You guys are so great!” Ms. A commented that she had noticed in her experience that when children begin to act out, it usually means they need some extra positive attention, more reassurance they can be successful, or an extra hug – especially the FR/L students. She feels they need her to give them a genuine, pleasant greeting and send off each day because some of their lives at home are so difficult. “I try when I talk to them to always use kind words. They may be the only kind words they hear during the day.”

She began instruction immediately, again modeling responsibility of how time is spent. Ms. A asked the students to “Please take out your Focus Lesson notebooks.” Then she followed with “I love the way \_\_\_\_ has taken out her Focus Lesson notebook.” She made statements while teaching that referred to the students as being smart and knowing how to take prior knowledge and apply it to the new information she was introducing in the lesson-statements such as, “Authors know how smart we are....They know we can make inferences.” She used references to the students’ examples or connections they made during the instruction.

Shortly after instruction began, an announcement was made over the school wide intercom system that a coworker had been chosen Teacher Assistant (TA) of the Year. She encouraged the students to congratulate her when they saw this TA at lunch.

Ms. A constantly dialogued with her students. (A girl student came in late. She was not a FR/L student. The student came in quietly and joined the instruction quickly.) She emphasized learning new vocabulary and definitions and making connections from personal experiences to use as prior knowledge for building their knowledge. She would make a personal connection with part of the lesson and constantly encouraged her students to do the same and then to share their connections with the class during whole group instruction. Ms. A modeled for the students how to use expressive language and describe scenarios and be able to make inferences and read between the lines. She also modeled for them how to apply this skill to their writing. As she was modeling using personal connections, she described her personal experience being raised on a farm as “glorious childhood to be raised on farms.” “I now live near farms of tobacco, soybeans and 500 acres of peas.” She then extended this

connection by reviewing definitions of previous vocabulary such as *irrigation*, *environmentalist*, *animal habitats* and prior knowledge such as what soybeans are and why they are grown, what a farm is, and what things might be associated with farms. She then made the connection with the students on how having a good vocabulary extended their knowledge in many areas and their ability to draw conclusions and make inferences. Ms. A then had the students follow along in their notebooks while she read aloud the selection they were to use to find supporting details, draw conclusions and make inferences. She reviewed previous strategies learned for drawing conclusions and making inferences while introducing a new strategy and how it could be used. Some students shared how these strategies had strengthened their reading skills, especially in comprehension. Ms. A smiled at these connections and told the students how glad she was that they were activating their prior knowledge and strengthening their reading skills.

Ms. A then modeled on the overhead how to fill in answers on the chart the students had been given as to what inferences could be made and conclusions drawn from their reading selection. Ms. A used the overhead to deliver this part of the instruction. She did a lot of modeling and constantly scanned what the students were doing and asked them questions to check understanding. During this part of the instruction (27 minutes), she had at least 14 one to one interactions (asked them a question, had dialogue, students shared a personal connection) with 8 of her 11 FR/L students and at least 12 one to one interactions with 8 of her 12 non-FR/L students. These interactions were all conducted from where she was sitting on the stool beside the overhead. All the students were attentive except for one non-FR/L student who was playing with his pencil and something else. (When Ms. A saw what he was doing, she stopped and looked at him briefly then continued with her instruction. He responded by putting the pencil down and becoming more attentive.)

Ms. A then asked the students to put away their Focus Lesson notebooks and get out their writing notebooks. “Great job!!” she said to the students for making such a quick, smooth transition. She told them, “It’s time to earn a marble for a great transition,” and then asked one of the girls to put a marble in the container for the class. (The class earns incentives for accruing a certain number of marbles.)

She used a SMART Board (similar to a white dry erase board, but is used interactively with the computer), which she says the children love, to deliver her writing and

literature instruction. She moved the overhead up by the regular board, out of the way. Ms. A never turned her back on any of the students to write on the board or deliver information. She sat on a stool beside the computer and only got up to interact with the SMART Board. The energy in the room seemed to rise as she started the program on the SMART Board and surfed to the website for the author they were studying. “Today we are going back to the website.” As soon as she said this and began to pull it up on the SMART Board, the students said “YEAH!!!” Ms. A responded to the students with, “Isn’t that cool to sit around and discuss an author?” (The SMART Board at this time froze, so she got up and reset it. While doing this, she told the students “You guys are great while we adjust.”) She continued her dialogue with them about authors, their use of conventions and ideas and what authors go through to write a story. Vocabulary reviewed was *parody* and *satire*.

The pace and the energy picked up when she had the students put themselves in the place of an author and referred to them as authors for the remainder of the lesson. Ms. A asked lots of questions like “Should we be like authors?” (All students responded - yes! Write and rewrite!) “Do we have drafts?” (while showing the author’s example on the SMART Board) “What do we do when we edit?” (using a thesaurus as an option). The students really liked when she showed them the author’s original sketches and his use and the importance of a storyboard. One of the boys shared what he had noticed about how the stories were written by this month’s featured author. Ms. A said, “WOW!” Some other students were raising their hands and wanting to share too. She thanked them for being patient. (The same boy from earlier was playing with something else on his desk. She looked at him sternly and said “I’m waiting.” He stopped.) She continued the lesson pointing out the art vocabulary used about Van Gogh. She then encouraged the students to use the computers to gather information for their stories and reminded them that this author was rejected the first time by an editor, but accepted six months later by a different editor. “Writing is hard work and takes lots of hours, but it is fun – like fourth grade,” she told the students. You need to persevere. She went on to connect the subjects other teachers teach her students to the ideas in the writing and illustrating of their books. She also connected this lesson to their previous lesson on drawing conclusions, making inferences and including important details.

Ms. A then gave the students their directions for working independently while two girls and one boy passed out the materials needed to the other students. She assigned groups

for each center and for her first guided reading group. She then circulated around the room to check progress of each group and returned to work with her reading group at the reading table. All the students were engaged in their activities. One of the girls was practicing reading aloud to another student to get ready to read aloud to a kindergarten class. (Both of these girls were FR/L students.) The student she was reading aloud to was assessing her reading for volume, clarity, emotion and fluency.

During her first observation, which was one hour of instruction, Ms. A had at least 26 one to one interactions with 9 of her 11 E.D. students and 22 one to one interactions with 10 of her 12 non-E.D. students. Two E.D. and two non-E.D. students did not have one to one interactions with her during this hour. Of Ms. A's 48 total one to one interactions, 54% of these interactions were with E.D. students. She had an equal percent of non-E.D. students and E.D. students she did not have one to one interactions with. For this observation, 8% more of her one to one interactions were with her E.D. students.

### ***Room Description.***

Ms. A's room is set up for instruction as well as to encourage collaboration and social skill development. It is arranged so she can circulate and monitor her students easily as she did in her second observation (see Appendix D for Ms. A's observation chart and her monitoring movements). Her room is setup with student desks in groups of five or six, but so students may work in pairs, not in small groups. She told me in her interview that her room "until this year has always been set up for students to work in small groups. This year's group can't handle groups." The exception is when she has reading and discussion groups who sit on the floor together, but have to move around to get with their assigned groups. (Ms. A did not use her desk at all during instruction.)

There is very little "teacher space" designated in her room. She does have a small desk, but all other classroom space is used for students, instruction, and displays. Her desk was very organized and neat as was the rest of her room. The students' desks also appeared organized so they could transition quickly, switching books and notebooks in and out as needed for the instruction. The cubbies were partially used for student space and the rest of that area was being used for science bin storage and teacher resource storage. She added that she had to call her mentor teacher for ideas on how to work effectively with this year's class. She tried everything she knew and her colleagues' suggestions, but could not find a strategy

that worked for the whole class to work in small groups. This final room arrangement was based on her mentor teacher's suggestion that the students' desks be arranged so they could easily work in pairs. She has had to seat four students on the perimeter of the class because of their inability to work in groups. Two of these students were sitting on the perimeter when I observed. One boy (FR/L) student was sitting in a student desk by the back wall at an angle from the computers and reading table. One boy (non-FR/L) student was sitting in a student desk by the teacher's desk (See Appendixes D and E for copies of Ms. A's seating charts and pictures of her classroom).

On her walls are posters and items relating to North Carolina's history and the fourth grade social studies curriculum, which Ms. A says she loves. She also has a set of rubrics for writing that displays examples of Level 1, 2, 3, and 4 finished writing products. The class Daily Schedule is on the board in the front of the room. Under the Daily Schedule is Accelerated Reader goals set by the class with a note that reminds the students if the class reaches this goal by a certain date, they will celebrate with a Pizza Party. There is also, in this same area, an "NC Trivia" space. She moved the overhead from the front of the room, against the board, out to the center of the room towards the front and even with the first set of student desks. Opposite her desk in the front of the room was an area for books and resources for students to use in their research and other assignments. She set the SMART Board up in the center of the room in front of the mounted board. The computer used with the SMART Board was set up in the center of the room in front of the SMART Board a few feet.

By the back wall, she has a rocking chair on a square carpet piece which she has designated as a reading area. To the right of this area are three computers and a printer. The door to the classroom is to the left of the reading area. On the wall to the right of the computers are windows. Just in front of the computers on the same wall is her Guided Reading Table. This area and the area by the overhead projector are her favorite instructional spaces. She loves teaching reading in small groups and modeling writing from the overhead projector. She has a stool she sits on by the overhead.

***Observation 2 for Ms. A.***

Ms. A's second observation took place at the start of the school day. As in the first observation, Ms. A greeted each student as he or she entered the classroom with a kind and

pleasant greeting such as, “Good morning! Good to see you today!” She also had soft instrumental music by John Tesh playing in the background. Ms. A complimented the students after they entered the room for beginning their morning work promptly. “\_\_\_ is doing a fine job this morning.” She complimented each student as they began their morning work while she continued to greet the other students who came in later at staggered times.

As soon as the bell rang to begin classes, Ms. A began instruction by sharing with her students how much the teacher of the kindergarten special needs class loves for them to come in and read to her students. “Ms. \_\_\_ wants you to read more often to her class. Her kids love it! Boys and girls these kindergarten students think you’re the big stuff! They also need you to help them learn how to play.” Ms. A reviewed the procedures for preparing to read to their buddy class and how the schedule for readers would be posted on the board in the front of the room. She reminded them to be conscious of their audience and of the attention span of the younger students. She also reminded them about the amount of text or number of words that would be appropriate in the books they chose to read with the kindergarteners. In addition to reminding her class about the reading preparation procedures, she also reminded them that they should know the names of their book buddies and learn things about them, so they can communicate with them. All the students were very attentive. Many of them shared with Ms. A that they already had some books in mind for reading to their younger book buddies.

Ms. A quickly transitioned into instruction with, “Great! Let’s get out our \_\_\_. Yesterday we \_\_\_. Today we are going to start our new objective \_\_\_\_\_.” She continued with a discussion introducing the new objective by calling the students by name, asking them a question and then using probing questions or clues to check for prior knowledge of this concept with her students.

Again, as in the first observation Ms. A used personal examples of how she learned more about this reading objective. She was very enthusiastic and used her storytelling skills to share these examples with her class. The students were engaged in her introduction of the new topic and interacted with her as she began a discussion again for the students to share from their personal experiences.

Ms. A then began to ask questions to guide the instruction and held up a Big Book for the students to reference for answers to her questions. She asked questions such as, “How do

you know the keywords in this story? How would you identify them? What are your clues to help you identify these words? What are ways an author gives you clues to say WOOO! WOOOO! I'm a clue. I'm a keyword!"

The students responded to her questions enthusiastically as she had asked them. Ms. A complimented the class with, "You all are so smart!" The discussion continued on how to use the keywords and connect them to the index of the book. She showed them an example on the overhead and said, "Look at this passage." She then started another line of questioning. One of the boys was blurting out answers impulsively and then raising his hand. She thanked him for being eager to contribute, but reminded him of the rule for contributing to the conversation. He immediately showed he understood by then raising his hand first and waiting to be called on. She then called on him and thanked him for controlling his impulsivity.

Ms. A continued with reading a paragraph selection while her students followed in their notebooks from their copy of the selection or along with her from the overhead screen. Ms. A modeled reading with expression and fluency while she read the paragraph.. She then asked the students to, "Use your 6-inch voices and discuss with each other which words should be bolded or italicized in this selection." She circulated around the room and listened to the discussions between the students and asked them questions to stimulate their discussions.

Then Ms. A called the groups by names of North Carolina geographic regions. "Coastal Plains group have you come to a consensus?" She continued with compliments of how the groups were having their discussions. She used the Coastal Plains group as the model group for how their discussion was going and what conclusions they were drawing to the question she had given them. Ms. A then guided the instruction back to the whole group and used their group answers to drive the rest of the discussion. She modeled strategies they had used and added some they could have used in making the best choice for which words should be keywords. From this activity she led them to the connection in keywords and the main ideas of a text.

Ms. A then asked the class if there were any questions about this part of the instruction. She told them, "We are going to come back to this, this afternoon in social studies." She continued with another compliment for the class, "You guys are marvelous,



wonderful!” She then asked a student to give the class two marbles for a good transition. This was part of her behavior plan for this class. When the jar was full, they earned an incentive.

Ms. A went into writing instruction by asking the students, “Would you please get out your writing notebooks?” Then she reviewed what authors need to have in their writing. This was obviously a familiar statement because she had the students fill in the blanks when she stopped. “You know you need to have as good authors critical ‘setting’ (students in chorus), critical ‘object’, critical ‘character’ !”

She moved back to the overhead model writing strategies. She asked the students questions about the difference in words they would choose to be “general” or “specific” in their writing. “What does *beautiful* mean? All eyes on the overhead, please.” Ms. A then interacted with the students in writing about a winter landscape and the specific, relevant details they could use for the reader to know they were talking about a winter landscape.

Ms. A called a boy’s name and told him she would be calling on him for an answer in a minute. She continued with, “Pay attention to word choices – pointing out color words. I wrote this while you were writing yours.” She stopped to look at a student who was off task and said, “I’ll wait.” His attention was redirected and she went on to discuss her example and then the students’ examples. She complimented each student’s example with a, “That’s great!” and followed this with a specific reason their writing was “great”.

Her comments to the students about their writing were, “I like that! That was very good! That gives me chills!” After each comment, she would tell the student why she thought it was so good. The students made suggestions to her about her paragraph which she also complimented them for and pointed out how it made her writing more specific and elaborative.

Ms. A connected the strategies the students were using with their prior learning and emphasized how what they were learning today would build on that knowledge and improve their skills as authors. A girl student passed out papers with prewriting ideas that the students continued working with per Ms. A’s instructions. She then guided them through making a chart by generating questions about critical character and word choices they might use that were general or specific. She reminded them about using a variety of sentences and how to use their ideas for story starters.

During this guided activity, she again reminded the boy student who was impulsively contributing to the discussion that all responses were important and he needed to be in control and then she would call on him for his contributions. She also reminded him that she loved his enthusiasm; he just needed to be in control so that the whole group could participate. She circulated around the room and worked with all students continuing to compliment them with specific feedback on their work. As snack time arrived, students were allowed by groups, N.C. geographic regions, to get their snacks and return to their desks to work on their writing. During the guided instruction, modeling and conversations with students, Ms. A used extensive expressive language and emphasized with her students the need for extending their vocabularies to enhance their writing. The class received two more marbles for making the good transition with snack time and independent work.

During this second observation, Ms. A circulated around the room several times and had numerous one to one interactions with her students. Her students were sitting in four groups of five and one E.D. boy sitting individually. The groups were made up of 2 of 5, 3 of 5, 4 of 5 and 1 of 5 E.D. students. She had 57 total one to one interactions with all 11 of her E.D. students. This was 58% of her class total interactions. She had 41 total one to one interactions with all 10 of her non-E.D. students for 42%. She was in proximity of all the students indirectly by working with each group of students (see Appendix D for observation charts of Ms. A).

***Room description.***

The desks were still arranged in groups of five with only one student sitting individually. The reading area was the same with the rocking chair and rug. The books for students to choose from as resources for their current studies were changed. Different books were displayed for student interest. Some student projects had been changed as class displays. The furniture arrangement remained the same which allowed Ms. A to move freely around the room and to work with individual students or small groups. The students also worked in partners and small groups for this observation which their desk arrangement allowed them to do easily.

There was very little space designated as Ms. A's space. The room was conducive to movement by the teacher and students and was open for instruction to take place in many areas at once.

## *Summary*

### *Reflections on Ms. A's observations.*

To summarize Ms. A's interviews and observations, she was not aware of her consistent success with economically disadvantaged students. She is sensitive to children who are E.D., but only makes allowances for them if they are not able to complete homework assignments because of difficulties at home. She still has the same high academic expectations of these children as she does her other students. She also felt strongly that being disadvantaged cannot be used as an excuse for not learning. These students may have more to deal with in their heads, but what is in their minds and heads is fine. She said,

“Being poor does not necessarily mean that you are going to have learning problems. There may be other problems in your way. Maybe not having as many advantages, experiences as other children have, museums, traveling, seeing things that other children that are advantaged have, the opportunities they have. We had lots of children [on a field trip] that had never been to a restaurant before. We wanted them to be able to order when the waitress came, so teaching them those social skills.... Because those children are not necessarily read to at night - which she finds out by conferencing with them and talking to them - I do a little book club with them.

She realized as we were talking that the students she had identified to be in her book club today were all E.D. students. “They come and eat lunch with me. I read to them during lunch and then discuss the book while we are eating.”

During Ms. A's observations, four themes emerged that supported her interview responses. She was very efficient with her instructional time and the students reflected this in their responses to her directions and time reminders. Ms. A implemented her instruction at a brisk pace, but checked regularly with her students for understanding. She asked a student to put two marbles in a jar for each transition that went smoothly and quickly.

Second, she was animated and enthusiastic in her presentation even though she had a cold. She dialogue constantly with the students and encouraged them to use their new vocabulary words in their speaking and writing. She was most enthusiastic during her writing instruction. The pace of her instruction even increased. Ms. A used the SMART Board to deliver her writing instruction. When she navigated to the author's website her

students became interactive with her in her instruction and increased their participation. Some students even said, “Yeah!” when the board came on. Ms. A said they really liked for her to use the SMART Board. This was obvious in their expressions and increased participation.

Third, Ms. A used a lot of expressive and descriptive vocabulary during her instruction and when speaking with the students individually. She also verbally cued them to, “Activate your prior knowledge.” Students through out the observation would raise their hands and say, “I have a connection.” The students then went on to share their connections and were guided to say if they were from personal experiences or previous lessons. Ms. A had said in her interview she works daily on increasing vocabulary and encouraging students to make connections with their new knowledge to daily life. She even shared a personal connection from being raised on a farm with her students. Ms. A later told me that many of her students did not know what a farm was, so she often shared from her life on the farm with her students to build their base knowledge of that environment.

Lastly, Ms. A integrated social studies, science, reading, writing and character education concepts into her instruction. She had books displayed by the author they were studying and several items, books, CDs and projects from their N.C social studies objectives they had been studying. Ms. A told me that she loves N.C history. She had collaborated with the media specialist and art teacher to teach her current objectives and plan for extensions in her social studies lessons. She also included guided reading instruction in both observations.

***Bridging the gap.***

She realized she has been providing those opportunities for E.D. students that they may not get at home. She provides opportunities for students who cannot afford field trip costs to participate in the field trip experiences by seeing that their costs are covered somehow. Other experiences she provides are reading with and to students to encourage literacy skills practice through: her lunch time book clubs, consistent use of small group instruction, through guided reading groups and allowing her students to read to younger, special needs children in their buddy class. Ms. A provides movie going experiences with her as reading incentives. She decorates her room as a habitat or literature scene they are

studying and then dresses up herself as a character in these scenes. She then uses her storytelling skills to, “bring the literature or habitat to life, to create an experience”.

***Instructional planning and strategies.***

In describing her planning, she makes no special accommodations for E.D. students. She expects the same from all her students. She plans her instruction based on her informal and the school’s formal assessments as to what each child needs academically. Her lesson plans are thorough and differentiated for all her students.

This is the first year her grade level has been team-taught and she loves it. She can really focus on the language arts, social studies and writing instruction that she loves and knows that her team teacher will cover the math and science objectives. She does allow for lots of student choice in her general planning. Students can choose books or activities that they prefer to help them master the objectives taught in class.

She mentioned using technology in her instruction several times in her interview and did use the SMART Board and computer programs with the students. However, she did not emphasize this as a strategy for providing opportunities for E.D. students they might not have at home.

Ms. A did say she tried to close the gap in literacy opportunities she observed in her children through small groups and guided reading instruction with no more than three students at a time in each group. This allows her to provide lots of direct instruction and individual attention to these students. The group of students observed was mostly E.D. students, usually two out of three students in her groups. They showed deficits in their literacy skills, she felt, because they did not have access to books or literacy enhancing opportunities at home.

***Philosophy of Ms. A.***

As to her philosophy of teaching, she said it was the same for all students. She sets high expectations for them and they rise to those expectations. If she does not expect high quality work from them, then she will not get it. She added that if she looked at them as E.D. or very disadvantaged, she did not expect more from the well-advantaged kids or less from the E.D. kids. She expects the same. She continued this thought with,

Not to say that when a child comes in the classroom and is having a very difficult day based on what’s happened at home, do I expect the same from

that child, yes. But do I know that in the back of my mind, and realize things are going on at home versus a child that had a bedtime story at night and had a really good supper and slept really well and wasn't interrupted by loud noises and fighting, I take that into consideration when children come into my classroom.

Ms. A completed this response by saying she expected the same thing from them (E.D. students), but knew in the back of her mind what they are battling. She would be really thinking a lot about this when she went home that night.

***Classroom design and environment.***

In her seating arrangements for her room, she had from one to four E.D. students in each group of five students with one E.D. student and one non-E.D. student sitting separately or just one non-E.D. student sitting separately.

She created a rich learning environment through the use of music as a part of her classroom atmosphere, visuals and displays of projects her students were working on, as well as North Carolina items and information. There were books and other literature accessible to students in different areas around her room. She had clear expectations for work and behavior with established routines and class rules that she consistently and positively enforced. Her instruction was varied through the use of technology as well as storytelling and drama skills thus enhancing her instructional presentation and delivery. Ms. A consistently emphasized and modeled the importance of and fun in learning literacy skills of reading, writing and speaking.

***Interactions with students.***

In both observations, Ms. A had a higher percentage of one to one interactions with her E.D. students than with her non-E.D. students. Her first observation, she had 48 total one to one interactions with 54% of them being with E.D. students. In her second observation, she had 98 total one to one interactions of which 58% of them were with E.D. students. All of Ms. A's students were engaged in her instruction and participated in the activities during both her observations.

**Teacher II – Ms. B***Interviews for Ms. B.*

Ms. B describes herself as structured and teaches the students what they have to have to fulfill the grade level and tries to find a way to teach them all what they have to know. “I am always trying to think of another way to do something or, you know, wake up in the middle of the night and go - here’s what I can do and try to change up something or just try something new.” She said, “I could regroup them or I just try to think, something’s not working. I have to try to get around it, what are we going to do to fix it and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t.”

Ms. B is a fourth grade teacher in a school with a 51% FR/L population and two classes composed of 50% and 52% FR/L students. She also has three to five students who speak little to no English. She is 54 years old and has taught 11 years. Her personal school experience, she shared, took place in New York State about 2 hours south of Albany. She attended one school system for her whole school experience. In her family, “...school was always just a natural course of events and college was a natural expectation at the end of your high school events. I had a lot of family support so it was real positive. It went really well.” Ms. B remembered her teachers: “I have teachers that I remember as really good teachers, favorite teachers that left an impression on you and I had other teachers that are sort of hard to think of their names anymore. So it was a really good experience overall.”

In describing her teaching experience, she said, “My teaching experience is pretty varied because my husband was an officer in the Marine Corps so we moved around a lot.” Ms. B taught a first-second grade combination for a teacher on sabbatical, private school first grade and private school fifth grade before she started to move around a lot. It was difficult for her to get a teaching job when she was moving so often, so she would usually substitute a year, work a year and then move. She said her experience was disjointed.

She taught for a year overseas in the Department of Defense Dependents School in Japan and said, “That was a great experience!” She described this experience as great because there was a lot of support for teachers, no supplies to worry about; everything you wanted was there and did not follow a curriculum. “People came from all different backgrounds. The teachers came from different backgrounds; the students had lived in many places all over the world so when you went to discuss something, these students had a lot of

clear knowledge about many different things because they had so many experiences.” She was enthusiastic when talking about this experience.

Ms. B moved to Maryland for a year, but did not work. After Maryland, she moved to Florida. Because she had been out of the mainstream awhile, she went back to school for her Master’s Degree in Reading. She said the reading master’s would help her be a better teacher in every area. She taught first grade in Florida then moved to California where she taught third grade for six years. She really liked teaching third grade “...because the children were a little bit older [comparing them to first and second graders], they were a little bit more independent... I really loved third grade!”

Ms. B’s career was also disjointed because she did not teach while her children were little. She and her husband moved to North Carolina when he retired to be near their daughters and she began teaching fourth grade. Ms. B said she was really nervous about teaching fourth grade because the students were older and she had not had any experience with them. She continued this thought with, “I don’t like to say this, but the bar in California is quite high and when I came to fourth grade in North Carolina, the fourth graders are about where my third graders were in California, academically.” Ms. B chose her school because it was close to her home. She said, “I was glad to get the job here!”

Ms. B says her experience at orientation before she started teaching at her current school was interesting. All the new teachers were going around telling where they got their jobs and when she told them about her school, she remembers some of them telling her that it was a challenging population. Her thoughts about the challenging population now are “...it’s worked out really well because I am getting to understand the population a little bit better. When you work with children that have so little support at home, it is really a challenge to help them out and kind of mother them along the same time as you teach them.” When Ms. B reflected on her personal experience, she said, “I came from a middle-middle class as far as that, but I had so much support at home.” Most of her students in this current position do not have the kind of support that she enjoyed at home. Their parents are unable to read or write. They work at least two jobs and do not have time to work with their children. The parents cannot provide clothes or school supplies or even reading materials at their homes.

When telling me her philosophy, Ms. B became more intense, animated and descriptive. “I feel very responsible for their learning. Whatever they need from the first day



they walk in here to the last day, I feel like I'm solely responsible for what they need to learn in fourth grade. I try to treat each of them as individuals."

One of the examples she gave was of one of her economically disadvantaged (E.D.) girls.

The girl came in and I asked her where her homework was and the student said, 'Well, I had to go see my mother.' So I asked her where her mother was, to which the child responded, 'Well, she left.' I asked her what she meant. The response was, 'She went to live with HER mother.' Then the student went on and on and explained the whole story and I thought, in the big scheme of things, really who cares about homework! This little girl has gone through her mother leaving, this trauma. So now I try to put in perspective what some of these kids are going through.

To summarize her philosophy, she said, "I just figure out who they are and what they are going through and certainly try to keep that bar up there and help them achieve what they are supposed to achieve in fourth grade. You can still make a difference in their learning. So, I try to reach the individual and work with his or her strengths. Ms. B used positive terms and phrases when talking about how to work with children and meet their needs and never wavered from taking sole responsibility for giving them "...positive strategies for whatever they have to figure out and whatever works for them."

When asked to describe an *effective teacher*, Ms. B spoke of herself. "Well, I'm structured. You have to really teach what they have to know. I mean, you have to teach those students what they have to have, whether it's working with them individually, or in a small group or changing something." She says, "An effective teacher has to stay on top of the curriculum and requirements and find a way to reach those kids and teach them."

She said of herself that she probably was not a very fun teacher, but she had to get the job done. She tried to change things up, but keep them at an even keel. "They pretty much know what's going on when they come in and how I'm going to do it. I don't like to frustrate them by going 'Today this is going to happen or that's going to happen.' I really try to keep everything even so the expectations are the same level every day."

In our discussion about effective teachers, Ms. B would refer to what she considered needed for this population (E.D students) because the majority of her students are

economically disadvantaged. “But in this population, I think of some of their lives are in so much turmoil or they just don’t know what to expect when they get home. Is grandma going to be there, is somebody going to pick me up, did dad leave, did my sister do something? If they come in here, I’d like them to feel safe and to feel like they know what’s going to happen.”

Ms. B made comments consistently about her planning, that she does not really consider which students are E.D., but “totally what they are able to do.” She is sensitive to students not feeling that they are able to do the same projects or activities as other students, so she is careful to not give assignments on different color paper to different groups, but to give the same base assignment and differentiate with each child for expectations of the final work product. She feels her students all need to feel part of the same group and still be expected to do their best on each product.

In writing, she observed that the E.D. students’ writing “is flat because they haven’t seen a lot of things. They haven’t had all that much life experiences where they can develop their ideas.” She goes through the writing process and adds the Empowering Writers skills to their writing instruction and thinks this is a program that works well with this group (E.D. students).

Ms. B feels her decision-making is driven by her belief that she should always give these students the opportunities to go to the higher level where she wants them. She also feels they all may not get to this higher level, but many can with support and scaffolding. She thinks with this support, students can do more than if they work independently. Ms. B sees them wanting to do well and having a good attitude about school. “They seem to be willing to work if they know that you are going to make them accountable for it and that you care that they learn.” These two things seem to be what they care most about.

In discussing accommodations or compensations she might make for her E.D. students, she focused on the need for providing supplies for E.D. students. She commented “I don’t know if they can get supplies. We provide a lot of supplies for these students. A lot of them will come to school and just sit because they don’t even have a pencil. One student sat through part of the mock writing test before she raised her hand to ask for a pencil. We’ll tend to say to students without pencils that we will get their parents to get them some, but

their parents can't! We have to provide a lot of this kind of support." She called it "providing the infrastructure" (supplies) for the students to participate in school.

She reflects on the physical setup of her room a lot. Ms. B plans for guided reading groups to be with her at the reading table which she has in the back of her room. She also has all the students facing the front, so she can see their eyes and be sure they are paying attention. She also has the desks set up so they can talk to a partner (see Appendix F for photographs of Ms. B's room). Ms. B feels that facing the front holds their attention better. That way they will not be distracted by what is going on at the reading table or the bookcase in the back. She likes groups for projects, but not for everyday work.

Ms. B's favorite part of her room is the overhead projector because the kids will watch it and focus on it. They do not focus on her writing on the board or chart paper, but will focus on the overhead information. Ms. B also has the kids put their coats up away from their chairs. Otherwise, she says they will pull their coats over their heads and go to sleep. They have a lot of research to do on the computers. She feels the room size is adequate, but not large enough to be able to change things around a lot.

When discussing Learning Disabled students versus E.D. students, Ms. B said she has some really sharp students whose mothers have to work two or three jobs to provide for their families. She feels it's not what level of poverty these students experience, but more what kind of family support they get. "I think a lot of them, it goes hand in hand, and if they don't have enough money then they are out working and not supporting their children that much in school." She said many of her parents had more than one job, and most of these parents were single moms.

Last year her expectation of her students was to have their planners signed every night. This year she started the year with this expectation, but then changed her mind because 90% of the parents were not looking at the planners and she felt she was putting too much pressure on those kids whose parents were not even home or able to help them with their assignments because they are not able to read or write themselves. Now, she has all the students copy the homework together into the planners. She still writes notes for the parents in the planners, but does not require a parent signature. For getting their interim reports returned, she has started to trade recess time for their return. No interim, no recess.

They knew and sure enough one by one they all brought their interims back. The interims came back in because the parents weren't going to ask them for the interims, so the students had to realize it was their responsibility to get them signed and turn them in. I think you have to teach them responsibility. They don't automatically know this is my responsibility to take the interim home. You have to teach them that.

Ms. B feels that if you get E.D. students their supplies, give them all that infrastructure and support they cannot get at home, then you can work with them. "It's really hard; I look at most of them in these classes as economically disadvantaged, but I don't think we have but like five really, really poor poverty level type students, then the rest are okay. They are all pretty low income overall." Out of her 23 students in one class and 22 students in her other class (team teaching), she said at least 50% of each class was FR/L students or E.D. students.

"Vocabulary is always a concern. These [E.D.] students don't have a lot of expressive vocabulary. You have to pay close attention to the vocabulary when doing a read aloud, like in a social studies lesson, because they don't have a lot to pull into their work. We try to exchange ideas as much as we can, but our schedules this year are not as flexible. We don't have a lot of time for discussions." She is at a school where fourth grade is team-taught. She is hoping, by the teachers teaching their interests and their strengths (by team teaching), this will be best for the students.

When asked to describe a recent teaching interaction she had with an E.D. student, Ms. B told me of a scenario that occurred the previous day. One of the girls who is E.D. came in from another class and asked to take an assessment she had missed. She was shocked because most kids would try to avoid taking an assessment they had missed. The student told Ms. B, "I have to take the reading assessment." Ms. B told her she should take the time then to catch up on the activity the class was working on when she came in because she knew the student would really enjoy this activity. Ms. B told her she could make up the assessment the next day. Ms. B said the student had this little smile on her face which let Ms. B know she had made the right choice. Ms. B was touched by this experience because this student also has a learning disability in addition to being E.D. The child had missed some of the lesson they were being assessed on, but really wanted to take this reading

assessment right then to make it up, even though the rest of the class was chatting and working on this fun project. The child was so happy when Ms. B gave her the option to do both, work on the project with her classmates and to makeup the reading assessment. The student came in the next day and told Ms. B she had to take the assessment today. Ms. B said, “You sure do, thank you.” The child took it. Ms. B says you know you’ve made the right decision when a child responds like this (smiling and feeling successful at doing what the other students are doing) and it seemed to build her self-confidence. Ms. B felt that she had made a connection with this student both socially and as an educator.

Ms. B used a Spanish dictionary to communicate with her students whose English was poor. She also had arranged the room for the bilingual students to work in close proximity with their peers who knew little or no English. All her students were participating in the activities and were attentive during her instruction and directions for the project; as a result of the peer help and the modeling and demonstrating she did during this time. Also these E.D. and Limited English Proficient students seemed, in my observation, to really appreciate that Ms. B was communicating with them in her limited Spanish. These students did not miss a beat and were eager to do the work.

Ms. B shared that she did not realize she was so successful with E.D. students. She commented, “I think it’s just sort of who you are. I have children at home. Whatever they needed I was out there getting and running around and making sure they had everything. When you know there are parents that don’t have that capability, you try to help them out. You do what you can for them. There are children who know you care about them, I guess. That speaks more than material things sometimes.” She then referred back to the inability of these students’ parents to support them. She was saddened by the fact a lot of parents would not or could not come to the school for conferences, and did not get to see their child’s room, their work, or meet their teachers. As a result of this, the parents did not get a clear understanding of what was missing in their child’s education plan. Some parents will have phone conferences, but still miss experiencing their children’s school environment.

Ms. B described another time when she thought she was particularly effective with an E.D. student which again included references to working individually with students on improving their writing skills and use of expressive language. She was sensitive to this child’s frustration in writing.

You do a writing conference and you take that time because some of them certainly feel frustrated when they write two pages. I give them the pencil and I don't red ink it. I think of one thing when we conference and say, okay we are going to work on spelling. That's what we are going to pay attention to. You can see their frustration level go down. It takes some of the pressure off them because they are not up to grade level and if I red inked the whole paper, we would probably both sit down and cry.

She breaks the writing down into smaller pieces and has them successfully complete the rewrite of each smaller part until the whole composition is done. She said, "They look at you like 'I can manage that.' It's not so overwhelming like to re-copy the whole paper." She feels the individual time spent with each student is a big plus. She also encourages them during this time and lets them know she will work with them and teach them how to use this strategy of chunking into smaller parts and apply the skills they are learning, so they can work independently. She said, "That's kind of where I think I can make a difference."

Ms. B referred to parental support being the main reason children were successful or not in school throughout her interview. She showed me where she had tried many things to improve communication and support of parents. She meets with parents very early before school. She has phone conferences with them versus conferences at school in the classroom. These accommodations have only been successful with a few parents, but she is willing to do them. Ms. B says she has realized, because so many of her students are economically disadvantaged, she needs to do some things differently so they will like school and be successful.

Ms. B feels, for many reasons, these parents are not able to be very supportive of their children, so she has changed her expectations of receiving communication from parents, especially parents of E.D. students. She was clear that she had not changed her expectations of the students academically, only in how she felt she needed to teach them. She has made changes with the students to take the pressure off them for returning communication from their parents. For example, she continues to write notes to parents in the student planners, but does not expect them to be signed by parents every night. She feels the students should be responsible for their learning and what they have control of, but do not need to feel the

pressure of trying to get their parents to do things the teacher requests of them, e.g., signing planners each night.

Ms. B was sensitive to the fact that parents of her E.D. students cared about what was going on with their children at school, but had so many other issues in their families to be concerned with, it did not seem they cared. She said many of her parents were single parents and worked more than one job. She had also observed most of her E.D. students had other siblings usually younger who needed their parents' attention which kept them from paying as much attention to her students. Some parents wanted to help their children, but were not capable of helping them academically especially with language experiences, written or verbal.

***Observation 1 of Ms. B.***

Ms. B kept a very steady pace while she was delivering instruction and a positive atmosphere. She complimented all the students and several individual students many times throughout the observation. She complimented the students who came in and followed the routine. She had incentives for those students who did not need her to speak to them.

Ms. B began the class with a review of an assessment on drawing conclusions and making inferences. She circulated the room to monitor the students as she read the expository text they used for their assessment. The students were expected to follow the reading while she read to them which they all did. Ms. B had popsicle sticks in a cup with a student's name on each stick. She would pull a stick from the cup as she asked a question and called on the student whose name was on the stick. This seemed to keep the students' attention. She reviewed strategies to be used to draw conclusions and make inferences with the students. The students shared the strategies they used and how they applied the strategies as they were called on. When the students answered their questions on the assessment correctly, they would say "YES!!!" with some type of arm motion to support this enthusiasm. They were serious about how well they did on this assessment.

Ms. B's classroom was very organized, as were her students' desks. It was obvious that these students had been taught routines as they knew what to do for all transitions and what movement they could make around the room while Ms. B was working with a guided reading group. The students were all given a project to complete independently while she was teaching reading. All students were engaged in the project, even the Limited English

Proficient students. She gave oral directions and had directions written on the board. She also had examples of the finished work product they were to do and went over the steps using visuals to demonstrate. The students also had a book to read when they finished their work. There was a bookcase at the back of the room where the students went to get a book to read while they waited for her to finish with the reading group. When they finished one book, they returned it to the bookcase and checked out another one.

Ms. B had several one to one interactions with each student during the observation. She had at least four with each student in the reading group and at least three with each student during whole group instruction. She also circulated and monitored students' work and progress constantly while not teaching reading, which was the majority of the class (see Appendix G for copy of observation chart). Ms. B had 67 total one to one interactions with her 11 E.D. students for 63% of her class total interactions. She had a total of 101 one to one interactions during this observation. Most of these interactions were working with students individually on reading and writing skills. In her interview, Ms. B said she felt working with students individually and spending that special time with each student was where she could make a difference.

The bookmark projects, using the North Carolina symbols, seemed to be fun for the students. All students were engaged in the activity. As Ms. B explained the project and directions, she used many descriptive words. She made statements such as, "The cardinal has a beautiful song," or "The male cardinal is brilliant." She had many examples and pictures of the item she was describing. She told the students that she would laminate the bookmarks when they were finished if they followed directions and put their names on them. The students got more focused on finishing these bookmarks after she said this. She circulated around the room and kept the children informed as to how much time they had left to complete the project. She even used a Spanish dictionary to speak key words in the directions to help one of her students understand what she was to do. A peer who was fluent in Spanish and English also helped the student who spoke no English.

Students appeared to be taking a pass off the wall when needing to go to the bathroom. She got their attention by saying "Clap once if you can hear me, clap twice if you can hear me." Ms. B would then tell them how much time they had left and compliment them on how nicely the projects were turning out. For example, "You have 15 minutes guys.



They're coming out really nicely." The students were responsible for cleaning up after themselves and student helpers were used to do additional clean up as well as handing out and taking up materials. Students placed their finished products on the back table. She told the students, "I have extra stickers for students whose desks are cleaned up and...." Students were quiet listening for how they could earn additional stickers. She gave stickers to students as she complimented them individually and in front of the class. To close the class, Ms. B told them what to expect after the holidays. She then lined them up by saying, "If you have \_\_\_ line up, if you sit on \_\_\_ side you may line up quietly." Then the students switched classes.

The atmosphere was busy, but calm and positive. Ms. B spoke in a normal and low voice volume for the duration. She complimented the students as they entered the room, during instruction and as they finished their work, and then again when they lined up to switch classes. The majority of her dialogue was with individuals to assist them in their reading, give them feedback on their work, give them encouragement to complete their work and give them compliments.

***Room description.***

Ms. B's room was very organized as were the inside of her students' desks. The desks were arranged in horizontal rows, four rows on each side of the classroom. Each row had two to four desks in each row. All the desks faced the front of the room. One E.D. girl and one E.D. boy were sitting separately, but close to a row. There was a wide space between the two sets of desks down the middle of the room. Ms. B set the overhead up in this middle section, so all the students could see the board where she was projecting the instruction. There was room to move between most rows on both sides of the room and room to move around the room outside of the desks. The desks were arranged like a big square where you could walk around the outside of it or walk down the middle of it. Students used the middle aisle mostly when moving, except for the students sitting at the outside desks. Students could work with their neighbors beside and behind them.

The reading table and a square table were set up in the back of the room. The reading table had a chalk board behind it Ms. B could use for instruction. It also had writing and reading tips on posters on the walls around the table and in that corner of the room. The square table had materials on it for students to use the first observation. When I returned for

the follow-up interview, Ms. B had a puzzle out for students to work on at designated times during the day.

Across the back wall were three computers, a storage cabinet, a tall bookshelf full of books for student use and a behavior chart. The students consistently went to the bookcase to choose a book to read when they finished their assignments. This was very evident as students finished their centers work while Ms. B was working with a guided reading group.

On the side wall by the door was the school mission statement a calendar bulletin board, cubbies and storage for teacher resources. A dry erase board stretched across the front of the room. There were posters above and below the board with learning tips and character education traits. There were several windows across about half of the other side wall. The room was clean and neat. The students had jobs for cleaning up after each activity and earned extra stickers for doing a good job.

***Observation 2 of Ms. B.***

This observation took place first thing in the morning. Ms. B greeted the students as they came in with a smile and a “Good morning.” She had written on the board in letter form:

Dear class,

Good morning. Do DPP’s

W and X in your math log.

Read a book when you finish.

From,

Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_

The students came in and began work on their math and checked out books from the bookcase when they finished. As soon as the bell rang, she said, “Let’s get started right on time. We have a lot to do.” She reviewed student jobs for the week and the responsibilities of hall monitors. She reminded students that they made the choices whether or not to follow the class rules in the hall, not the monitor. The monitor only reported the infractions to her. Other students should not give the person with this responsibility a hard time. Everyone should choose to follow the rules to show respect for other class instruction and for safety.

The students pledged allegiance to the flag and started into a song practice led by two students. The students were learning the hand motions to “This land is your land”. They were going to be performing this song for parents soon. The students knew what morning

they were to complete, students who were in the first guided reading group went to the reading table and Ms. B gave directions for what to do as they finished their different assignments. She gave out papers and circulated around the room to be sure everyone was working on their assignments.

Ms. B then began instruction with the reading group. The instruction for the reading group was fast paced, including lots of dialogue about reading strategies and the reading selection itself. Ms. B would assign the reading group a task and leave the group to circulate the other students for individual assistance. Each of the eight students in the reading group had from four to nine one to one interactions with Ms. B.

At 9:15a.m., just as she had told the students, she brought the class back together for whole group instruction. They transitioned smoothly and quickly and began a discussion about open-ended questions. Ms. B reminded them of their reading goal for the day for them to apply their goal in finding the answers to the questions and responding to those questions. She gave students directions for the independent activity and circulated to monitor the students' work. Students then shared their answers and the strategies they applied to find the answers. Teacher reviewed grammar, spelling, punctuation and the rubrics for an appropriate response to an open-ended question. She reminded the class of her expectations of the quality of their writing, in particular their sentences. She then gave them an assessment on the reading and writing objectives they had covered the last few days. Again she circulated to monitor student work.

Ms. B gave specific feedback to her students on their writing on the assessment. She worked with some students to break their writing down to one sentence at a time. This is what she spoke of during her interview. Ms. B commented that most her students had little background knowledge if any to answer the questions on the assessment. She had been giving them information integrated into their language arts and social studies instruction for them to draw from for this assessment.

For this observation, Ms. B had 80 total one to one interactions with all 11 of the E.D. students for 58% of her total class one to one interactions. Even though Ms. B had 11 E.D. students and 11 non-E.D. students, she had at least 137 one to one interactions during this observation. She circulated the room constantly when she was not providing whole group instruction and was regularly going by each student's desk to check their work. All of her

students had several opportunities to request her help or for her to observe they needed help throughout this observation (see Appendix G for observation charts).

***Room description.***

Ms. B's room remained the same as for her first observation for her furniture arrangements and resources. The bulletin board had changed for the calendar and some books had been added to the back bookcase (see Appendix F for pictures of classroom).

***Summary***

***Reflections on Ms. B's observations.***

Ms. B said, "I am probably not a very fun teacher, but I have to get the job done. I try to change it up, but I think keeping things steady and on an even keel makes the students feel safe in knowing what's going to happen each day." She works hard to reach each student individually and work from their strengths, she said. "I try to work with them on an individual basis, but still have high expectations I remind them of every day." She did monitor and work with her students one to one for the majority of her instructional time as was evident in her observations. She also had routines and procedures in place that the students were accustomed to and followed. Students worked in partners and as peer tutors in her class to be sure the non-English speaking students could follow her instruction.

Ms. B was not as openly energetic and intense as the other three participants, but had a softer, calmer style. Her students were still engaged and appeared to enjoy her class. They smiled and spoke openly with Ms. B and were completing their work successfully. The atmosphere was positive and encouraging even though it was serious and structured. Her one to one interactions were almost double the other participants.

Ms. B, like Ms. A, used and introduced new vocabulary words and expressive, descriptive language throughout her instruction. She said in her interview she works daily on increasing students' vocabulary because, "A lot of these students don't have background knowledge to bring to their writing. They don't have adjectives. They haven't seen a lot of things, so their writing to me is flat." She feels learning to read and write will help build their background knowledge.

***Bridging the gap.***

Ms. B looked ahead at the assessments she was to use and knew where her E.D. students might have trouble making connections to some of the examples and reading

selections. She integrates literature and activities into her language arts and social studies instruction to introduce new experience and to stimulate dialogue for the children to share experiences related to concepts and examples on their upcoming assessments. She shares her travel experiences from around the world and the United States with her students to introduce them to other cultures. She also feels as she emphasizes learning new vocabulary and expressive language she is increasing their knowledge base to enhance their abilities to communicate and ask questions of concepts or information they do not understand. She uses a lot of pictures and examples from literature to enhance their understanding of concepts and to teach them about different resources they can research for themselves.

***Instructional planning and strategies.***

Ms. B is a thorough planner and a long range planner who constantly tries to find ways to reach her students. “I am always trying to think of another way to do something. I wake up in the middle of the night and go here’s what I can do to find out where they will be most successful, by regrouping them, choosing another resource for them, small group or individual instruction – whatever works.”

She uses peer tutoring. She circulates and monitors her students’ work regularly. Reading and writing strategies are emphasized daily. Modeling and use of visuals are used in her presentation. Ms. B constantly talks with her students and encourages them. The implementation of routines and procedures that are consistently followed is key for her to keep a safe unchanging structure in place for her E.D. students who she feels do not have much consistency or structure at home that supports school success. “The E.D. students have a lot on their mind and their parents are working many jobs and aren’t there to provide a structure. I have not changed my expectations of students, but have changed what I ask of them. I can only ask them to take responsibility for things in their control.” This is why she has changed her homework requirements and what she asks of the students outside of her classroom.

***Philosophy of Ms. B.***

“I feel very responsible for their learning. Whatever they need from the first day they walk in here to the last day, I feel solely responsible.” She encourages her students to come to school and take responsibility for getting to school, so she can, “get to know who they are, what they are going through and certainly try to keep the bar up there and help them achieve

what they need to achieve.” This is what drives her to work with all her students, but especially her E.D. students individually and in small groups as much as possible, she said. Ms. B also told me she thinks knowing how to read is the key to student success, so she models and works daily on literacy skills.

***Classroom design and environment.***

Ms. B’s classroom is warm and organized. The atmosphere is pleasant, personable, but structured. Student desks are arranged so students can work with a neighbor, but also so students will be facing the front. This is so she can see her students’ eyes quickly and easily and if they are being attentive. It is also because her whole group instruction is usually presented from the overhead or at the front board. There was no pattern as to where E.D. students sat. She had assigned seating based on who worked well and productively together.

There are other areas where students can work such as at the computers, on the floor by the bookcase, at the square table in the back, at the reading table and with her individually. Ms. B is soft spoken, but students are attentive to her voice and respond well to her when following directions or when being reprimanded. She speaks to students respectfully and tries to communicate with non-English speaking students in their language. Students have job responsibilities assigned to them each week.

Students earn incentives for being responsible for their class jobs, being respectful of time, staying on task, keeping the room clean and organized, following directions and making a good effort to complete a task.

***Interactions with students.***

In both observations, Ms. B was charted having several one to one interactions per student and more per E.D. student. During her first observation, she had 67 one to one interactions with her 11 E.D. students which were 63% of her 101 total interactions. Her second observation showed 80 total one to one interactions with E.D. students for 58% of her 137 total interactions.

**Teacher III – Ms. C**

***Interviews for Ms. C.***

Ms. C is a 64 year old fifth grade teacher in a school with a FR/L population of 63%. The class observed consisted of 25 students, 19 (76%) of which were FR/L students. She has taught emotionally disturbed children, in kindergarten through twelfth grade, in the Virgin

Islands and in the United States for over twenty years. Ms. C previously worked in construction for several years and in migrant camps.

Ms. C's mother was a teacher, "a very good teacher and I valued her." But Ms. C did not want to be an educator. She attended school from elementary through high school in the U.S Virgin Islands and graduated at fifteen years old. She then left the Virgin Islands to go to Duluth, Minnesota for college. Originally, she declared her major in nursing, but then changed to education and psychology. She graduated from St. Scholastica College with a double bachelor's degree in education and psychology and a minor in Spanish. After this, she went to the University of Hartford and received her master's in administration and supervision. She then took some online courses with Capella University and got certification in a teaching curriculum she liked. In addition, she took workshops and courses in between these degrees.

For her experiences, she went to college in Minnesota, worked for the Department of Welfare and worked in the fields in migrant camps in California for about five and a half years. Ms. C went from working with the Department of Welfare with emotionally disturbed children to the elementary level third and fourth grade in public school. Her past classes were similar to what she has currently with 20-22 students, a predetermined curriculum, with less flexibility in how you approach the curriculum. She was able to use her Spanish teaching Spanish-speaking students from Puerto Rico. She picked up a lot of Spanish when she worked in the migrant camps in California. "I also picked up an understanding of what people really felt in the migrant camps because I had a dual responsibility. Part of my responsibility was to translate for the migrant workers and part [she chose for herself] I worked in the fields. I did this because I felt I needed to know the different dialects and phrases they used in order to understand how to translate for them." She said she learned that the workers in the field felt there was no way out for them. She could leave whenever she wanted to. She had options to go back to the office or the classroom, but for them, that was it.

She felt this experience made her a better teacher. "So it gave me a better understanding when I went back again into the classroom, to understand that it was not they don't want to learn, it's not that they don't dream or want to have dreams, it's that they don't have the opportunity to have that." She said, "You and I can dream and follow our dream to

be President or whatever, but their life is pretty well set out. It takes a tremendous amount of spirit and luck and somebody to recognize you have the ability to do more than to pick fruit.” She said she learned fast that as a middle class person you assume everybody, if given an opportunity, can get ahead and do or become, but that is not real. It was hard, she said, to tell someone who drinks starch for breakfast that they should not do certain things and they should stay in school. The migrant workers earned her respect. They always came back to the fields and worked hard all day whether they had babies or a lack of food, they just dealt with it. “When I went back in the classroom, I was more realistic! I had lots of journey and I’ve had a few pit stops.”

Ms. C returned to the Virgin Islands and worked with emotionally disturbed children as a supervisor for the girls’ section of this school and then went back into the classroom. “I was never going to be a teacher. When you grow up with somebody who is a teacher, the demands are so strenuous that you don’t really understand what they are doing.” When she finished her contract with the emotionally disturbed, she was looking for a job. Her mother said, “Why don’t you teach?” Ms. C said she thought, “Every once in a while you listen to your mama. So I listened to my mother and it was probably the best time I’ve ever done that.” She listened to her mother and said, “I’ve loved it ever since.”

Ms. C stayed in education for 16 years in the Virgin Islands as a classroom teacher in grades kindergarten to middle school and had her own private school for a couple of years. She then went to the Department of Education and taught middle school. She enjoyed having her own school because there was a lot of freedom, but financially it was very demanding to run the school and teach and she did not feel it was what was best for the children. After teaching in middle school, Ms. C taught at the University in the Virgin Islands.

“After a while, when you are in education like that, you want to see things change and so I moved into curriculum. I set up the curriculum and instruction department providing training and workshops in the Virgin Islands.” Ms. C did this for three years and taught at a local college part time. She then said she tired of trying to fight the system to requisition the very basics, so she took some time off and went into construction.

“We built houses,” she said. She appreciated this experience. “That was really good because I think I learned even more the value of education. You learn to apply the knowledge that you’ve been teaching so I got a whole different perspective of what I should



be doing as a teacher in the classroom. The math became real! The formulation of plans became real! All the principles that we had in textbooks and academically all started to take on a whole new light. If we didn't do it right, there were immediate consequences.”

Ms. C moved to St. Martin and continued to work in construction, but then began tutoring. She moved to the Bahamas and went back into education full-time. She worked in the British system for six and a half years, revitalized by her other work experiences. “That was even more exciting, like I said; I came back into it fresh, cleaned out and had a new approach.” She had also picked up a lot of technology.

Ms. C taught third grade in the Bahamas for a year and then moved to Freeport and was the coordinator for technology and taught from preschool through twelfth grade. There were no planning periods like here, but she had the opportunity to establish and design the system for them and set up the curriculum for them in technology. She was proud of the fact she was able to link the technology to the curriculum rather than it being taught as a separate subject. It supported their academics. She got excited when discussing this and added that the technology became a tool just like a pencil. It also excited her, she said, because education was very important to her students, so these parents' attitudes were a little different than the parents she works with now. They were willing to do whatever they needed to for their children to be successful. They were willing to put in extra time after school, on Saturdays and other times and were amenable to this. “It gave me a lot of freedom and I got a lot of support from the system in order to do that.” Ms. C taught technology in elementary, middle and high school.

Ms. C's two daughters and three grandchildren were with her in the Bahamas. She said, “It came time for them to complete their education so they can replace me eventually. It's not feasible to do collegiate advancement in the Bahamas, especially if you are not a citizen. We made the decision to come back to the United States.” She and her family returned to the U.S in 2001. Ms. C said she had been out of the U.S. for many years and was not sure she was ready to leave the beaches, but felt she needed to do this.

She came to Raleigh in October, 2001 (just after the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City) and was hired at a magnet elementary school in November for the remainder of that school year. At this magnet elementary school, Ms. C taught in a summer program. Then was hired at her current school to teach fourth grade, then fifth grade, and during the

summers teach migrant education. Ms. C has been teaching fifth grade for five years. “I wanted to move up to fifth grade because I wanted to be in a position where I could do a lot of communication with them. I felt I had a pretty good understanding of their needs and I wanted to be a part of that transition to middle school.” Applying real world connections with their academics, she thought, would be a strength of hers; to help fifth graders better understand transition.

Their world, she said, is more of an adult world because they have the responsibility of making a lot of adult decisions without any kind of real experience. “They are functioning in a role they are not prepared for. Then they have to make that adjustment to student after making these kind of adult things they do. They have so much knowledge, but the knowledge doesn’t have any foundation. It doesn’t have memories or experience and when they do have experience they are not able to connect it.” For example, a lot of the children, even though they are disadvantaged, have access to malls, televisions, technology, and travel. They will go to Disney World because that’s one of the achievements you are supposed to have, but they “have not been able to really enjoy it, haven’t experienced it. They have just been there.”

Ms. C’s next observation was, “We [teachers] expect them to be able to read and tie it into whatever they have done and we think they have experienced something or that they have enjoyed it and they haven’t.” She said that the students cannot make the connections. She went on to say that it is not because they do not have the potential, but because nobody stopped to take the time to help them realize, enjoy or feel it. That is a really big thing. “They do not have the vocabulary they need. They are very glib and are certainly surviving in their own world because of constant television (does not see this as necessarily bad). What’s missing is there is no connection! In school we give them a piece of paper and the paper doesn’t connect them to the real world.”

She described when she went to school, that the teachers integrated everything. A subject was not taught by itself. Everything was lapped together so that your literature was part of your science, math and everything. So one came out with an understanding how everything fit. “The kids I’m dealing with don’t have that. Things are in little boxes, like the way we build a house. They don’t have individuality. They don’t have vocabulary.”

In talking about her students, of whom 76% were E.D., she commented that they had a lot of respect for each other. She felt first of all, as a classroom teacher that she has to earn their respect, but that it is hard because the system is not protective of giving her time to earn their respect. She described it as like being in the middle of trying to earn respect and what the school system expects and how students live. She clarified this thought with the statement, “Our expectations of what a good student looks like is that they come in with their shirts tucked in, walking in a straight line, sitting quietly in the classroom while you empower them with knowledge. That’s quite a big switch because the time they are not in school they (students) make 95% of the decisions for themselves. They decide what they are going to wear and how they are going to manipulate and maneuver and outfox their parents. That’s their strength. They don’t see that it makes sense to make a change, there’s no value, there’s nothing tangible.” Ms. C believes she has to earn her students’ respect because they have survived things she does not know if she could have survived. There is value, she says, to the fact that they have been able to point out some of the things they have survived so she can show them where their strengths are and how they can use those strengths in school to become even stronger and make a connection to the real world.

Another observation she made was, “It seems the older person for these kids is not a threat. It’s kind of like they have such a messed up house life that for many of them the only stability they have is with an older person such as a grandparent.” She says the children do not have that feeling of security. They give you a feeling that something’s missing. In terms of how they deal with each other, they have a coldness that they have as a protection. It’s important that she earns their respect first.

She followed this thought with the fact that she did not consider herself a normal grandparent because she is, “Still with their dances and their language and their movements.” Ms. C felt being able to communicate with them better would help build their self-confidence. This was very important too.

She said she had observed that in elementary school, “We [educators] want all the students to do everything.” She does not feel this is the way it works in real life. Students should understand if they are a great illustrator then they should do the illustrations and do them well. Then they should know how to choose an editor who can take care of the editing. In this way, the students work together using their areas of strength, while they are

developing all their skills, to complete the projects. This structure, she says, keeps students from being embarrassed or feeling as if they failed because they cannot complete or compete in doing the work. It also gives them the opportunity to pass a test while giving them some flexibility in coming up with something they are good at and interested in. By providing these opportunities and choices, the students take interest in the projects and want to do the research and work required to meet her high expectations and the curricular goals.

Ms. C describes her students as, “Digital kids who make decisions spontaneously.” They will use CDs, television, X-Box, and Play Station and know everything going on around them. So she believes that it is the teacher’s job to get them to transfer that into knowledge we know they are going to need. “A textbook is not going to do it. Reading the paper is not going to work. There is too much quiet for them. It’s not the length of time they are willing to stay seated because they will sit for hours playing a game because they like the challenge. They almost need extra noise.” For this reason, Ms. C had music playing quietly in the background and had students assigned to different centers using reading, speaking, writing, and technology to complete the required tasks while she was working with small groups for direct instruction. Her classes were busy, but well-planned, using hands-on activities, vocabulary development activities, writing activities with on-going dialogue with her throughout the instruction. If the students did not get to work in a center or on the particular part of their assignment they wanted to, they could go to the class website and work on it there.

Using the computer programs, where the students can move around the sites quickly, with color and animation, etc., matches how they think and how they visualize things quickly and spontaneously. “It’s the most natural thing in the world for them to read on the computer. You can animate the words, repeat the words and make automatic connections that they can’t do from reading a book. You (the teacher) still need to spend small group time with them and make sure they understand the words being used and that these words have the meaning they want them to have.” She says that she finds more than ever that she needs to have small group instruction for this reason. She met with several small groups and individuals to work on comprehension and vocabulary development during the class observations.

She gave me an example of another reason small group and individual instruction is important. She feels this time helps her make more connections. “I was doing something with one kid today, one girl, and she said, ‘Wow! I have you all to myself.’ You know, I realized again because of the way their home lives are they need this special attention to make that connection.” She went on to say that every time we want our kids to go away and not give them our attention, we lose that connection. In both classroom observations, Ms. C was very attentive to students and their comments, personal connections they shared and how they were working and expressing their answers. She summarized her planning and instructional delivery by saying, “I still try to figure out for myself a better way to serve where they are and getting them excited about learning and wanting to read.”

Ms. C says education is just like a gang. In a gang, there is a leader who gives direction. “In my classroom, I want this same effect.” She is the alpha and there are rules they have established. If you cannot fit, if you cannot contribute, then you just do not belong. This is hard for her and she does not want to throw students out of her class or of the education system, but they need to understand, just like in a gang, if you do not have the right sign or signal, there is an immediate consequence. This is why she feels there must be immediate consequences in her room for students’ work and behavior expectations. If students do not learn, then they won’t be able to be a part of things, be able to do what they want to do and contribute to what they feel is important. They know they have to fit into world expectations.

In talking about her philosophy, Ms. C said that her philosophy was not the same for all kids, but her expectations were. “You must do what you are capable of doing. I expect everybody to be AG (academically gifted) at the level they can be.”

When asked to describe an *effective teacher*, Ms. C said that an effective teacher has to want to teach, to enrich herself and to expand her understanding of where students are in terms of what their lives are. They need to know what it really means for them to be poor. They have to have a passion, a feeling for learning; otherwise they will just be delivering a package situation. “If you don’t see that learning, that application, then you’re not going to be effective very long. You are going to burn out. You’ve got to know their dances, stay in touch with their vocabulary, know their interests, and be able to communicate with them. They have to feel that you understand.” Ms. C demonstrates these characteristics in her

teaching. She connects with her children by using examples of how they speak, dance, dress and live – things she has learned from them or with them – in talking with them, disciplining them, making her lesson plans and guiding them to make connections with the curriculum to their real life.

Ms. C describes her E.D. students as not really being poor. They still have access to somebody caring about getting them money, food or clothes. They still have some kind of support. The parents are more aware of what things cost. The kids are not poor. “They have Timberlands on their feet and Snorkel air force jackets on their back and all of them have two or three of the major electronic games like X-Box or Game Cubes.” In the class I was observing, she did an informal survey of the students as to who had how many electronic games. This makes a difference in how students appreciate things. They have a fast food mentality that we have built up. They get that instant reward. They will come in with nice pens. They will get broken, but they will not replace them or care about them. “What they are poor in is making connection to values, not being sensitive to others and not having a sense of reality.”

Her experiences in the Bahamas, Virgin Islands, migrant camps, the welfare department and teaching are what make recognizing the types of support E.D. students need in Ms. C’s classroom easier for her. “Years of experience make a difference. You learn how to read what the child needs in time. You learn how hard to kick and when you need to back off, just be warm or supportive or do the tutor type thing.” She thinks this comes from surviving and experiencing the mistakes she has made and fixed. Her experiences have helped her learn to recognize in a child if it is a home issue or just a child being rude.

“I know I am successful with economically disadvantaged students because they still email me years later. I have a lot of communication that continues. I get email from kids in the Bahamas who are headed into college. So I know that something I am doing is working.” It is comforting to her that her principal sees her being successful. She also feels she is successful because of her age. “There is a time and grade for young teachers, but there is also a time when you need that older teacher who doesn’t have as much of an outside life now that keeps her from doing what she needs to do. You have more of yourself to give. The kids we are looking at (E.D.), that’s the big thing with disadvantaged kids, they need to feel that they have something or somebody that can actually take the time to hear them.” She

says when she starts not feeling that she wants to come to school to teach then it will be time to go.

***Observation 1 of Ms. C.***

Ms. C has her own expectations but she also established routines and responsibilities in collaboration with her students. Her students were able to verbalize these routines and expectations during the observations. The climate in her room was both positive and respectful with a focus on completing a variety of tasks. She referred to the students as “Mr. or Miss (last name). She and the students said “please” and “thank you” to each other. The majority of tasks emphasized literacy skills, especially increasing vocabulary, writing and communicating with a variety of audiences. The students kept a working journal for writing they used throughout the school year. Ms. C laughed a lot with her students while keeping a very brisk pace and the students engaged in a variety of activities.

In my first observation, I noted that Ms. C did “float” around the room (see Appendix I for observation chart). She circulated and monitored the students’ work closely. She was very observant and could look and listen to many things at once and respond to them all. She also showed a high level of energy and enthusiasm in her speaking with the students and in her constant movement. Her feedback with individual students and to the whole group was immediate, specific and encouraging. She also complimented the students throughout the lesson. She emphasized her expectations for their work and behavior during the observation also. Her expectations were on the board, on posters and given verbally to the students, statements such as, “Don’t quit! Be responsible. Be respectful to yourself. Good job! (She would give specific examples as to what the student or students had done well.) Feel how much you’ve accomplished?! Congratulations to those who didn’t quit and kept a good attitude!”

The students constantly wrote and dialogued with Ms. C during this first observation. She used the students’ work and responses as examples of how certain assignments should be completed. The examples she used to help students make connections all included something or someone the students could relate to currently. She was having them write and compare letters written to a teacher versus ones written to a business. She tied this in with communicating to the right person the right way if they need to exchange a gift or have a gift replaced because it is not working. This observation was before winter break and the winter

holidays. She also encouraged them to send letters by email, not just handwritten. She gave them some tips on how an electronic letter could be more effective because they could change the fonts, colors, add graphics, and add pictures of the items they were inquiring about.

She then connected this concept to monitoring what they read – as the fine print on a box or advertisement of an item they might want to purchase. She gave them several examples of situations where they needed to be mindful of all the text in what they read in school and “everywhere.” The students all made some type of responsive sound when she gave the example of them receiving an X-Box or remote controlled Escalade, but someone had not monitored what they read very closely, so when they opened these gifts and wanted to play with them, they could not because there were NO BATTERIES! Ms. C incorporated some character education in her instruction as she encouraged the students to be respectful of their parents and thankful for the gifts they received, even when the gifts might not be what they asked for. She reminded them that someone thought enough of them to make that special effort to give them a gift, so they needed to be nice. Then she brought the students back to what their assignments were going to be over the break and when they returned. Students were asked to email a letter to her describing their experiences over the break. She wanted them to be creative, but appropriate, in their writing. She referred to the notes and requirements of the letters online for them to access. The students also wrote down her directions for the letter assignment. They could also call her any day except Christmas Day if they wanted to.

The students kept bringing up the electronic games, so she had a quick discussion on her recommendations of technology they could ask for other than the electronic games. She explained to them that they could use other types of technology for games and research and calendar and practical things instead of spending so much money (their parents spending) for just the games. The students asked her questions about the Palm computers and some other items. She talked with the students about how they should compare the products and see for themselves how it would be better to buy a computer they could use for many things, including their games, instead of just for games. This discussion supported her interview statements on how students needed to be current on their knowledge and use of technology,



so they may access information and then use it to make better decisions and enhance their work.

In managing her class, she would use phrases such as, “That’s good,” complimenting them on their overall behavior; “Bring it down now,” talking about the volume of their voices; “Let’s go,” to speed them up in their writing; “Wait,” students would stop immediately what they were doing and listen; “Don’t talk when someone else is talking” and “Hold on, we’ve got some rude people,” for students to stop talking while another student was talking. She also kept the students working at a brisk pace throughout the lesson. If she thought she was losing their attention, she would use a comment or make a connection to “cause and effect” as to how this related to their decisions for their behavior (consequences) and their work (retention or promotion) with an example of what they were studying. She continuously used real life examples with the students and how they currently affected them. She also was clear in her expectations that the students were old enough to be responsible for getting their work done, getting to school, making decisions about wanting to learn and do well, and accepting the results or consequences of those choices.

In the interview, she was serious about the students understanding their responsibilities no matter what was going on with them and they needed to be in class. They needed to want to learn and she would be there for them. An example occurred while I was observing the first class: One of the boys came in late. She stopped instruction and asked him why he was late. He told her his mom got up late and he had missed the bus. She told him he needed to make a plan to get himself up and ready. He did not need to miss any instruction because it would affect him getting done what he needed to in fifth grade to go on to sixth. (She said this encouragingly, but with the cause and effect consequence in real life connection.) He accepted this idea, got settled quickly and joined the class. The other students were nodding their heads in support of her comment to the boy, but not in a judgmental way. They seemed to just believe they should all take this responsibility to be at school. Ms. C continued her instruction. This whole exchange took a matter of a few seconds and did not break the pace of her instruction. As soon as she gave the students directions for the next activity, she went over to this student and made sure he was caught up with the class and shared a little of what he had missed.

Another example was that one of the other boys brought a note in (in Spanish, which she read) that said his parents were picking him up early so they could leave for Mexico. He was called to the office about halfway through the observation to leave. She encouraged him to come back as soon as possible and asked him to try to bring her a certain kind of pepper from Mexico. She had this conversation with him in Spanish. The other Spanish speaking students joined in the conversation and had big smiles on their faces and even enjoyed a little humor with him and Ms. C. She did as she said in her interview, which was trying to make a personal connection with each student, so she could better communicate with them and keep them interested while still being their teacher.

After a very quick and efficient transition, she continued a lesson on listening. This was the second day of the listening exercises. She reminded them of the guidelines and began reading from one of her favorite books. She modeled reading fluently and with expression. The students then wrote down what she read including punctuation. After a few sentences or a paragraph, she would stop and have a student read back to her what they wrote. The students did much better today, she said. “Guess what? In two days you have come a long way. If we keep going like this, by May we’ll be blowing people away. You won’t even know yourself! You did real good!” She praised them for not getting frustrated and not quitting before the selection was complete. She then encouraged them to practice with their parents and how this might even help them at home to improve their listening. She also encouraged them to listen to the words in their music and write them down and reminded them of monitoring what they read and write for, “good words, clean words.”

In conversations between students, I noticed they were correcting each others’ grammar and use of proper English. They were also asking each other questions about their reading and writing. Some were discussing how they could earn tickets from Ms. C to go to the movies to see *The Chronicles of Narnia*. (They had been reading the book and discussing the story in class, so Ms. C had set up a project that connected the movie with their literature study.)

Ms. C’s class had 24 students with 19 of them being E.D. In interacting with the students, Ms. C had 53 one to one interactions with 14 of 19 E.D. students and by proximity monitoring interacted with the other students anywhere from one to five times. In monitoring, she usually addressed the group of students sitting together. She also had non-

verbal interactions with many students. She interacted 15 times, one to one, with three of the four non-E.D. students and monitored the fourth student at least three times.

***Room description.***

Ms. C's student desks were arranged in groups. Some groups of desks did not face the same direction (see Appendix H for classroom photographs). She also had three reading tables in her room where students could choose to work. One of the reading tables was her work space and guided reading area.

She did not have a teacher desk by choice. She devoted all the class space for the students and instruction. She said, "Her rolling chair is used by the students. They love sitting in this chair. It is like a reward for them." Her classes were setup as communities; each group of desks was a community, each student in the group had a role in the community for the community to work efficiently and successfully. The communities then made up the city (class). Each community contributed to the city through their strengths and communication. Ms. C plans especially for her room arrangement to accommodate her small group areas.

Students chose where they sat to work unless they were scheduled for work on the computers. Ms. C had 11 computers in her room. The guided reading table was by the computers so Ms. C could monitor both areas closely.

Student work was displayed in hall outside her room and in the classroom. Writing strategies were displayed on the wall in the back. Signs were on the walls to encourage students to, "Go above and beyond". Directional signs were also on the walls like recipes for using the computers and for tips to writing in different forms.

The middle of the classroom floor was open for Ms. C to move freely and a lot while presenting instruction. "I float all over the room. The whole room is mine." She moves around the room constantly monitoring student work and working with individuals and small groups (see Appendix I for observation charts). Ms. C had music playing in the background during both observations. "There is too much quiet for these students sometimes. They almost need extra noise."

***Observation 2 for Ms. C.***

During Ms. C's second observation, she had the students working in small groups in center activities. She worked with two small groups in Guided Reading instruction and

emphasized reading comprehension and vocabulary. The students had journals where they recorded words unknown to them. They discussed the meaning of the words from the context clues. When they finished in the group, they were to find the definitions of those words and write them in their journals. She told them they would have to show her those definitions the following morning when she would ask them to better explain the words and the reading selection in their group. This observation matched what she described in her interview of how she delivered her instruction. She and the students were making several connections with the vocabulary and the reading selection, which was a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

The students working in the other centers were all engaged in their activities. One group of girls was talking louder than Ms. C expected them to be. She gave them a choice to lower their volume and work individually as they were instructed to do originally for this activity. She later had to say something again to the same girls, so she took away some minutes from their recess as the consequence. The girls knew this was the next step of their class discipline plan. They did not complain. They got back to work. At the end of class, the girls were to tell their homeroom teacher of their consequence.

One group of students was working on an assessment on the computer. This was a new skill they were learning. It was the first or second time they had attempted to complete their assessments on the computer. She had given them instructions and gotten them started, but then wanted them to work with the program on their own to figure out how to use it. A couple of times students were trying to help other students and she told them to let them work it out by themselves (which is not what they are used to they are used to her encouraging them to work together). She wanted them to be confident in the program and pay attention to directions. Also, Ms. C was monitoring them while she was working with the reading group as to how they were doing with the new program and how much of the assessment they were able to complete. She was able to continue her instruction and dialogue with the reading group while she stepped over to check a computer she observed was not working. Other students wanted to try the assessment on the computer, but did not get to that center. Ms. C said they could access the assessment from home if they wanted to try it that night.

At the end of the class, she complimented these students on how they persevered. She then spoke with the whole class about the difference in taking an online assessment versus a pencil and paper one. She gave them some tips on how moving through the online assessment was different from moving around for a computer game. They were also answering open-ended questions, so she asked how they felt about this. She then reminded the class about their consequences for their off-task behavior and not following directions. She also complimented them on certain behaviors and their work.

During this observation, similar to the first observation, Ms. C's class was engaged in their activities which included a variety of writing, reading, vocabulary enhancement and technology assignments. There was a constant dialogue between teacher and students with several real life connections being shared by students and with students. Ms. C again had very detailed lesson plans and had all the many materials she needed for the centers ready and available to the students. The students already knew what they had to accomplish for class and began working as soon as Ms. C and a student handed out the additional materials needed and she told them which group was to meet with her first at the reading table.

Ms. C monitored the whole group closely even as she was working with a small group. In the reading groups, Ms. C asked each student to read and explain what he or she read. She had them record words they did not know in their journals, so they could enhance their vocabulary. She emphasized the necessity of knowing what words meant, so they could accurately interpret their reading. She also shared that having an extensive vocabulary helped them report information accurately and clearly (she had worked with them on this during the first observation) to their audience. Each student in the reading groups had at least three one to one interactions with Ms. C. She kept a constant discussion and word study going during the small group time. Ms. C initiated the conversations with questions about what the students thought parts of the letter were talking about or what a specific word meant and how that word made a difference in the thought of the letter.

It was difficult to record Ms. C's one to one interactions with her E.D. students during the second observation because the students were moving from small group to small group for centers while she was having guided reading instruction. However, 17 of her 25 students were E.D. and she had one to one interactions with 21 of the 25 students from two to six times during this observation.

***Room description.***

Ms. C's room remained the same except for her having removed one of the reading tables. This allowed her to rearrange the groups of desks more freely and freed up more space to move around the room. She had changed the student work on the wall in the hallway and was changing out the student projects for new ones they had just completed. She had also changed a couple of her signs on the wall to reflect the type of writing they were focusing on at that time.

***Summary******Reflections on Ms. C's observations.***

Five observations were made in how Ms. C's interview answers matched the implementation of her instruction and her interactions with students. First, she had very detailed lesson plans for both observations which were pieces of a weekly plan. She had a variety of activities planned with some student choices integrated in the activities. She demonstrated, modeled, wrote and verbally gave students directions. Second, the instruction involved using technology, emphasized writing and word study, and encouraged dialogue and communication. Third, she used real life connections that were current with her students and that her students had shared with her. Fourth, she held the students responsible for their learning and behavior and had high expectations in both areas which she clearly communicated. Finally, she was enthusiastic, energetic, positive, and attentive with her students. Her students demonstrated much success in a short period of time.

***Bridging the gap.***

Ms. C consistently worked to help her students make real life connections. "We expect them to be able to read and tie it into whatever they have done. We think they have experienced something or enjoyed it and they haven't. They do not have the vocabulary they need to communicate with someone to help them realize an experience, enjoy or feel it." She feels she is successful in helping students experience things and bridging the gap through her literacy and direct instruction. In the observations, she spent time focusing on word choice and understanding. She also emphasized with her students knowing how to communicate with any audience they might need to and having the verbal and nonverbal skills to be successful in their communication. If they were successful in communicating, they could bridge the gaps by creating more opportunities for themselves to experience. Ms. C like Ms.

A provided opportunities for students to experience field trips, movies at a cinema, and other experiences as they earned them through reading and academic accomplishments. Ms. C planned into her week “Survivor Friday” where if the students accomplished their class goals and personal goals she provided an experience they had shared with her they would be interested in trying. The last week I observed the students had earned Survivor Friday time and had asked for lessons in self defense. The physical education teacher provided the space and she was able to arrange for a Martial Arts Master to come and work with her class on self defense skills.

***Instructional planning and strategies.***

Ms. C’s lesson plans were just as she described them. She shared a copy of the weekly packet she was working from that was part of the monthly plan she had for the students. These lesson plans were also available on the class website for students and parents to access. First of all she plans throughout the summer. Her lesson plans are very detailed, emphasizing connections to current events and developing communication skills and vocabulary. She also integrates technology into her long and short-term plans. She creates a website for each class where they can find class notes, homework and project descriptions and where students can chat about their assignments, books they are reading, movies they have seen. She spends the first few days making sure the students know what she expects of them and what their roles are. Then she distributes plans prepared for them for the whole school year, so they know ahead of time what they are going to have to do. The students can check monthly for projects to do. Ms. C said she keeps a lot of variety going, so they won’t be doing something they did in fourth grade and to help differentiate instruction when needed. She commented that she does not make any accommodations or modifications for her E.D. students in her planning, but has a different understanding keeping the same goals. “The fact doesn’t matter that you are free lunch or whatever, you’ve just got to step up.” She said she does not allow them to feel disadvantaged. She helps them learn their strengths and then how to use them to be successful in the system [education] and in their environments. They need to figure out how to play the game, so they can win. “If you have asthma, you can still be an Olympic swimmer.”

Ms. C takes the information (language, interests, music, books) she learns from her students individually and collectively and links them to the fifth grade curriculum and then

develops her lesson plans. “I use everything that is important to them and then build the curriculum to that.” She begins with the academic expectations and then merges those things that are current that are current with these academic concepts. She reads every book she asks her children to read and that she gives them a choice to read. She stays on top of their music preferences and incorporates it into her lessons. She looks at the new technology, especially science videos, so she can support this. She makes a weekly working plan on the computer for her students. She also teaches them how to take notes and how to answer discussion questions. Ms. C figures out their learning styles and then creates a variety of approaches for the students to complete their projects. She really likes to use word choice projects to encourage vocabulary development, which she feels her E.D. students especially need. One example she gave was how she challenged the students to rewrite Hercules. The students had to rewrite Hercules for three different audiences, a ghetto kid environment, five year olds, and ten year olds. She said the “ghetto kid” idea was risky, but the students knew how far they could go with the language. She said that the idea was to show the value of knowing your audience and choosing the appropriate language so you can clearly communicate with that audience.

In implementing much of her instruction, she uses a lot of hands-on activities and demonstrations because of the limited vocabulary of most of her students. She feels this is essential so they will have more than one way of showing her they have the skills to complete projects and have an understanding of why they are doing the project. Ms. C discussed her other reason for doing projects is for students, “To understand that presentation and image and the ability to be able to deliver an idea to their audience is important to their success.” If children struggle with writing, she makes plans for those students to do the illustrations. She feels this is a real world connection in that one person might have the idea, but someone else writes, illustrates and packages it.

### ***Philosophy of Ms. C.***

Ms. C’s philosophy is based on wanting her kids to be passionate, to feel. In order for them to be passionate, she has to be passionate. “I have to nod a little, be passionate, be excited and I have to apply, to make things real!” Ms. C was passionate and animated in answering this question about her philosophy. She also demonstrated this passion and excitement in her classroom observations. She was enthusiastic, passionate and animated in



her delivery and dialogue with the children. She made many connections with the children and they shared personal connections with her. Her discipline and classroom management were what she called “tough love” style. Her expectations of the students were clear as to what they were responsible for in their work and behavior. Whenever she spoke to a child, she allowed them to correct their work with some tips from her, but did not give the answers. She had them look in their journals or on the computers for how to improve their work. Her criteria for all assignments were written on the board or a handout, on the class website and given verbally. The students could access these expectations in and out of class. The students dialogued with Ms. C as to ideas on how they might proceed, but never complained or tried to get out of doing their work.

It was the same as far as disciplining her students. They knew clearly what was expected of them, so when she spoke to them they had a chance to correct their behavior. If they did not, she told them the consequence and they took responsibility. Then they returned to their work and she returned to her instruction. Her students did not appear to mind taking risks in doing their work or working with her. In her interview, she said,

They [students] have to know that mistakes are acceptable and that you fix them because that’s the rule. You have to want to fix it and they know I support tough love. When you’re ready, come back. I am still going to be there, but I can’t do anything until you’re ready to want to learn. My management is that you have to make the decision that what we have here has got a benefit for you. I have to be consistent in whatever I do.

***Classroom design and environment.***

Ms. C pays considerable attention to the physical setup of her room when planning her instruction. She tries to design the room for what she wants to be happening. She especially plans for her small group areas. This was apparent in my observations of her classroom. She had group areas set up at the computers, at reading tables and by grouping desks (see Appendix H for photographs of her room). Those students who need to choose their own space to work have that option. She tries not to assign seats but lets students choose their own spaces near others they feel they can relate to and work with. In my first observation, she was working on improving their listening and writing skills with the whole

group, but they were still sitting in groups. In my second observation, the students had chosen their seats and were working completely in small groups.

She would like to have more free space in her room, but her smallest class has 24 students, so there is no extra room. Ms. C has devoted all the class space to her students and instruction. She has no teacher's desk or designated teacher space, in fact the rolling chair/teacher chair she has at one of the reading tables is used by the students. They love sitting in this chair, she says. It is like a reward for them.

When delivering her instruction, Ms. C circulates constantly, both monitoring her students' work and working with her students individually and in small groups. In her interview, she says of herself, "I float all over the room. The whole room is mine. I try to circulate so I can check all their faces, because they don't all face the same way in my room."

***Interactions with students.***

Ms. C had 58 total one to one interactions with her E.D. students for 76% of her total class interactions during her first observation. Her interactions were more difficult to chart because of the way she would go from one student to another and then to a group of students quickly during her dialog and questioning. Also the majority of Ms. C's class was made up of E.D. students. 19 of 23 students were E.D. students in her first observation. 17 of 25 were E.D. students in her second observation.

**Teacher IV – Ms. D**

***Interviews for Ms. D.***

Ms. D is a 31 year old fifth grade teacher at a school with a free and reduced lunch (FR/L) student population of 51%. She has six years of teaching experience. Her homeroom class consists of 24 students, 11 (46%) of whom are free and reduced lunch students. This percentage is higher when the students who mainstream join her class. She will sometimes have as many as 29 students in her class.

Ms. D describes herself as being a well-rounded student in school, having been involved in sports since she was in second grade. She graduated from high school in New York and has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with two minors in political science and psychology. Her undergraduate degree was from a state college in New York. She was a police officer in North Carolina for three and a half years before she decided to make a career change. She had considered education as a career earlier because her father was a teacher.

She now has her master's degree in elementary education from a private university in North Carolina and is in the process of trying to complete her National Board Certification.

Ms. D attended grade school in the same school system on Long Island, New York for the duration of her grade school experience. In the younger grades, she said she struggled because she thought she had a learning disability. Remembering her experience in third grade, "I got a teacher who believed in me and put me in two reading groups, the blue and the orange group, for that school year. After that, I was in the regular, average group from there on." When Ms. D graduated from elementary school, her name was placed on a plaque on the wall for the Most Improved Student from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Ms. D has been teaching for six years. She began teaching in a small rural elementary school in North Carolina for a year and a half and then moved to the Raleigh area and has been teaching at her current school since then. She said her student populations are different between these two schools in that the first school was a rural or country population, but her current school has a lot more economically disadvantaged (E.D.) students. However, Ms. D did not realize who her E.D. students were until she was recommended for this study. Then she found out 11 of her 24 students were E.D. She said, "I was amazed! I didn't realize that!" She said she never would have believed some of her students were E.D.

In describing an *effective teacher*, Ms. D says for her it is when she sees her kids taking risks. That is when she knows she has reached her kids. "When they normally will sit back and agree with their classmates, then no, I'm not reaching them. When I actually see them eager to go ahead and want to complete the assignment or want to participate, I am reaching them."

"I will never tell a student that something they choose and are interested in is too hard for him or her. What I normally say is we'll try it and see; if you like it that's fine. If you still need help with it that's fine too. But if you feel like you are getting overwhelmed, we'll talk about it and see what we can do." Ms. D feels student choice and interest are important to keep interest and effort up. She also does not want students to think they cannot do something and quit. Her thoughts and plans allow for all her students to get the same accommodations for being successful. She gives them all extended time or the same accommodations. She has options for the students to choose from such as listening to text on tape or working in pairs. "My goal is to make their learning experience the most enjoyable

and less frustrating thing they can do to be successful and I don't care how we achieve it as long as it is in a positive way."

During Ms. D's observation, she was not at her desk. She sat for a short while at her reading table with a small reading group. The rest of the time she was at the overhead or circulating around the room (see Appendix J for observation chart).

Ms. D uses a mailbox in the back of her room as an Issues Bin. So if someone is struggling with something or is having a problem with something outside of class work, he or she can put a note in the box to let her know. She said they use this Issues Bin all the time. She coordinates with the counselor when she feels there is an issue she can help with. As long as the students do not abuse this, they are allowed to go to the counselor when they feel they need to go.

Other ways she supports her students is by encouraging them with phrases like, "Good job!" and using positive sustained feedback such as, "That's a good idea, but a better answer might be," or "What I am looking for is," she never tells someone "That's not correct." This is one reason she likes open-ended questions, so she can find out how her students think. She said she learns a lot from her students' responses to open ended questions. "I'm like, Oh! I didn't even think of that approach or about answering it this way." She encourages her students to think, "outside the box." She says they do not like to write much, but will to explain themselves, so she uses open-ended questions regularly to encourage this. If it makes sense how they answer the question, she gives them credit for it.

Ms. D says her students know she is in charge and that she is strict. At the same time, she thinks most of her students know they can come to her if they are having issues. "You know if they didn't do their homework because something was going on at home last night, I don't feel like they are intimidated or the night before they are stressing all night because they couldn't get an assignment done because of a family problem." She feels she is approachable and fair. Ms. D will ask the students if their consequence is fair and most of the time she says, "They know it is."

"Differentiating" is how Ms. D describes her teaching style. "I try to teach to my students, but at the same time, I am still trying to challenge them." She tells her students, "I am a visual learner. I need something modeled before someone gives me an assignment. I

need stuff written down because ten minutes from now, I might forget what my directions were.” In my observations of her, Ms. D did write, say and model her directions.

Ms. D says the biggest thing in her classroom “is just having a buddy.” She says she even models this for her students by always speaking to her colleagues about things, by knowing what is going on in each other’s classes, and sharing ideas with each other. The students are aware of this. This is also a positive role model for them in that the kids think nobody’s perfect. “Nobody knows everything. They are sharing, getting each other’s opinion, that’s the way we should too.”

One of the reasons she feels her current school is a better fit for her is because of how wonderful her colleagues and administration are now. This makes a world of difference to her. “I can handle students and any issues I have because it changes year to year, but the people you work with are pretty much the same throughout.”

One good example of this collegiality is that Ms. D works with the media specialist a lot. She likes to create an environment in her room to reflect the book the class is reading. For example, she wants to decorate her room to look like a chocolate factory when they read Roald Dahl’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Ms. D really enjoys role-playing, to make the reading, “Come alive, so the students will get excited about it.” The kids enjoy it too, she says. She gave an example of reading about Paul Revere in poetry. “To bring that to life, we role played. Kids were flicking the light switch on and off, pretended they were on horse back and loved pretending!” (Ms. D was more animated in her interview when describing these lessons.) “I love to hear their interaction. I don’t like when I look at my class and they are just sitting there. I love to hear their conversations because I learn so much about my students, if they are getting it or not.” Most of the time, she says, the students are on task.

She also incorporates character education into her lessons through literature. They studied courage through reading about Harriet Tubman and went on a website where they had to become a slave and make decisions in different scenarios to try to better understand how she felt trying to escape for freedom. They did this exercise as a class, using the SMART Board to interact on the website. They also read three different books all of which were biographies of Harriet Tubman. She had many selections from which the students could choose including a variety of media, current newspapers, to work on independently with partners or small groups for center activities while she worked with the reading group.

A recent teaching interaction she had with an E.D. student that she felt was very successful was with an academically gifted girl student. This student and two others read a Harry Potter book. Ms. D created an activity to create a scale model on paper of a place in the book. She gave them a variety of activities they could do on top of the scale model. The students got very excited. They began to have a conversation and she ended up finding an activity on the internet the students wanted to do. They integrated math and the extra activities and were really excited about the book. Ms. D did not know this student was an E.D. student until after she made a list to identify the E.D. students on her seating charts for my observations. She loved the fact this student excited the other two students about this book and then did these great projects to go with the book.

As far as how much Ms. D considers “No Child Left Behind” when planning and teaching – she does not. She said she tries to teach to all her students at their ability levels. This is what drives her to learn many different ways to reach her students. “I don’t even think about that because if I’m doing what I am supposed to be doing, then my kids are getting what they need to get and achieving what they need to.” She also commented that her principal comes in their classrooms and knows what they are doing day to day, but does not put pressure on them.

Ms. D’s principal has shared with her that she is successful with her E.D. students. She said they have talked about it and she tells him, “I think that it’s just because with all my struggling students (not just E.D. students), I go back to the basics.” If she sees a child not reading well, she goes back and reviews basic reading strategies. If she sees they are not using the strategies, she will not accept an answer or assessment as complete until they can show her or tell her the strategies they have used. Ms. D also says she makes her expectations clear as to her work standards and responsibilities.

With her academically gifted students, she uses the same plan because she said, her students may start slacking off and their grades start slipping, so she has them all go back to the basics. At mid-year, she said she had just a handful of students who she was still having go through this process. If students still have trouble, she works with them independently, going through each step. Ms. D said, “It’s a nice compliment he [her principal] said that to me and you know, I just tell him, again, I just try to teach to my students’ needs. With 25 students it’s hard, but you know, I try to do it.”

Another important reason, she feels she is successful with E.D. students is that she encourages them to believe in themselves, to have self-confidence. She feels they just need and want reassurance their answers or responses are right. “I try to teach my students to have self-confidence in their own ability.” She has a sign outside her door that says, “An expert in anything was once a beginner.” She tells her students, “You know, the smartest or the most talented person started somewhere. They weren’t always like that. They had to work to get where they needed to be.”

Ms. D’s story of a successful time with an E.D. student just happened recently, she said. One of her E. D. girl students has a speech problem, which affects her writing in that she writes like she speaks. She has a lisp and has trouble articulating her words. One thing, Ms. D has done with her is to teach her when she writes to read her story backwards. This strategy forces her to read her work word by word and not assume it is on the paper like she meant it to be. She underlines words that do not look right and then reads the selection to see if it reads correctly. This student, Ms. D says, reads very well and comprehends well, so she can use this strategy. Ms. D said that she did not realize this child was E.D. until she was making a list of her E.D. students for this study.

***Observation 1 of Ms. D.***

In observing Ms. D, I noticed her class consisted of 24 students, 11 of whom were E.D., for a total of 46%. Her students entered the room quietly, put their coats away (coming in from lunch and recess), went to their seats and got their notebooks out. Ms. D began a review immediately at the overhead (transparency, as Ms. D refers to it) on making generalizations and using prior knowledge. She asked questions and modeled the use of reading comprehension strategies she had taught previously. The students answered her in complete sentences and told her where they retrieved prior knowledge and found current information (in reading selection using for instruction). This is what Ms. D had described in her interview.

Ms. D implemented the instruction at a brisk pace and had constant dialogue with students throughout the instruction. She would model at the overhead then circulate around the room monitoring students’ work as she continued her dialogue with the students. Ms. D used personal examples to model making connections with the text to make generalizations. After Ms. D modeled this, her students began to respond with their personal connections.

This pattern of question and dialogue and making generalizations and connections continued for about 10 minutes. Then Ms. D brought this lesson to closure with drawing conclusions from their reading and discussion.

Ms. D gave the students directions for how to use the information they had just reviewed on how to make generalizations, connections, and drawing conclusions, in their centers. She then asked and checked to see if they understood what she had asked them to do in their centers and with the reading strategies she had just been over with them. “Thumbs up if you understand what I’m asking you to do.” She realized some did not, so she modeled again how to use the strategies with the reading and writing they would be doing in their centers.

The students moved to work with a group, partner and one student on her own and began working. Ms. D told them they could talk in their groups. (All students were engaged and talking quietly in their groups. One group was sitting and lying on the floor working together.) She circulated, stopping to listen or speak with each group of students several times. One group was still discussing what to do, so Ms. D sent another student over to explain the assignments and answer their questions. This, too, was a point she made in her interview about how she communicated with her students if they did not understand something from her. Having a peer explain the directions to other students worked well in this situation. The centers were like she described in her interview in that there was a variety of literature organized in a progressive assignment for the students to choose from for their centers.

Once during her first observation the intercom phone rang. She went to answer it and called one of the boys up to the overhead to continue the lesson while she answered the phone. As soon as the phone rang, students raised their hands excitedly to get to come to the overhead and be the teacher for this short time. Ms. D had commented in her interview that her students loved to do this. Ms. D monitored the class while she was on the phone and also monitored the girl she had asked to explain directions to a group and the boy while he was at the overhead. In both cases, Ms. D was doing something else, but commented to the boy and girl on the correctness of their instruction and thanked them for their help.

Ms. D called a group to the reading table and began to count to five. This was a strategy she used with her students to keep them working at a brisk pace and not wasting



time in transitions. These four students had to be at the table ready to work with her by the time she counted to five. She worked with three E.D. girls and one non-E.D. boy in this first reading group. In this group, she would give them a question they had to answer from analyzing a picture and drawing conclusions from that picture. She emphasized making connections and inferences from what they observed in this picture. Again the instruction was at a brisk pace, but the students were responding well to this pace.

Ms. D continued the steady dialogue with her small group. She gave these students constant compliments and praise for how well they were observing details in the picture and making inferences from this information. She would also compliment them on how well they drew conclusions from their information. She would say to them, “Good! You’re using your prior knowledge and making connections from (an example from the picture). Good! You’re drawing conclusions! I love it!” Ms. D reviewed some strategies and vocabulary with her reading group then said, “Eyes and ears,” to the whole class.

Ms. D gave them directions for the transition back to whole group which they followed quickly. “I need you guys to... Gentleman, I need you to... Put these away.” The students transitioned quickly and quietly throughout the observation. Ms. D then told them what their homework would be. The principal came in at this time and watched the students during the transition, spoke to a student and spoke to the teacher. He stayed for a couple of minutes while she began working again from the overhead using a writing prompt.

Ms. D put the writing prompt on the overhead and began brainstorming with the students on keywords in the prompt. She underlined them on the overhead and then wrote them on the board for the students to use later. Ms. D began asking questions about Harriet Tubman (students had been reading three different books about Harriet Tubman). The class got very excited about the discussion of Ms. Tubman which was tied to the prompt and the extension lesson for drawing conclusions, making inferences and connections. She also worked with them on answers being “general or specific”. Ms. D would give the students clues to guide them in their responses and to organize their writing. She also brought in character education with a discussion of the concept of courage. The whole discussion was like a review of the books the students had read plus a social studies lesson plus a writing and vocabulary lesson. Ms. D said in her interview she loved social studies and getting her

students excited about learning. She and the students were very enthusiastic during this part of the instruction.

Ms. D ended the class by being sure the students had written down their homework. Then she said, “Good job today folks!” She reminded the students who had responsibilities this week to take care of those jobs now. Some of the jobs students were responsible for were preparing for Safety Patrol, filling out a student incentive chart, and handing out letters. The teacher was signing daily reports for some students and collecting Passports, which were homework passes students had earned.

Ms. D, in the first observation, had one to one interactions at least 68 times with all 11 of her E.D. students during whole group and small group instruction. She had at least 42 interactions with all 13 of her non-E.D. students. These interactions do not include the number of times she circulated and monitored each student in proximity. They only include verbal interactions. The total number of interactions for both groups would be much higher if the proximity interactions were counted and added to the verbal interactions.

***Room description.***

Ms. C has a reading area in the back corner of her room with a big chair for students to curl up in and read or they can lie on the floor and read. This area is separated from the rest of the room by a bookcase that comes out from the wall. The students chose this area often to work in their groups or to do their reading for their assignments (see Appendix K for classroom photographs).

The four computers are along the back wall. She has a word wall over the computers. One side wall is windows. She has a ledge that she uses to place the work packets out for the different activities. The other side wall is cubbies and storage space. Her bulletin boards were government or social studies’ themes. The overhead was setup in the middle of the floor towards the front. One or two students sat by the overhead. The reading table is located in the front of her room by the dry erase board and is turned so she is facing the rest of the class and the students have their backs to the other students.

***Observation 2 of Ms. D.***

Ms. D’s second observation was very similar to her first. Her students came in and began copying from the board. She circulated around the room to monitor if students were getting the information from the board for their instruction. She then began a review of types

of text by questioning students for prior knowledge. Students raised their hands and answered the questions accurately and thoroughly. The review went quickly. Ms. D gave the students directions for working with their partners, groups or independently. The students had a choice of how they wanted to work to complete their activities.

The writing activity of ideas for a science fiction text really excited some of the students. As Ms. D was circulating she noticed some students were confusing fantasy and science fiction. She stopped the class and redirected them from their work areas to review the key elements in science fiction. She then guided them through a story start and instructed the students to finish the activity. She circulated and after a few minutes told students they would finish this activity tomorrow.

As Ms. D circulated around the room, she asked review questions from their social studies lesson the day before. She then led a discussion on the Articles of the Confederation and the power the states might have under these articles. The students' discussion led to the writing activity of putting themselves into the role of a delegate having to give a report to congress. Ms. D again circulated around the room to monitor student work and then called a guided reading group to the reading table.

Ms. D worked with the reading group for a few minutes and then circulated around the room. She listened to student discussions and ideas. Ms. D said in her interview how much she loved to teach social studies and government classes. Her enthusiasm was obvious with the students in her dialog with the class and in speaking with students about their ideas for their reports. Ms. D closed the activity with a discussion of state versus federal control, currency differences between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Most of Ms. D's interactions were with the students as she circulated through the groups and listened to their discussions and asked them questions to guide their research. During her second observation, she interacted one to one at least two times with every student. She had 20 total one to one interactions with E.D. students and 23 total interactions with non-E.D. students. These interactions did not include proximity interactions as Ms. D constantly circulated and would stop at each table or at each student or group and give them the opportunity to share with her (see Appendix J for observation charts). If proximity interactions could be counted, Ms. D would have had several interactions with all but two non-E.D. students.

***Room description.***

Ms. D's classroom arrangement had not changed except for the bulletin board for social studies by her desk. She said she had tried to rearrange the student desks, but the new arrangement made for more restricted movement rather than less restricted.

***Summary******Reflections of Ms. D's observations.***

In observing Ms. D, I found four main themes that reinforced her interview statements. First, she did circulate around the room constantly monitoring student conversations and work as well as giving the students immediate, positive and specific feedback. She looked over students' shoulders to see if they had the correct answer and then encouraged them to share their work with the class. She was constantly encouraging students while holding them responsible for responding to or completing their work at a certain level of expectation. Second, she kept instruction at a brisk pace for the afternoon class and let them move around. Every 20 – 30 minutes, she used a transition or had students change tasks in their planned centers. Third, students were allowed to move to work in groups, partners or on their own. They were also allowed to move from their assigned desks to another place in the room to work on their centers. Her desks were arranged in groups with paths for her to move quickly and easily around the room (see Appendix K for photographs of Ms. D's classroom). Fourth, her lesson plans were very thorough, including a variety of literature for the students to choose from to complete their center assignments. The assignments for the centers were tiered with an easy, medium and challenging piece to each one. The classes I observed were working on a daily plan that was part of a long range lesson plan. The materials were ready and available for Ms. D and her students before class began.

Finally, Ms. D encouraged dialogue between her and the students and between students. She also had students explain directions and information to their peers who did not understand the information from her. Overall, Ms. D's atmosphere in her classroom was positive and energized. Students worked respectfully with her and each other and were engaged in whatever their activities were. It was also apparent that the students knew the class routines and expectations in how they responded to Ms. D's directions and her verbal

and non-verbal cues as well as how they moved, when they moved, and how they completed their work.

***Bridging the gap.***

Ms. D loves to use the Internet. She loves to try to incorporate activities with the Internet; although she pointed out that it was difficult to get into the computer lab sometimes. She was enthusiastic when she described a project about Jackie Robinson. She told me how the students did not know what Jackie Robinson looked like. She said, “How can we do any reading and you don’t even know what he looks like”? She took them to the Hall of Fame website and navigated through it to learn about his history. The kids loved the video clip of him playing baseball that was on the site. Some of her students had never been to a baseball game, so they thought this was pretty neat to see that video.

***Instructional planning and strategies.***

With her struggling kids, she sometimes tells them when she comes to stand by them it means she is going to call on them soon. If they are not paying attention, she will try to walk around the room and stand next to them until they get back on track. She does not want her kids to be embarrassed and shut down, so she lets them know ahead of time what she expects and when.

Ms. D described her planning as different for different children. She usually has three activities going on at the same time. They will be studying the same skill, but have different assignments. She differentiates her plans based on her students’ skill levels. She uses guided reading groups and independent assignments. She incorporates science and social studies during reading assignments. When Ms. D plans, she does not consider if her students are E.D. or not. She did not even know who these students were until she participated in this study. She plans for a total unit as opposed to planning week by week. Ms. D allows her students to explain assignments to each other after she explains them to the class. She says this strengthens the students’ understanding if they can teach it or explain the directions to another student. “If they are able to explain an activity to somebody, sometimes they can put it in a different way than I can, then maybe they’ll understand it if they’re having trouble with some directions. Nine out of ten times I won’t need to repeat directions because they (struggling students) are either getting it from me or they understand it the way their peers are saying it to them.

When asked how she implemented her instruction and if she made accommodations for her E.D. students, she answered with an emphatic, “No!” She could not tell me who her E.D. students were before the study began. She does not consider their family income when making her plans. Her main goal is to meet students at their level of understanding and help them grow from there. “When I do my plans, I think, this is for my struggling students who may have some difficulty, this is for my average students and this is for my challenging students. I will always challenge them. Being poor doesn’t have anything to do with their ability,” she said.

Ms. D uses a lot of open-ended questions in her reading instruction. This was obvious during her observation. She used mostly open ended questions with her reading group and with her class. She also had given a learning style inventory at the beginning of the year to get an idea of how students learn. This is why she allows students to walk around if they need to. She feels some of them need to walk around so they can learn better. She gives directions in writing, verbally, and through modeling. (This was also obvious in my observations.) Many of her students struggle in writing, so she gets them to illustrate what they are writing about.

#### ***Philosophy of Ms. D.***

When asked about her philosophy of teaching, she says, “We (her grade level team) look to see how each student grows from fourth to fifth grade.” This is how she teaches. She tries to teach at the ability level of each child and push him/her. She does not give struggling students easy assignments so they will always be successful. She gives them assignments she feels they will be successful with, but will, “throw them some curve balls just to get them thinking and rise to the challenge.”

Ms. D says she has the same philosophy for all her students. “I don’t like it when my students say they can’t do something. I don’t accept that at all! There is always a way to figure it out.” She tells her students she is teaching them how to think, not to take tests and answer questions. She likes to give her students choices because she feels they do better on assignments they get to choose. Her students do not realize she creates assignments having in mind who will choose what project, but gives them the option. She structures the assignments so there are three parts that should be done in order which include a challenging question and a not so challenging question. She does not just consider ability levels, but also

the interests of her students. “I know some people don’t necessarily like writing, but one activity will be about sports. So I know I’m going to draw them into maybe trying to do that challenging one because it’s of their interest as well.” Ms. D feels if she can get the students interested, they will try more challenging tasks and probably give it more effort.

***Classroom design and environment.***

Ms. D considers the physical setup of her room sometimes when planning certain center and activities. One thing she and her kids both enjoy is that they do not sit in their desks for long periods of time. They have the option of getting up and moving around. (This was obvious in her first observation.) She has the students sitting in certain seats mainly for behavior reasons not by ability levels or for certain grouping. She wants students to learn to work together and respect each other, so she does not move students if they do not get along, but has them work whatever it is out. Usually she has students pair up. She monitors the pairs and groups closely to be sure students are all participating and if both students in a pair are struggling she will sit and work with them or suggest they both join another group. (This was also obvious in her first observation.) She never moves just one student. She allows students who do not like to work in groups to work on their own. Every now and then she will have these students work in groups, so they will learn how to work with other people. In her monitoring, she checks the answers of students who do not have the confidence to answer out loud and will tell them what a good answer they have and ask them to share it with the class.

With her afternoon groups or when she sees her groups are tired, she gets them up and does exercises with them. She said she will just stop in the middle of a lesson and do jumping jacks with the class or take them to get water or something. Sometimes she says she switches gears on them and will have students be the teacher. “The students light up when I ask who wants to be the teacher,” she said.

She referred back to how her class is set up and described her ideal room being one that has the desks in a U-shape, so students would have a lot of room to move around, sit on the floor and see each other. Her room now is not big enough to do this with so many students (24 – 29) in her class. She likes to group her desks, but does not like rows. She likes for the desks to be grouped so the atmosphere is more conducive to teamwork and helping each other. “I taught my students we are as strong as our weakest students. If

somebody needs help, it is our obligation because they are part of our home; to do everything we can to help them. The kids are really good about that.” The students are usually willing to help each other out which she likes because she wants them to know that is what they will need in the outside world. “If you don’t learn anything else from me throughout the year, you will learn to appreciate one another because you never know when you might need somebody’s help.”

One of her students asked if she could sit by herself because she was having behavior issues. Ms. D does not like to tell students how to solve problems, but for them to tell her how they can solve a problem. This girl moved by herself and has been outstanding ever since. Ms. D says she is never at her desk. She is either at the transparency or at the reading table with a group, walking around or sitting with a group at their desks. She likes the desks to be arranged so she can move around easily and join groups. She still feels her current room is more cluttered than she would like for it to be, but she can get to all the students and groups easily.

#### *Interactions with students.*

In Ms. D’s first observation, she had 68 total one to one interactions with her E.D. students. This was 62% of her total class one to one interactions. Her second observation showed 23 one to one interactions with non-E.D. students versus 20 with E.D. students. These charted interactions for her second observation do not include her proximity monitoring and interactions she had by listening and observing the students working together. She monitored frequently and made herself available for all but two non-E.D. students several times during her second observation. She also monitored frequently in her first observation (see Appendix J for observation charts).

The following table (**Table 2**) summarizes all four teachers’ personal and instructional strategies used, classroom environment, use of technology, and classroom arrangement.



**Table 2**  
**Personal and Instructional Strategies of Teachers A, B, C, D**

<b>Personal Strategies</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
Complimented students frequently	Y	Y	Y	Y
Identification of E.D. students	Y	Y	Y	Y
Made personal connections with students	Y	Y	Y	Y
Personal Travel	N	Y	Y	N
Shared personal interests with class	Y	Y	Y	Y
Provided school supplies	Y	Y	Y	Y
Encouraged students	Y	Y	Y	Y
Collaboration with colleagues	Y	Y	Y	Y
Networking with colleagues	Y	N	Y	N
<b>Instructional Strategies</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
Guided reading	Y	Y	Y	Y
Modeled reading and writing strategies	Y	Y	Y	Y
Modeled communication skills	Y	Y	Y	Y
Expressive language emphasized	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emphasized vocabulary increased	Y	Y	Y	Y
Reflective practitioner	Y	Y	Y	Y
Small-Group instruction	Y	Y	Y	Y
One on one instruction	Y	Y	Y	Y
Students worked in pairs/groups (Peer teaching)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Differentiated/tiered assignments	N	Y	Y	Y
"Chunking"	Y	Y	N	Y
Self-paced learning	N	Y	Y	N
Student choice	Y	Y	Y	Y
Planned with specialists – media, music, art, p.e.	Y	N	Y	N
Variety of books available for students	Y	Y	N	Y
Provided variety of classroom social experiences	Y	N	Y	Y
Behavioral and academic expectations made explicit at beginning of school year	Y	Y	Y	Y
Frequent monitoring	Y	Y	Y	Y
Personal anecdotes	Y	N	Y	Y
Learning style inventories	N	N	Y	Y
Established routines	Y	Y	Y	Y
Freedom to make mistakes	N	N	Y	Y
Used formal and informal assessments	Y	Y	Y	Y

Table 2 cont.

<b>Instructional Strategies (cont.)</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
Incentives	Y	Y	Y	Y
Provided immediate and specific feedback	Y	Y	Y	Y
Change positions/locations to work in room (students choose)	N	N	Y	Y
Verbalized expectations	Y	Y	Y	Y
Field trips	Y	N	Y	N
Spoke softly	N	Y	N	N
<b>Planning</b>				
Long-term lesson plans	Y	Y	Y	Y
Subject integration	Y	Y	Y	Y
Based on student needs	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Classroom Environment</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
Use of music	Y	N	Y	N
Class rules explicit	Y	Y	Y	Y
"Mailbox" for non-threatening/anonymous communication	N	N	N	Y
Reading area	Y	Y	Y	Y
Changed decorations	Y	Y	Y	Y
Used student work	Y	Y	Y	N
Book displays	Y	N	N	N
Desks in groups	Y	N	Y	Y
Desks in rows	N	Y	N	N
<b>Technology</b>	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
SMARTBoard	Y	N	N	Y
Overhead Projector	Y	Y	N	Y
Student Computer(s)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Email	Y	Y	Y	Y
Class website	N	N	Y	N
Internet searching	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Key: Y = Yes; strategy was used N = No; strategy was not used**

In the next chapter, I will analyze and discuss these findings to explore how these four successful teachers are similar and different personally and professionally. I will also discuss the implications of these findings and what future studies might be warranted to further this research.

## **Chapter Five Discussion and Implications**

### ***Introduction***

The purpose of my study was to see if I could identify personal and professional strategies in fourth and fifth grade teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged children. What instructional strategies are they using? What personal strategies are they using? Are they using strategies that can be identified? If so, are there any similar strategies being used? The four teachers in this study, two fourth grade teachers and two fifth grade teachers, were recommended by their principals because they are successful with this specific student population year after year on the North Carolina End of Grade (NC EOG) Reading and Math Tests. Even though there are only four teachers in this study, their experiences and backgrounds are quite diverse. My focus was to listen to the voices of these teachers talking directly about themselves and how they think and work with economically disadvantaged (E.D.) children. I also observed them implementing their instruction and how they interacted with their E.D. students in their classrooms.

The information gained from these teachers might prove useful to other teachers who work with economically disadvantaged student populations. It might also prove useful to administrators in hiring teachers to work with this rapidly growing student population who are not being as successful on NC EOG tests or in mastering the North Carolina Standard Course of Study as their economically advantaged counterparts. Additional information from the principals of these teachers about these teachers and their instruction has proved to enrich the data collected from teacher interviews, classroom observations, observation charts of teacher movement, student interactions and room arrangements, lesson plans and pictures of the classrooms. From the analysis of this data, themes have emerged that will be the focus of my discussion and from which I have drawn my conclusions.

My research question was, “What instructional and personal strategies are used by teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students”? (p. 3) From the data analysis, the answers from the teachers focused first on identifying these children. All four teachers realized after some thought and reflection that they had discerned who most of these children were from the personal knowledge the students had shared with them and from their own observations. Once the teachers identified the E.D. students in their

classes, their strong reflection skills enabled them to analyze their personal interactions with, their instructional planning for, and their overall classroom environment to provide a successful learning experience for them. In the following discussion, I will discuss two themes that emerged strongly from the data as being the basis for beginning the process of providing these successful personal, social and academic experiences connected to the school environment.

After identifying the E.D. students in their classes, all four teachers, Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C, and Ms. D became more aware of how or if they made accommodations in planning or delivering instruction to these students. They also told me that they paid more attention to how they interacted with E.D. students. Are they or have they been interacting or communicating with these students differently from their economically advantaged peers? What do these teachers think about when they are preparing for their instruction? How do they interact with the children? By listening to these successful teachers talk about their E.D. students and watching them work with their students, I have observed many similarities in how these teachers connect with this struggling student population.

Another theme that emerged was that each teacher realized her personal experiences – background, family life, interests, other work experiences and school experiences – enhanced her ability to make both academic and personal connections with her students. The breadth of their experiences had also provided them with an extensive general knowledge base from which to make connections with more children. Providing experience-rich learning environments for their students enhanced the students' abilities to make their own connections between life experiences and learning experiences.

There was a part of their teaching philosophies that was directly connected to working with economically disadvantaged children; the need to make a personal connection with each individual student. Personal needs of each student had to be met before academic needs could be addressed. From this philosophy the teachers developed personal strategies to address the needs of each child. These strategies encompassed providing additional individual attention, meeting basic physical needs, building self-esteem, and developing a sense of community. The strategies also extended to establishing structure and organization in the classroom environment and also in personal relations. Once the teachers understood

and had begun to meet students' personal needs and provided a structure, the students became more open to the learning experience.

Instructional strategies were then designed to connect the personal strategies and academic content. These four teachers used an impressive inventory of instructional strategies including expressive language, breaking down and layering content, use of supportive technology, variety in assignments and assessments, student choice in the learning process and constant modeling of instructional activities and objectives. Personal and instructional strategies intertwine to maintain the connections between the students and the teachers and between the students and their newly acquired knowledge.

I observed that these teachers addressed the responses about their economically disadvantaged students from a personal and caring viewpoint first and then from an educator's instructional viewpoint. The following sections discuss the main themes that emerged from the data in how these teachers say and what I observed in how they successfully teach their E.D. students.

### ***Identification***

I think it is interesting to note here that three of these four teachers did not realize how successful they had been with E.D. students until it was brought to their attention by their principals for participation in this study. Ms. A said "I did not realize that population was high, that they performed well for me." Ms. B said, "No, I did not realize I was successful with this population. I think it's just sort of who you are." Ms. D wrote her students' names on a sheet of paper for herself, so she could remember who her students were for reflection. Her response was, "I didn't know who they were. I just wrote it down on a sheet of paper." (This was so she could make a seating chart for me.) This realization was interesting for the teachers, they said, because they were able to identify most of their E.D. students from what they knew personally about the children. One or two in each class surprised them as being E.D. Ms. C's response was, "We are running at 61% of our school population and of those in my room, right off the top of my head, I'm close to 70 or 80% of my kids." It was if they had a preconceived picture of who these children were and were surprised to find out that some students did not fit in this picture. It was also apparent that these teachers intuitively taught their E.D. children to meet their needs and did not

consciously make special accommodations for them, described by Brown and McIntyre (1995, p. 17) as *craft knowledge* or *personal practical knowledge*.

Identifying their E.D. students was important to all four teachers being able to reflect on how they were interacting with these students and what personal and instructional strategies they had been using with these students. They found that identifying the majority of these students was easy from the personal information and needs the children had shared with them as they were developing personal connections. However, they also realized that they might never have identified some students as E.D. who they found out were E.D. This information was useful to these teachers as it made them realize why some students had trouble getting homework completed at home and then returned to school. Ms. B used the example of how one of her students would not turn her homework in or her signed weekly folder. When Ms. B asked the student why she was not turning in these assignments, the child told her she had been going to see her mother who had left her. Ms. B said this made her rethink her homework requirements. As a result of many incidents similar to this one, Ms. B made a different plan that still held the students responsible for their assignments, but allowed them more flexibility in when and where they completed the assignments. Ms. B said, "In the big scheme of things, really who cares about homework?"

The other three teachers had similar experiences and had also changed their minds about what they required their E.D. students to be responsible for away from school. "Many things," Ms. A said, "are out of their control. How can I hold them responsible in the same way, if they don't have control over their home environment?" All four teachers still held their E.D. students accountable for their work and responsible for getting their report cards returned, but had made plans with the students that gave them opportunities at school to get most of their work completed.

Ms. C emphasized to her students the importance of the influence they had on their parents to help them get to a computer at a library or community center so they could work on their assignments and communicate with classmates while they completed their work. She had developed a class website for students to communicate with her and their classmates about their work.

In summary, all four teachers were able to identify all their FR/L students once they thought of what they knew of the students and learned from the students. Also, all four

teachers realized how much it had helped them to know this information about their students. Even though they know they can not access student free and reduced lunch status information any longer because of national, state, and local student privacy restrictions, they reflected that getting to know their students and building a trusting relationship with them was a more dependable resource for knowing more about each student's personal information (Forum Guide to Protecting the Privacy of Student Information, 2004, p. 30-33). These four teachers made special efforts to get to know who their E.D. students were and then to make a personal connection with them. They felt the more they knew about each student, the better they could communicate with him/her. The better they could communicate, the better they could meet their personal and academic needs. The better the teachers could meet the students' needs, the better they could teach them to make connections in their academics, so the students could better see the benefits of the academic success in their daily lives.

***Implications.***

Ruby Payne states in her book, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty", "The ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources. These resources are Emotional resources, Mental resources, Spiritual resources, Physical Resources and a support system is a resource" (1998, p. 16). She describes Mental resources as, "having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life." With these thoughts in mind, it is important for teachers to help E.D. students understand the importance of school success and for teachers to understand the importance of students seeing the benefits of academic success in their daily lives. The students need to make a connection between new knowledge and the benefits to them in their home, school, and daily lives.

Identifying students who are E.D. would be the first step to developing a plan for their academic success. Teachers need to build relationships with E.D students that include open communication between the two. Strong communication between teacher and student increases the likelihood of teachers getting to know their E.D. students and their needs. Once the "infrastructure" needs, as Ms. B refers to them, are met, then the academic needs can be addressed to build the mental resources necessary to give E.D. students the tools to apply their resources in daily living and to leave poverty.

Because FR/L information on students can not be accessed any longer from the child nutrition managers, teachers will need to depend on their observations and communications with students to help identify E.D. students. With identification of these students comes the responsibility for teachers to be prepared to develop plans with the students who need some modifications or accommodations to meet their academic needs. This may mean changing how they view homework assignments or other requests we make of students after they leave school. What academic requirements when dependent on completing at home can we as educators hold disadvantaged children accountable? What opportunities can we put in place during the school day for students to complete assignments needed for teachers to assess concept mastery?

In addition to these implications for the teachers, it is important for me as a school administrator, to help make teachers aware of their successes with the different student populations. As these teachers expressed, they were not aware of their consistent success with E.D. students until it was brought to their attention. If teacher assessors, who are most often the teachers' administrators, could point out specific successes with teachers, teachers could be more reflective on what it is they do to experience these successes.

***Reflective Practice.***

At first, the teachers were unsure of whom the E.D. students were in their classes, but as soon as they learned who they were, they were all very reflective and shared many of their thoughts about how they planned and interacted with these students specifically. This ability to reflect on their personal thoughts and the instructional strategies used with individual children was very keen in these four teachers. Reflective teaching strengthens the ability of teachers to look back on what worked and develop from that knowledge effective strategies for a variety of situations (Hollins, 2003, p.96). Knowing from my experience in assessing teacher performance that being a reflective practitioner is key to every teacher's success, the strength in this skill that these teachers demonstrate leads me to the conclusion that this is a skill that should be emphasized in strengthening teachers' performance. This *reflective practitioner* skill is acknowledged specifically on the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument as being one of the main functions in a teacher's performance. (see Appendix L - North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument).



Also, from my experience, I know that most teachers and administrators know that being a reflective practitioner is critical to being an effective teacher. The reality is often that teachers do not have or do not make the time it takes to be truly reflective about themselves and their instructional practices. That is why the strong reflective skills these four teachers have stood out. What I learned from these teachers is that whether it is during their school day or during their personal time, they make the time, which is a big commitment for them all, for constant reflection and planning their instruction. These teachers thought of all their students individually, personally and behaviorally, first and then planned for them academically.

In addition to being reflective on their own, they constantly spend time reflecting with their school colleagues and a larger network of colleagues. They share and collaborate with grade level peers, peers in other grade levels and peers in other areas, such as the media specialist, Title I teachers, music and art teachers, are to enhance their instruction. Ms. A spoke of how she planned frequently with her grade level peers as well as the media specialist. She also collaborated with a preschool special education teacher to provide opportunities for her fourth grade students to read to the preschool class on a regular basis. Ms. D spoke of how she worked with her fifth grade peers and fourth grade teachers to enhance her literacy instruction overall and to share resources to meet her fifth grade students' needs in reading. Ms. C shared how she spends all summer preparing for the next school year by reflecting on what worked and didn't work the previous year. In her words, "All summer, I do. I've got my foundation which is what the expectations of the academic world are, so all summer I look for the things that are current that they are into. I merge those things that are current with the concepts I know I'm going to have." These teachers all expressed that their reflection and planning for meeting the students where they were academically to get them to grow; they saw as their job. In their reflection, they not only analyzed their academic or instructional success, but thought it was important to look at their success with behavioral and social strategies and the climate in their classes.

They all felt the climate in their classrooms, especially with E.D. children, should be one that is structured, positive, understanding and based on mutual respect with high expectations of all students. The strategies they were using to promote this type of expected environment were looked upon with as much importance as their instructional

planning. Ms. B commented about attention to her class environment being important to her E.D. students because “there are children that know you care about them, I guess. That speaks more than material things some times.” Ms. A shared, “I think with the make up of our children in this school and my class, a lot of my children have very difficult home situations and I think about this. When a child left today, I said,

I hope you have a good evening.’ And I know [Ms. A began to cry] that she probably won’t, because her home life is so difficult. But you know when she leaves; she comes back because she knows somebody will provide a comfort zone for her. Even though I am tough on her, she knows that I love her and I am there for her.” Ms. C said she was tough on her students too, but, “They know I love them and support tough love. They have to want to learn and to know that mistakes are acceptable and that you fix them because that’s the rule. When they are ready to fix it and learn, I will be there. If they go get into trouble, I will be there. If it takes them another year, I am still going to be there.

Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C and Ms. D were very strong reflective practitioners. They constantly revised their lesson plans to meet the needs of their students and to build time in for opportunities to have one to one interactions with students. In 7 of the 8 teacher observations, these teachers had a significantly higher number of one to one interactions with E.D. students than with non-E.D. students. These four women also spent a lot of time in developing very thorough lesson plans based on the academic and personal needs of their students. Ms. C said in her interview,

All summer I look for the things that are current that they are in to. I merge those things that are current with the concepts that I know I’m going to have. I stay on top of their music, what the new technology is, and read the books I plan to ask them to read. Then I merge all these things into my lesson plans developed around the standard course of study.

All four teachers collaborated with peers and specialists regularly to enhance their instruction. They used their reflective skills to address how to improve each day’s lesson and to assess the class setup and student interactions. Each of these four teachers was able to give me several examples of instructional and personal strategies they revised from their

reflections. Ms. A realized her students were more participatory in her writing instruction if she used the SMART Board to deliver her instruction. Ms. B realized her E.D. students' writing was flat so she increased her usage of descriptive and expressive language to increase her students' vocabularies. Ms. C realized how important direct instruction, such as guided reading, is in order to develop interactive skills and personal communication skills with her students who she feels would become completely digital and technological kids if they could. This would cause them to lose skills in personal communication. Ms. D realized from her reflection that as much as she loves to work with small groups, some of her students this year prefer to work on their own, so she has built more opportunities for her students to choose if they work in a group, with a partner or by themselves.

It was interesting that all four teachers realized from their reflection that a large number of their E.D. students were entering fourth and fifth grade still having a limited vocabulary and moderate to low expressive skills. They were able to associate their E.D. students being the students who needed to increase their expressive language and overall vocabulary to improve their academic performance and understand the NC EOG test language.

### ***Implications***

According to Payne, who cites language studies dating back to 1967, all languages are learned and used in what is referred to as “registers” (Payne, 1998, p. 41). The five registers most noted are: *Frozen*, described as language that is constant as in the Pledge of Allegiance or Lord’s Prayer; *Formal*, as in using complete sentence structure with certain word choice as is used in school and work settings; *Consultative*, which is formal register modified for conversation that is less formal; *Casual*, as in a 400 – 800 word vocabulary used between friends with general word choice, incomplete sentence syntax and supported by non-verbal cues; and *Intimate*, which language observed between twins, lovers and in sexual harassment (Payne, 1998, p. 42). E.D students are not usually exposed to formal register in their home environment, so they do not know how to use it. The problem with this is that standardized test such as the NC EOG are written in this formal register. For E.D. students to be successful on NC EOG tests, they must know and understand the language used in these tests. “Ability to use formal register is a hidden rule of middle class. The inability to use it will knock one out of an interview in two or three minutes....on the other hand, allows one to

score well on tests and do well in school and higher education” (Payne, 1998, p. 43). It is imperative then, that teachers be aware of this language disconnect for E.D. students and teach them how to transition from casual register to formal register and why they should learn to do this. If students can associate the benefits of learning formal register with their daily lives, they will understand the importance of connecting the academic environment with home. My observation of these four teachers is that they have realized this importance, through what they referred to as increasing vocabulary, expressive language, and communication skills, and that this realization is important to their students’ school and personal success. It could also be a reason for why their students are successful on standardized tests such as the NC EOG math and reading tests.

Another point to make about being a reflective practitioner is that none of these teachers verbalized this skill as being important for an effective teacher. They discussed at length the results of being reflective, such as finding different ways to teach kids, figuring out what needs to be changed or fixed, reaching kids at their performance levels and in their behavior issues and creating classrooms that are effective and successful for children. These are examples all four teachers gave as to what they were able to accomplish after they went back and thought about whom their strategies worked well with and which strategies were successful.

The implications of this observation - teachers not identifying or verbalizing the skill of being a *reflective practitioner* - are important to note. For teachers, if they were aware of the importance of this skill in being successful, they would focus more on how to be a better reflective practitioner. This best practice is given great importance as standard number 9 on the INTASC standards, which are teaching standards used as resources for all states to develop their teaching standards. This practice is also found in function 8 of the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument (see Appendix L). For teachers to be able to identify this skill in themselves and others would lead to a better understanding of this skill and what it looks like, so they can verbalize or communicate about it. For school administrators and others who assess teacher performance, they should also be able to identify and communicate the importance of being reflective to improve performance. Administrators should also be sure they are putting a plan in place for teachers to have the time and tools for self - reflection and group reflection. School administrators should be

modeling this practice too, in reflecting on their own performance, with their teachers on their performance and with school and community leaders on overall school performance.

### ***Connections and Experiences***

Three of the four teachers talked about realizing their E.D. students had limited background knowledge and were struggling to connect or make sense of their new knowledge or experiences. Ms. C called this limited background knowledge, “knowledge without memories.” Ms. A reflected on how she noticed her E.D. students acted out when they had trouble expressing themselves to work out a situation and when trying to express themselves in writing.

Making connections with their students and getting students to make connections for themselves was another major theme that evolved from the data analysis. *Connections* is the term these teachers use to mean tying prior knowledge to new knowledge in order to be able to apply this greater knowledge in drawing conclusions, making inferences, and more informed choices academically and socially. These *connections* are also used by teachers and students to tie knowledge from personal experiences to other experiences again to gain a deeper understanding of and be able to better apply what they learn.

In working with their E.D. students, these teachers all gave examples of how they realized these students are usually most disadvantaged in having experiences from which they can retrieve prior knowledge. Ms. A described an experience on a field trip that “opened her eyes to this fact.” She took a group of students to the beach for a field trip (one of her first trips as a teacher) and did not realize that many of her students had never been to a restaurant. The children had already placed their orders through her ahead of time, but when she realized so many of her students had not had this experience, she worked it out so the children could learn how to order and she could teach them these social skills at the same time. She said she thought this was something we took for granted, that students have had experiences like going to restaurants or the movies or museums, when not all of them have. Ms. C described a similar experience when she realized going to the movies was a big event for her children. As a result, she tries to provide opportunities for her children to go to movies that are connected to their curriculum and enhance their literature studies. Ms. B taught overseas in Japan for the Department of Defense Dependents School. She described this experience as great because both the teachers and students came from a variety of

backgrounds and had lived all over the world. “The students had a lot of clear knowledge about many different things because they had so many experiences.”

In observing these teachers, I saw that their students were eager to share their connections. The students would actually say to the teachers, “I have a connection to share.” All four teachers encouraged their students to share connections with their classmates and the teachers listened attentively to the students make their connections. In most cases, the teachers would use the students’ connections to continue the dialog they were having in order to encourage more connections until the students had shared enough prior knowledge or experience for the class to draw conclusions or have a better understanding of the lesson. If the students were unable to make connections with a reading selection or a concept, the teachers used their personal experiences and prior knowledge to model making connections for the students. The teachers would explain how their connections were made and then apply that information to the lesson. This strategy was woven throughout their instruction in order for the students and teachers to share different experiences and broaden their knowledgebase.

Ms. A, during her writing instruction, shared with her students her connection of being raised on a farm. With this connection, she included several vocabulary words that activated her students’ prior knowledge of animal habitats, environmental issues, geographic regions and North Carolina agricultural information the students had received from previous lessons. Ms. A had shared with me that many of her students could not picture a farm because they had never seen one. Sharing these connections between teachers and students broadened student and teacher knowledge of each other personally, helped teachers check for student understanding and broadened students’ general knowledge to enhance their ability to make connections and to deepen their understanding of the instruction.

I found the variety of experiences and personal interests of these four teachers to be interesting in that the teachers were able to activate their prior knowledge from what seemed a very large bank of information, to think of connections that would relate to their instruction and at the same time keep the interests of their students. Ms. A is a native North Carolinian, attended schools only in North Carolina and her teaching experience has taken place in two public schools in North Carolina. Her original educational goal was to be a music and drama major, but she changed her mind and now she has a graduate degree in elementary education

and is National Board Certified. Her love of literature, North Carolina Social Studies, her drama, music and storytelling background along with her skill as a competitive marksman have enriched her life experiences so that her general knowledgebase is very broad. Ms. A feels her interest in and love of literature helped open her eyes to lots of experiences. Her drama and storytelling skills help strengthen her skills in engaging her students in literature and getting them to experience different events and lives of other people through these classroom experiences. She also says these skills have made her a better teacher in strengthening her students' communication and expressive language skills.

Ms. B attended school and taught in New York, Florida, California, Japan and North Carolina and traveled a lot with her husband who was in the military. Ms. B has a bachelor's in education and a master's in reading. She feels her experiences have helped her connect with her E.D. students because she can provide examples of these worldly experiences to her students and make them real and authentic. She can broaden their knowledgebase with her own. She also feels having her graduate degree in reading has made her a better teacher and strengthens her ability to improve expressive language and communication skills in her students.

Ms. C was born and raised in the Virgin Islands. She has also lived in the Bahamas and the United States. She attended schools in the Virgin Islands and Minnesota. Her career goal and education was originally to be a nurse, which was her first major. She then shifted to education and psychology and graduated with a double major. She also received a minor in Spanish, a master's degree in administration and supervision and had her own private school. She has worked in migrant camps as an interpreter and worked in the fields so she could learn more about the workers' language and culture. Ms. C worked in the Department of Welfare with emotionally disturbed girls. Ms. C also worked in construction, building houses for a few years. She has taught in the Virgin Islands, Bahamas and the United States. She has worked in curriculum and instruction, special education, technology education, elementary and middle schools as well as in the university system. In technology, she developed the curriculum and plan for the school system to integrate technology into the instruction and the curriculum. She feels her experiences have definitely enhanced her ability to make connections with her students, both English- and Spanish-speaking.

Ms. D attended schools in New York, and originally earned a degree in criminal justice. She then came to North Carolina and became a police officer. She has also been involved in sports since second grade. She decided to make a career change and went back to school in North Carolina for her education degree, and received both a bachelor's and a master's in elementary education. She has taught in two schools in North Carolina. Ms. D feels her varied interests and experiences have helped her understand her E.D. students better and strengthened her skills connecting with them through practical and real world experiences and a variety of literature to peak their interests.

Experiences and connections between teachers and students are what these four teachers felt helped make them successful with E.D. students. The teachers could make better connections with the students personally, broaden their general knowledgebase and help close the gap in experiences they felt hindered their E.D. students' academic success. Ms. C says this well, "They may have a lot of knowledge, but they lack experiences and understanding of their experiences to make connections. It is our job to make this happen, make it real."

What are the implications for teachers and administrators? These teachers felt by being "well-rounded" in their education, experiences and interests, they were better equipped to understand their E.D. students, and therefore better able to make personal connections with them and broaden the general knowledgebase that was lacking because of their lack of experiences. I also conclude that being able to keep their students interested in their instruction with their connections, coupled with the added personal knowledge of their students that these connections allow them to tap, make a strong case for teachers to consider being well-rounded students themselves.

Knowing these connections and variety of personal experiences and interests is what these teachers feel helps them make those much needed personal connections with their students. And knowing that these teachers felt making these personal connections first was very important, in order to get their students to connect their lives with their academics, is why I think school administrators, with a high needs population such as economically disadvantaged students, should take a close look at teachers' experiences and interests outside of education when interviewing them. In addition to their instructional knowledge,



administrators could talk with them about how these other experiences will help them be better teachers. (Payne, 1998, p. 143)

It is important to note that these teachers were fourth and fifth grade teachers. They implemented these successful strategies with E.D students who were most likely eight years old or older. My recommendation would be that implementation of these instructional strategies should begin as E.D. students enter kindergarten.

Implementing these successful strategies upon beginning their school experience would target academic and social needs of this student population immediately. Therefore building their base knowledge, academically and socially, enhancing their ability to make connections to this new knowledge earlier.

The implications would be that this could help close the achievement gap more quickly and lessen the stress and hard work upper grades teachers face to close such large gaps in academic performance and experiences not addressed before fourth grade. More success earlier with E.D. students, might also improve retention of successful teachers who work with high needs student populations such as E. D. students by lessening the burnout of these teachers.

### ***Personal Strategies and Philosophies***

What personal strategies do these teachers use to provide successful educational experiences for economically disadvantaged students? In the following discussion, I will address this question and the similarities in the characteristics of these teachers that were revealed in the analysis of the data.

Once these four teachers verbalized their teaching philosophies, it became apparent how strongly influenced their choices and implementations of personal strategies were by these philosophies. I observed that these teachers had an in depth understanding of themselves from which to develop their personal teaching philosophies. From these philosophies, they built their strategy base for making personal connections with their students. These personal connections were what all four teachers said was important to beginning the school connections.

“We cannot assume our students have had opportunities we take for granted, such as going to a restaurant, to the movies, seen a farm, been read to, or even spoken to in a dialogue or storytelling style way. We have to teach students, especially those disadvantaged

students, in ways that provide them opportunities to learn social and academic knowledge.” These are some of Ms. A’s thoughts. Her philosophy of teaching is woven through the personal strategies she uses to be successful with her students. “When I step in front of them every day, I think about the difference that I make. I may not see the difference immediately, but hopefully will be there in years to come.” She says it validates what she does every day when students come back to her after several years and say they remember this, and that it is the one school year they remember.

When Ms. A thinks about the makeup of her classes now, she knows many of her students have difficult home lives, so when she talks to them at school she is sure to be kind. “I always try to remember when I talk to them that these may be the only kind words they hear during the day.” Ms. A greets her children when they enter her room and has something kind to say to them when they leave.

Ms C shared when one of her girls was called to work in a group with her, the girl realized the other members of the group were not there. The girl said, “WOW! I have you all to myself!” This response touched Ms. C because it made her realize how much it means for her E.D. students to have this personal connection and special time with her. Ms. D spoke of how her E.D. students seemed to just need a little more encouragement and self-confidence, even when their work and their responses, both behaviorally and academically, were very good. She was also sure her students had all the “things” they needed for school, such as pencils, paper, and other supplies as well as snacks and lunch money.

Ms. B’s philosophy is, “I feel responsible for their learning. Whatever they need from the first day they come in here to the last day, I feel I am solely responsible for what they need to learn in fourth grade. I try to teach each of them as an individual and work with them on an individual basis.” Ms. B described herself as not probably being the most fun teacher, but because she provided structure and lots of individual time with her students they seemed to really appreciate these two things. Ms. B like Ms. C had non-English speaking students in her class. She would also try to communicate key words in those children’s language with them. Her non-English speaking students and their English speaking peers, both seemed to appreciate the special effort given by Ms. B to communicate with all her students.

Ms. B made a comment similar to one made by the other three teachers, which was about homework and keeping in mind what her disadvantaged students are often going through outside of school. In reflecting on a situation with one of her girls, she described what the child told her about why she did not have her homework. The girl told Ms. B that her mother had left her, so she had gone to see her mother, and therefore did not have time to do her homework. Ms. B said to me she thought "...in the big scheme of things, really who cares about homework." This child had gone through the trauma of her mother leaving and other things, so she tried to put this in perspective. She said experiences like these have made her change the way she does things, but not the fact that she still has high expectations and holds the students responsible for getting their work done. She too, like Ms. A, said "You can still make a difference in their learning." Ms. B shared that she was attuned to the fact that many of her children had no school supplies, so she felt part of her job was to be sure they had "the infrastructure" or the material things she required in order to do their work. She did not want other children to say something to them or about them because they did not have school supplies. This thought is supported by the fact that material well-being plays an important role in how children feel about themselves and how they look to other people. If other children pick on children who do not have school supplies, snacks, or any basic materials needed for school success their self-esteem as well as their hope for success will most likely be damaged to some degree (Payne, 1998, p. 171).

All four teachers, as they learned more about their E.D students personally, felt they had considered what these children were going through and had made a plan with these children that still kept the students responsible for their learning and their work, but addressed the fact that they could not hold them responsible for what happened outside of school that prevented them from getting homework done. Ms. B added to this that once she learned her students, she could tell who was being lazy and irresponsible and who was not, in order for her to meet their individual needs.

Ms. C said she worked with her students as individuals also, but felt strongly that each student had his or her own responsibilities to the group (class). Ms. B touched on the fact that she worked with the students from their strengths to build their self-confidence, but Ms. C learned that she "had to have them realize that there is value in the fact they have been able to survive some of their home situations and to point out some of the things they have

survived and show them where their strengths are and how they can use those with the academics to become stronger, to be able to make a connection to the real world.” Ms. C, like A, B, and D, felt routine and structure were important for all students, but especially E.D. students, because many of them did not have this at home. In order for them to feel safe physically, and safe to take risks and make mistakes, their classrooms had to address these personal needs before the students would trust them to teach them and build a mutual respect between them.

Ms. C expressed her philosophy and expectations of her E.D. students as having the same goals for all her students with a different understanding of how her E.D. students might need to reach those goals. She said it was important for them to know she had an understanding, but not to let them feel disadvantaged. “They would need to step up and figure out how they were going to win, to finish or how to play the game (school and learning) to be successful.” She would help them with this by pointing out their strengths and encouraging them to work from there.

Ms. C’s philosophy is that she has to be passionate about learning for the students to be passionate about it. She will do whatever it takes to get them excited about learning and make things real, so they will be passionate about learning too. Ms. A shared this philosophy in that she wanted the students to be excited about learning. What came out of all the teachers’ responses was that they needed to show these kids how learning could be exciting, fun and held many benefits for them.

They all said they stressed learning and not quitting with their students. They really worked hard to know something about each child to tap their interests and get them excited about learning and how it would open up opportunities for them they could work to achieve. They could have dreams to realize. Ms. C feels she gets her students interested by using their language, music and dances in her applications. She also integrates a lot of technology in her instruction for them to learn. This is one of her loves and feels her students now learn more naturally on a computer because of their fascination with electronic games with animation, etc.

Ms. C added to her importance of having a clear structure in her room for discipline and to enhance the environment for learning was also to establish her role and theirs in school. Many of her students, she said, had brothers or sisters in gangs or there were gangs

in their communities. Knowing from her life experiences in working with children from gangs, she said these students needed to know who was in charge and how each student had to follow the rules and do their part to be a member of her class, just like in a gang. This was difficult for her at times because she had to support tough love and stick to her guidelines and expectations until a couple of her students chose to follow these guidelines and be a member of her class. Her students, as I was observing, really responded positively to Ms. C's structure and expectations. She spoke directly to them sometimes and told them what she expected, but she never raised her voice or embarrassed them. When she applied a "consequence", the students never argued with her, they accepted responsibility and the consequence, and then returned to what she had asked them to do. Ms. C made an observation of herself personally, that she thought her age, 64, was an advantage because "...students might need older teachers that do not have a lot of outside life and have more of themselves to give. They need to know that they have someone who will take time to know how they feel." Older teachers might not have as many things taking their time and attention from their jobs as younger teachers might have. Students, she thinks, feel a sense of security and stability with her as an older person. In relation to her E.D. students, she felt this was important to them because their lives are often so full of changes and moving around, they just want to be with someone who could spend a lot of time with them and get to know and understand them in a structured, consistent environment. This observation connects with my earlier reference to other resources that support the ability for children to leave poverty. Two of those resources, in addition to the mental resources mentioned earlier, are *emotional* and *support system* resources. Support system resources are what Payne describes as, "having friends, family, and back up resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources." (Payne, 1998, p. 16) School personnel are depended on by many school communities and student populations to be those support systems and external resources.

In relation to building background knowledge and confidence in E.D. students as all four teachers have been sensitive to, there is a connection between providing all three resources - mental, support systems, and emotional – to E.D. students as I have observed these teachers trying to do.

Emotional resources are needed by E.D. students to, "provide stamina to withstand difficult and uncomfortable emotional situations and feelings.

Emotional resources are the most important of all resources because, when present, they allow the individual not to return to old habit patterns. In order to move from poverty to middle class, an individual must suspend his/her emotional memory bank because the situations and hidden rules are so unlike what he/she has experienced previously. Therefore, a certain level of persistence and an ability to stay with the situation until it can be learned (and therefore feel comfortable) are necessary. This persistence (i.e., staying with the situation) is proof that emotional resources are present. Emotional resources come, at least in part, from role models. (Payne, 1998, p. 17)

Ms. D felt she connected with her students personally because of what she had experienced as a police officer and through her sports interests. She also made her expectations and class rules clear, but was quite attuned to their personal needs and interests to keep them motivated. She was very energetic, like Ms. A and C, but was not as animated or dramatic. She, like the other three teachers, was resourceful and creative in making connections with her students to motivate them to learn. She also stressed attendance with her students as did the other three teachers. They needed to be at school every day. Ms. A even rewarded her class every day that her whole class was present.

Ms. D's philosophy was to challenge her students by meeting them where they were, providing instruction for them that they would be sure to understand and would challenge them too. She said her philosophy included encouraging them, teaching them how to think and keeping them from quitting. She, like the other three teachers, felt these kids needed to know they could always figure something out. Whether it was a behavior issue or an academic one, they could figure out how best to respond to any circumstance, and not just shut down or give up. Her goal was for her students to have the most enjoyable and successful experience in a positive way. Ms. D had shared earlier that her beginning years in school were a real struggle for her until one of her third grade teachers convinced her that she believed in her. After that, her whole school experience changed to become a successful, positive experience.

A personal strategy she used in her classroom, which the kids used a great deal was a mailbox she had in the back of her room. The students who were struggling with something and they did not feel comfortable talking with Ms. D, or who were having other problems of

any kind, could stick a note in the mailbox. Ms. D has used the mailbox since her first year of teaching.

The following are other strategies Ms. D found to be successful. She lets students get up and move around when they need to. She tries to plan her classes, especially the afternoon class, so the students do not sit in their desks for long periods of time. If the students are lethargic or inattentive, she gets them up to do jumping jacks or to take a walk to the water fountain and back. Ms. D will go stand by a student to check the work over the student's shoulder, which is a cue for them she is going to call on them to answer soon. If she calls on students, they know their work is correct and they should be confident to contribute to the class. She allows students to choose a group, partner or work on their own. She only asked them to change if they are not getting the work done, or the pair, group or individual is struggling to do the work. Students who work better on their own are encouraged to work in groups occasionally so they will learn to work with others. Ms. D really encourages students to help each other or asks students to explain directions or a concept to other students who do not understand. She feels if students do not understand it from her after she tries a few times, they might better understand it from a peer. Ms. D also feels if students can explain the concept to other students, they will understand it better. She works with a lot of small groups and individuals. Sometimes, she says, a student just needs some encouragement and a little one on one friendly dialog. High expectations, responsibility for their learning and their work, figuring out for themselves what they need to do to accomplish their tasks, asking each other for help and helping each other, remembering it is okay to take risks and make mistakes, and not quitting or giving up in any situation are concepts Ms. D communicates to her students daily.

Some notes of interest about these four teachers are that Ms. A's parents were both teachers; Ms. C's mother was a teacher; Ms. D's father was a teacher. Ms. A, Ms. C and Ms. D did not originally choose teaching as their occupation. These three women all changed their minds and became teachers and even obtained graduate degrees in education. Ms. B did choose teaching as her career. In Susan Moore Johnson's study, "The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers", she found that this generation of teachers is not choosing teaching as a life-long career. She attributes this partially to differences in interests and options available to potential teachers and a lack of resources and/or support for beginning (Johnson,

2004, p. 19). All four of the teachers in this study have chosen teaching as their life-long career. Even though this career may not have been their original choice, they all now know that this is what they love to do and plan to retire as teachers.

### ***Implications***

What implications might these teachers' philosophies of teaching and the personal strategies they use with their E.D. students be? One implication from the teachers' philosophies and experiences is that their personal philosophies and experiences drive their decision making in implementing personal strategies to make connections with their students. It is important to make these personal connections with their students before they can engage the students in their academic instruction. The personal strategies they used depended on the individual needs of their E.D. students, as with all their students, but especially for their students who were disadvantaged. These teachers worked very hard in their planning for day to day climate in their classrooms as well as academic success. Knowing if the children had "infrastructure", (as Ms. B referred), needs of basic school supplies, snacks, lunch and field trip monies or needs such as time, attention, encouragement, self-assurance, social skills, stability and structure or both was critical. Second, the better the teachers knew what barriers they might face in working with their students, the better prepared they were to find ways to provide for these needs and to choose the personal strategies they could implement to establish a safe, positive, motivating and even entertaining classroom environment.

The personal strategies these teachers used were a result of taking the time at the beginning of each school year to learn about their students personally, to find out how they think and feel about themselves and how or what the students would need in order to connect their environment with the academic environment. Knowing how to reach the students personally was key to knowing from what prior knowledge they might have or not have to understanding, applying and making connections to the benefits for them of this new knowledge and school experiences. This knowledge for the teachers was key in providing and preparing for success with their E.D. students.

All four teachers spent a great deal of time with their classes and with individual students from the first day of school to find out what personal strategies would enhance their chances of building trusting relationships with their children. These strategies, once implemented should be consistent and part of each day's routines. They should also be



revisited if the class environment changes for any reason, such as adding new students, changing the daily routines or needed supplies to participate in school activities. This time spent getting to know students should start the first day of school and is the base for building a successful classroom environment for the year.

Providing opportunities to build background knowledge, modeling use of formal register language, being consistent and there for their students, and emphasizing building their self-confidence and encouraging them to not quit provide strong foundations in E.D. students to be successful in school and society. Without knowing they are doing this, these teachers are also connecting their E.D. students with three resources Dr. Payne states that individuals need to leave poverty - mental resources, emotional resources, and support systems.

### ***Instructional Strategies***

What instructional strategies do these teachers use with their E.D. students? How do they implement these strategies? What resources do they use? What kind of planning do they do? The answers to these questions were found in the data from the interviews, observations and lesson plans of all four teachers.

Before beginning their academic instruction, all four teachers said they spent whatever time was needed at the beginning of the school year to teach the students their behavioral and academic expectations. They taught their routines, procedures, discipline plans, school rules and expectations and what they expected their classroom climate to be. Respect and responsibilities for both students and teachers were emphasized. Then the teachers would begin to include their instructional plans and consistently enforced their expectations of behavioral and academic responsibilities. Two of the four teachers had students complete Learning Styles Inventories at the beginning of school.

Instructionally, the key theme in planning was to integrate communication skills emphasizing expressive language. Ms. A did this through storytelling, role playing, having her students read to younger students, building vocabulary daily, and dialoguing with her students constantly. She also incorporated a variety of literature examples for the students to read other people's ways of expressing themselves and had the students write their thoughts and expressions for a variety of audiences in a variety of styles e.g., stories, letters, reports, speeches and presentations.

Ms. A would plan for her projects and assignments to be completed a little each day or chunked into small parts to ensure students of being able to complete each part successfully, and keep the students engaged and interested. Her instructional pacing was brisk with clear objectives and benefits for each child. Her assignments were differentiated even in whole group instruction. She held her students responsible for completing their work in a timely, organized and acceptable standard. She also emphasized daily, making personal connections from prior knowledge and experiences. Her students would ask her to share a *connection* and would tell her if it was a personal connection, from experience, or a connection from prior knowledge from a lesson.

Ms. A's instruction was heavily supported and enhanced with technology, guided reading or small group direct instruction and constant monitoring of each student's progress and understanding. Ms. A was constantly assessing her students' understanding formally and informally through her monitoring, questioning and dialoguing, written work products and long term projects. She made books for choice reading, research resources and supplementary reading available to her students. She collaborated often with the media specialist to plan, so a variety of books would be available to her students all the time to support her lesson. Ms. A featured different authors for a period of time and the students would read books by that author, so they could have literature discussions. The students seemed to really like these discussions. They also showed positive responses when Ms. A would use the SMART Board to have an interactive discussion about the author's website.

Ms. B's students worked mostly in pairs or one on one with her after beginning an assignment. She dialogued with each student, asking questions about the work and assessing understanding. Her expectations were also very clear as to what type of work product would be acceptable. Students were constantly reminded of their choice reading when they finished their work. Her students seemed to love going to the bookcase and choosing a book to read and then doing a follow-up assignment with each selection.

Ms. B had really emphasized in her interview that she may not have been as fun as other teachers, but that she really cared about the children and worked to meet them where they were in what they could accomplish and getting them to grow from there. She was very encouraging and somewhat soft-spoken in her delivery, but focused on moving each child as fast as she could, challenging the student to "pedal as fast as they could." She focused on

their growth and monitored this through regular assessments and working with students individually.

Her instruction was not as strongly supported by technology, but she said this year's class would stay focused on her instruction when she used the overhead. If she wrote on the board or asked them to copy from the board, she had difficulty keeping them on task. Her instruction was supported with small group direct instruction, as in guided reading groups and differentiated assignments.

Ms. B, like Ms. A, did a lot of modeling for writing and reading instruction and also modeled the use of expressive language in her own speech with her students and by giving a variety of examples from a variety of texts and authors. Ms. B also emphasized the need for expanding students' vocabulary to enhance their expressive language skills and being able to make connections from their prior knowledge to their new knowledge to better understand the use and importance of this new knowledge. She focused on students being made aware of opportunities and experiences to broaden their knowledge-base and ability to make connections socially and academically. All four teachers emphasized how important making connections was to their students for their social, behavioral and academic learning experiences and how all these can be enhanced through having more knowledge to draw from.

All four classrooms were set up to allow for a variety of social experiences. Ms. A, Ms. C and Ms. D had student desks arranged so students could work individually, in pairs and in small groups. They also had spaces in their rooms for students to move to and sit or lie on the floor, in big chairs, rocking chairs, special rugs and reading tables. Ms. B's room had rows of desks, but they were close enough for students to work in groups or pairs. Her non-English speaking students often worked in pairs. All four rooms had a set of computers for student use and lots of space for books and other literature for students to choose from, so they always had something to read. Furthermore, Ms. D and Ms. B commented that their rooms were set up to be conducive to lots of teacher movement allowing them to monitor students and so students could move easily to their centers or spaces to work. All four teachers were highly skilled in monitoring their students' work and behavior. They often circulated and worked with their students individually.

An additional observation of all four classrooms was that there was very little, if any, room designated as *teacher space*. Most of the space in all four classrooms was used for center areas, reading areas and instructional space. Three of the four rooms had a small teacher desk and chair. Ms. C's room had a teacher chair at a reading table, but the students often sat in this chair as a kind of incentive. Ms. C said her kids loved sitting in her chair. They thought they were receiving special treatment just by being allowed to sit in that chair.

Ms. A has her classroom and students divided into the three sections based on the geographic regions of North Carolina. Ms. C has each group of students in her class divided into "communities". The students are responsible for all the community's business during the school year. Each class had responsibilities or jobs that students were hired for by the day or week to contribute to the daily operations of the class and assist the teacher in administrative duties. Different discipline plans or incentives were implemented in each class with many ways for the students to earn incentives and for their classes. Ms. A even gave the students marbles towards their class incentive for all students being at school. Students in Ms. A's and Ms. C's classes could earn tickets to go to the movies by completing different reading assignments or achieving reading goals.

All four teachers prepared lesson plans that were very detailed and had long and short term plans. Their lesson plans all included choices for students in their assignments, reading selections and in some cases how they chose to complete an assignment. Ms. C and Ms. D often let students choose if and with whom they wanted to work. Ms. A commented on the fact that she prefers her students to work in groups, but this year's class was the first group in 16 years who have not been able to work well in groups. She has had to revise her plans for them to still sit in groups, but work mostly in pairs, independently or in a whole class situation. The teachers talked about how their E.D. students in particular were used to making a lot of choices on their own, sometimes as the "adult" in their home, but with no guidance as to good choices versus poor choices. So these teachers felt building the choices into their lessons would help their students grow in their decision making skills and improving the choices they often made that affected their academics and their behavior. All the teachers were observed talking with their students about good choices and their benefits versus poor choices and their consequences.

Two teachers talked about how they planned field trips to provide a variety of opportunities for learning social skills as well as academic information, which E.D. students might not have otherwise. One example would be going to the coast to visit lighthouses, which might include a tour of the state the aquarium, dinner at a restaurant and an ecological study in the Sound. Ms. A said many of her students had not had the opportunity to see other areas outside of their home communities, go to a museum, to the movies or eat at a restaurant. Three of the four teachers provided opportunities for students to also experience travel virtually through the internet. They could also plan interactive lessons for students to experience historical events, famous people, social studies lessons, and writing activities on the website with an author they might be studying. She tries to bring the experiences to the children. Ms. A might decorate her room to be the scene in a piece of literature they are studying or an animal habitat or the setting of an historical event, and dress as a character in one of the stories so her students could experience this now. Ms. A, Ms. C and Ms. D planned lessons to include role-playing, connecting literature to current movies and events and music to make the lesson, especially the readings, come alive for the students.

Ms. C emphasized the fact that in order to get kids excited about learning and reading and communicating then you have to make lesson plans that connect students' environments to school environments. She feels the best way to do this is through their music, dances, current events and technology. "It is natural to these students to do their reading on the computer because you can animate the words, repeat the words, make all these automatic connections that they can't do from reading a book or experience from a pencil and piece of paper. We [teachers] have to figure out how to make what we know they need fit into the way they learn." The technology piece integrated into their lesson plans was important to all four teachers, but implemented at different levels by each teacher.

Ms. C had developed a website her students could access from school or home so they could chat about their assignments, communicate with her and check their class notes and instructions for projects and other assignments. She was also teaching them how to take some of their assessments on-line. Ms. C had her lesson plans for the school year prepared by the first day of school, as she spends her summer reflecting on the previous year's plans and how she needed to revise them and incorporate current events, music, literature, and technology into the new school year's lessons plans. Lesson plans showed integration of

subjects such as writing and science, social studies and literature studies, art and music lessons in language arts and many more. Collaboration with colleagues in and away from school for ideas and lesson plan development is standard for these teachers. One principal observed his teachers informally meeting and sharing ideas all the time in the hallway, on their way to lunch and while on duty.

Included in each teacher's class rules and lesson plans are character education traits and lessons related to these traits. Their behavior plans and class goals included opportunities for experiences each student could earn or choose; knowing their E.D. students might not otherwise have these opportunities. Class goals and expectations were clear to these students, for both behavior and academic successes. The climates in their classrooms were positive, busy and encouraging. None of the four teachers raised their voices or had to do any more than remind a few of their students of the rules and/or expectations. Their students were engaged, sharing connections, helping each other and taking responsibility for their learning and behavior. Respect for others was emphasized in all four classrooms. The teachers modeled and verbalized their high expectations for students' academic and behavioral responsibilities, and were consistent in how they supported these expectations. It was obvious that the teachers' focus was more on compliments and positive interactions with their students.

Small group instruction and one on one instruction were very important to these teachers. Because their E.D. students usually had limited experience, expressive vocabulary, and social skills, these teachers felt direct instruction in small groups and one on one would address the gaps in their learning as a result of these limitations. Teachers could dialogue and socialize with children more through small groups as well as target specific literacy and communication skills more often to close these gaps more quickly. All four teachers stressed how they can be sure their students understand the words they were reading, all the e-text information (reading on the computer) they were reading and that the reading selection itself had meaning to these students by working with them regularly in small group settings. Assessments, formal and informal, could be done more often and the teachers said they could see faster growth in their students when they made time for their small group direct instruction such as their guided reading groups consistently – daily if at all possible. Also these students often needed some extra time and attention to build their self-confidence, so

the added attention the teachers gave them in these settings seemed to make a positive difference in this need too. In support of this strategy, these teachers all had conferences with their students regularly to have that additional one on one time to dialogue and assess their students' performance. Conferencing and dialoguing with their students were strengths for these four teachers.

“E.D. students usually have a lot of knowledge, but this knowledge has no foundation. It doesn't have memories or experience and when they do have experience they are not able to connect it.” Ms. C made this statement and added that now more than ever her students - between the disconnect she feels they have with people because of their fascination with the digital world and their limited vocabulary - her children need the personal dialogue, practice in communicating and all the word choice, literacy, and direct instruction with her they can get. She observed in her E.D. students, as the other three teachers have, that the students have learned to read words quickly and fluently, but are disadvantaged in that these words have no meaning to them. In order for their students to learn to communicate and make opportunities for themselves, they need to have and apply the language knowledge (especially the expressive language) and the social knowledge (how to address different audiences) to be successful. Time spent being sure each student understood the meaning of what they were reading, was most effective when that time was used in a small group setting to specifically address comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Ms. C makes a special effort to try and connect her students' world and the environment in which they live to the academic world and environment, so they will understand how what they are learning will benefit them. She feels she communicates with her disadvantaged students well because she uses their language, music, dances, fashion and current technology in her assignments and instruction as much as possible. She spends time listening to them and being sure they understand her expectations and directions then she holds them responsible for their learning and assignments. She does not give her students answers, but has them research and figure out what information they need and want to know. She will give them tips and clues and resources, but they know before they go to her for guidance they have to be able to communicate what they have done and why they did it. Ms. A, Ms. B and Ms. D were all similar in how they communicated the students' responsibilities.

*Chunking* information and assignments was a similar strategy used by all four teachers. This matched the way they had prepared their lesson plans, in that their plans were divided into small parts to build on from day to day to accomplish their objectives. I concluded from this observation that this careful planning and implementation of their instruction (which included differentiation and tiered lessons) resulted in the efficient use of classroom time by these teachers. They knew how much of each objective they needed to accomplish with their students and how they needed to accomplish that part so well, that their instruction, including transitions, just flowed. There was also a feeling in all these classrooms that wasting time was not an option. Teachers and students understood what their goals were, short- and long-term, that they were committed to accomplishing.

Writing instruction was integrated across the curriculum and was taught separately. Guided reading instruction was used by all four teachers. It is interesting to note that all four teachers, for various reasons, loved teaching social studies. Listening skills were taught and practiced. Teachers modeled active listening with their students. Ms. C practiced listening and writing skills simultaneously. Ms. A and Ms. C played music in the background of their classes. Ms. C said she played the music to be sure there was some noise for her students. She said her students had to have some noise while they were working and even when she was teaching. She said they are used to so much noise that if it is too quiet, they do not work as well. They filter the other noise and focus on their work.

In my observations, Ms. B also stressed organization with her students. Organization of their materials, organization of their thoughts and planning and organization of their completed work was key, she thought, to reinforcing taking care of their things and appreciating and realizing where they started in fourth grade and where they had grown and what they had accomplished. Ms. C had similar thoughts, but made her students a DVD of their fifth grade year so they would have memories of what they had achieved academically and personally, and of some of their individual and class experiences. I observed that all four classrooms were well organized materially and very orderly behaviorally, but they were busy. The teachers and students were busy and were using their time efficiently. The teachers communicated to their students that their time together was important and they had much to accomplish. The teachers also communicated to their students that their attendance



in their classes and at school was very important. The students were old enough to take part of the responsibility to see that they got to school.

*Summary of instructional strategies.*

In summary, strategies found to be most successful with economically disadvantaged students by these four teachers were strategies that provided learning opportunities for these students socially and academically they might not otherwise receive, such as field trips and tours to special geographic areas, events, performances, restaurants, museums, historical sites and theatres. Opportunities that could also be provided virtually were used by these teachers. Providing these students with experiences from which they could build a general knowledge-base, improves their ability to make personal connections to new knowledge and understand how to apply what they learn to their lives. What all these teachers felt strongly about was that E. D. students were often disadvantaged in having a bank of experiential and prior knowledge. Having this knowledge is critical so the students can draw from their prior knowledge to make connections with new knowledge to increase their understanding of the application and use of this knowledge. These four teachers would transform their classrooms into a special setting or habitat they would be teaching and dress in character for this setting, to “bring their instruction to life” or “make it real” for their students.

Instructional strategies used also addressed the need to increase the limited expressive vocabulary E.D. students often have which hinders their ability to communicate well socially and academically. These teachers dialogued and had conferences with their students constantly, modeling the use of expressive language in their speaking and writing. They provided direct instruction in literacy skills, especially vocabulary, word choice and reading comprehension skills. Small group settings and guided reading strategies were avenues for providing this instruction.

Differentiation and tiered assignments were obvious in these teachers’ lesson plans and observations. Students often had choices in the reading selections needed to accomplish their tasks and in the process of completing their assignments. They also had choices in who they worked with and if they worked with other students. The teachers were clear in their expectations of what had to be accomplished with the students chosen. Behavioral expectations and responsibilities were also clear when students had these choices. (These expectations, routines and procedures were established at the beginning of the school year.)

These teachers monitored and assessed their students frequently. Assessments were formal and informal. The teachers would then adjust their teaching or lesson plan quickly and would give students immediate and specific feedback as to how they might improve their work. Feedback was rarely in the form of an answer, however, but mostly in the form of a clue or resource to which the student could refer to figure out what needed to be done.

Technology was integrated into the instruction more heavily in two classes. Two teachers commented they would love to include more technology, but availability was sometimes an issue. All classes had computers in the room accessible to both students and teachers. Two of the teachers used the SMART Board with their students for language arts and additional writing instruction. The students, I observed, were very attentive and enthusiastic about the instruction when their teachers used the SMART Board.

Collaborating and networking with their colleagues, teammates, special area teachers, teachers throughout the school system and even former mentors was natural for these teachers. One principal observed his teachers constantly talking with each other about ideas and suggestions to enhance their instruction. He said he would hear them talking with other teachers at all times of the day formally in planning and informally as they were walking in the hallway. These teachers also took advantage of networking over the internet.

Personal strategies common to these four teachers seemed to be just as important in their success with these students as were the instructional strategies. In fact all these teachers said they would not be able to “connect” with their students, especially their E.D. students, until they knew their needs personally. It was not only important to know their needs, but to understand their needs. They felt if these students trusted that they cared about them and would “be there for them,” then they would feel safe to try new experiences in their classes and not quit if they felt they might not be successful.

Having high expectations and clear expectations was important too. Even though these students might not be able to get certain work done at home, they were still responsible for their work. The teachers would set up a plan for them to accomplish and experience the same opportunities as other students, but the students had the responsibility to see that they followed the plan. Two of the teachers reflected on the fact that they had changed their thoughts on the importance of some homework and on what they could hold the students responsible for. They realized some things they were holding the students responsible for

were really out of the students' control and should be handled with their parents, as difficult as that might be.

These teachers took every opportunity to talk with their E.D. students and encourage them. They found if those personal connections could be made, then the students' self-confidence would improve and they would become more participatory in class, sharing information with the teachers so they could find ways to make better connections with the students and the students with their academics. The teachers made efforts to learn the music, language, dances, interests and dreams of these children to help them make connections between their environments and the academic environment, so they would see the benefits of being successful in both environments. Improving communication skills and providing experiences for these students were the two main reasons these teachers used the personal and instructional strategies I observed in this study. Both types of strategies were important to these teachers in being successful with their economically disadvantaged students. In reflection these four teachers felt, without making the personal connections with these students first, the success with them academically might not have been as great.

### ***Limitations***

Possible limitations of this study included the length of time provided to complete the study and how the teachers were recruited through their principals. Differences in the traditional calendar for the public schools and the calendar for the researcher's university were also a possible limitation. A richer description of how these teachers taught and their relationships with their students could have been gained from increasing the number of observations to three or four. Conducting two observations before the winter break, the first one taking place within the first three weeks of school, and two observations after the winter break, one occurring at the beginning of the third quarter and a fourth one occurring at the end of the third quarter or beginning weeks of the fourth quarter, would be my recommendation.

Obtaining school system permission to conduct one of these observations during the beginning weeks of the school year could prove difficult, if at all possible, in that the window for conducting research in the schools may not open until late in the first quarter or early in the second quarter. A possible limitation of extending the window of time for observations to the fourth quarter of the public school system's calendar is that of the researcher's

university calendar ending earlier than the school system's calendar. This difference in calendars requires data collection and study completion for the university calendar to be considered well before fourth quarter of a traditional calendar for a public school begins.

Four observations for each teacher scheduled as previously suggested, coupled with the two interviews of each teacher would, provide more data to enrich the comparison analysis of how the teachers develop their strategies for working with their students. Scheduling these additional observations at the beginning and end of the school year as well as acquiring the participants by early school year could prove to be limiting factors for this study. Also, adding to the number of observations would require more time to analyze and synthesize the additional data therefore extending the time needed to complete the study. Time to complete this study with these changes in the methodology would need to be considered carefully in order for time issues to not be limiting factors.

Recruiting teacher participants through their principals was both an advantage and limitation to this study. An advantage was that I did not need to gain consent to review teachers' confidential TPAIs to see if they had been rated standard or above standard. It was a limitation in that I was dependent on principals to recommend only teachers who they knew to have met the TPAI selection criterion. I was not able to confirm that the teachers have met this criterion. However, based on my communication with the principals I believe that the principals were careful to recommend teachers who met the selection criterion.

Another limitation of this study was that only two teachers were interviewed and observed at each grade level. However, the flexibility of the case study design allowed me to research as many teachers as necessary, for as long a time needed, until the data became saturated.

Studying teachers from other geographic areas of the state and other school systems would enrich the data for comparisons of the findings from this study to the findings of these other teachers who successfully teach F/RL students. Restricting the study to one school system was a good foundation study, but limited the findings from being compared to a broader range of teachers. Gaining consent from teachers, principals, and the school system was a limiting factor in this study.

Finally, a limiting piece of this study, but one that could be considered for future studies, was not including interviews with economically disadvantaged students who have

experienced success with these teachers. Adding the voice of the students to the teachers' voices would have enhanced the findings of the study.

### ***Future Studies***

Future studies might include the voices of students as to why they feel they are successful with their teachers. A longitudinal study of student success following their experience with their fourth and fifth grade teachers could be conducted to assess a long term effects or benefits of the instruction. These studies might also include teachers from other school systems and geographic regions of the state who are demonstrating success with this student population. Then a comparison study could be done to identify similarities and differences in the personal and instructional strategies used by these additional teachers (extension of this study) and in teachers from different areas. A future study might also be to interview and observe principals to identify characteristics in school administrators who are experiencing success consistently with the free and reduced lunch student population in their schools. With the restrictions increasing in accessing information to identify free and reduced lunch students, future studies may need to consider the possibility of interviewing family members of these students to gain permission to study their children and/or information relating to their children's school success.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Table 1 Increases in Membership

WCPSS Outcomes Summary for 2004-05

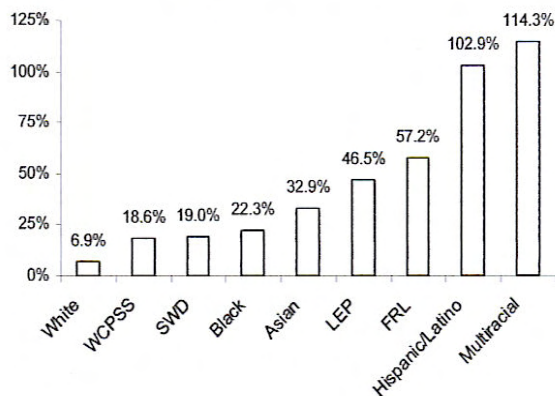
E&amp;R Report No. 05.20

**Table 1**  
**Increases in WCPSS Membership, Disaggregated**

Group	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Increase	Percentage Increase
WCPSS	96,057	100,912	104,464	108,867	113,969	17,912	18.7%
White	60,357	61,959	62,372	63,159	64,495	4,138	6.9%
Black/African American	25,104	26,473	27,778	29,370	30,697	5,593	22.3%
Hispanic/Latino	4,769	5,877	6,978	8,206	9,676	4,907	102.9%
Asian	3,847	4,180	4,483	4,700	5,111	1,264	32.9%
Multiracial	1,719	2,157	2,583	3,139	3,683	1,964	114.3%
SWD	14,021	14,554	15,050	16,088	16,685	2,664	19.0%
FRL	19,654	22,251	24,545	27,920	30,903	11,249	57.2%
LEP	4,286	5,451	6,610	5,974	6,280	1,994	46.5%

Membership percentage increases between 2001 and 2005 show patterns slightly different from student counts, with Multiracial and Hispanic/Latino subgroups standing out as increasing the fastest, followed by FRL and limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. FRL students often are more at risk of school failure due to poverty, and LEP students have special language acquisition issues to address.

**Figure 3**  
**Percentage Change in Membership by Subgroup**  
**Spring 2001 to Spring 2005**



## Appendix B

### Sample Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board For The Use of Human Subjects in Research  
GUIDELINES FOR PREPARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM

An **Informed Consent Statement** has two purposes: (1) to provide adequate information to potential research subjects to make an informed choice as to their participation in a study, and (2) to document their decision to participate. In order to make an informed choice, potential subjects must understand the study, how they are involved in the study, what sort of risks it poses to them and who they can contact if a problem arises (see [informed consent checklist](#) for a full listing of required elements of consent). Please note that **the language used to describe these factors must be understandable to all potential subjects, which typically means an eighth grade reading level.** The informed consent form is to be read and signed by each subject who participates in the study **before** they begin participation in the study. A duplicate copy is to be provided to each subject.

If subjects are **minors (i.e. any subject under the age of 18)** use the following guidelines for obtaining consent:

**0-5 years old** – requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative

**6 – 10 years old** - requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative and verbal assent from the minor. In this case a minor assent script should be prepared and submitted along with a parental consent form.

**11 - 17 years old** - requires signature of both minor and parent/guardian/legal representative

If the subject or legal representative is *unable to read and/or understand the written consent form*, it must be verbally presented in an understandable manner and witnessed (with signature of witness). If there is a good chance that your intended subjects will not be able to read and/or understand a written consent form, please contact the IRB office (919-515-4514) for further instructions.

For your convenience, attached find a sample consent form template that contains necessary information. In generating a form for a specific project, the principal investigator should complete the underlined areas of the form and replicate the bold areas.



**North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

Title of Study – Characteristics of Teachers Who are Consistently Successful With Economically Disadvantaged Students – Who are They? What are They Doing?

Principal Investigator – Donna “Susan” Spivey

Faculty Sponsor – Dr. Paul Bitting – Committee Chair

**We are asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify instructional and/or personal characteristics of teachers who are consistently successful with economically disadvantaged students.**

**INFORMATION**

**If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to** complete 2 interviews that will be audio taped and then transcribed for you to review for accuracy. The researcher would also like to video tape the interviews if you agree for her to do so. If not, the researcher will only audio tape and take field notes during the interviews. The first interview will take approximately one hour and will be conducted at a place and time of your convenience. The researcher would like to interview you in your classroom if you are comfortable with this setting. The first interview will also need to be conducted as soon as possible and before the first classroom observation. The second interview will last approximately 30 minutes and be conducted after the classroom observations are completed as a follow-up time for you to add information to the first interview responses and to share the observation data with you if you choose.

There will be 2 classroom observations that will last 45 minutes to an hour. The researcher will only need a copy of a seating chart of your class and students. No student names should be used on the chart only a “B” for Boy students and a “G” for girl students. Also, you will be asked to identify your students who are economically disadvantaged with an “E” beside the “B” or “G” on the chart. The researcher would like to have a copy of your Lesson Plan for the classes she will be observing, if this is convenient for you to provide – even if this is after the observation. The first observation will need to take place before Winter Break and the second observation will need to take place as soon after the beginning of second semester as possible. The observations will need to be of you with the same class of students. The observations will be video taped with the researcher also charting and taking field notes of your interactions with your students. The video camera will be set up to video as wide an angle of your classroom as possible as the researcher will not be moving the camera to follow you the whole instructional time and to be as minimally disruptive as possible. There will be no one except the researcher observing your class and recording data.

The audio and videotapes will be destroyed as soon as possible after the study is complete. You will have the opportunity to review all transcriptions for accuracy.

The researcher will be available throughout the study to answer any questions you might have or for you to share additional information to your interview and observation data. You can reach me by email, phone or written correspondence. I will provide this information to you before the first interview. Also, if at any time you feel you do not want to continue in my study, I will release you from this agreement – no questions asked.

**RISKS**

**You, your students and your school will be anonymous in this study. Codes will be used to identify you for this study and for recording data associated with you in this study. I will plan carefully with you so there will be minimal disruption to your wonderful instruction. Also, I will be very mindful of your time as to not take any more of your time than agreed to. I know you are very busy. My observations will only be used for my research. They will not, in any way, be used as teacher performance observations for your required administrative observations for the school year. You will also be given opportunities to review the interview transcriptions for accuracy. Videotapes and audiotapes will be destroyed after the study is completed.**

**BENEFITS**

The benefits of this study are that I hope to add to teacher knowledge - identifiable characteristics of teachers who are consistently successful with this growing, high needs student population, so more teachers might enhance their performance with these at – risk students. Also, this information might help reduce teacher burnout with this student population by knowing more ways to be successful with these students. In addition, I hope this information will be helpful for administrators of schools that serve economically disadvantaged children. This information might also benefit you directly by adding to your personal knowledge of why you work so successfully with this student population.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in computer files. Written documents/field notes, photographs and tapes will be stored in a personal safe or a locked brief case. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study.

**COMPENSATION** (if applicable)

For participating in this study you will receive a \$40 gift certificate to a local restaurant, teacher supply or office supply store of your choice. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will receive a \$15 gift certificate.

**EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT** (N/A)**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Susan Spivey, at 451 R & S Lake Rd. Semora, NC 27343 or Cary Elementary School or by email [dspivey@wcpss.net](mailto:dspivey@wcpss.net) or by phone = h) 336-234-9172, w) 919-460-3459, c) 919-291-0734. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed at your request.

**CONSENT**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

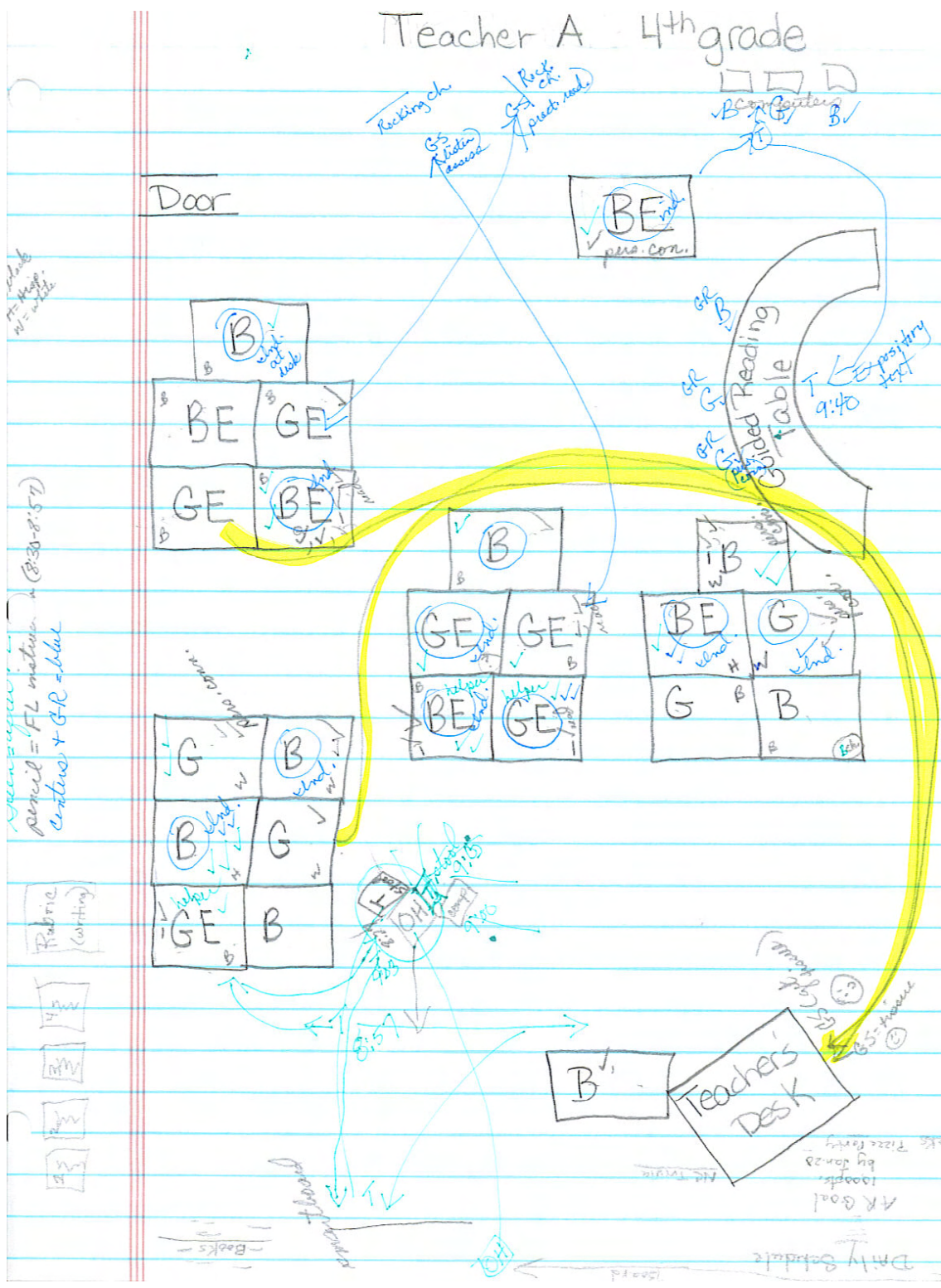
1. Talk to me about the history of your personal school experiences?
2. Describe your teaching experience. (Years of experience? Elementary, middle, high school? Public or private school? Grade level? Schools and school communities?)
3. Tell me about your current position. (How long at this position? School? School system?)
4. What is your philosophy of teaching? (Is it the same for all students you teach? If so, why? If not, why?)
5. Describe how your philosophy effects how you teach your students.
6. How would you describe an *effective* teacher?
7. How do you plan for your instruction? Do you make the same plans for your economically disadvantaged (E.D.) (Free and reduced lunch status) students? If so/not, what drives your decision making? Why change assignments or do something different for these certain students?
8. What kind of accommodations/compensations, if any, do you make for your E.D. students?
9. When you are planning, do you include how the physical set up of your room might effect your instruction? (Why? Why not?) Describe how your room is designed and set up for instruction.
10. What area(s) in your setting/instructional space/room are most important to you? (Why?)

Interview Guide continued...

11. Is being poor, like being LD? How do you compensate, respond to it?
12. Certain students need certain types of support. How do you determine what E.D. students need to be successful?
13. How would you describe your teaching style?
14. Describe how you implement your instruction.
15. Can you help me understand your work by describing a recent teaching interaction you had with an E.D. student?
16. Does your understanding of the federal legislation, “No Child Left Behind”, influence your instructional planning? (If so, how? If not, what might you do, knowing the make up of your class, to address the differing populations of students in your class?)
17. Your principal told me you’re very good with E.D. students. Is that a skill you’re aware of? Why do you think you’re successful with these students - in your opinion or in the eyes of others?
18. I’d like for us to finish our time by you telling me any one story that comes to mind of an instructional time with an E.D. student that was particularly effective.
19. Is there anything else you would like to tell me before we finish? Is there anything we didn’t talk about today you would like to discuss?

### Appendix D

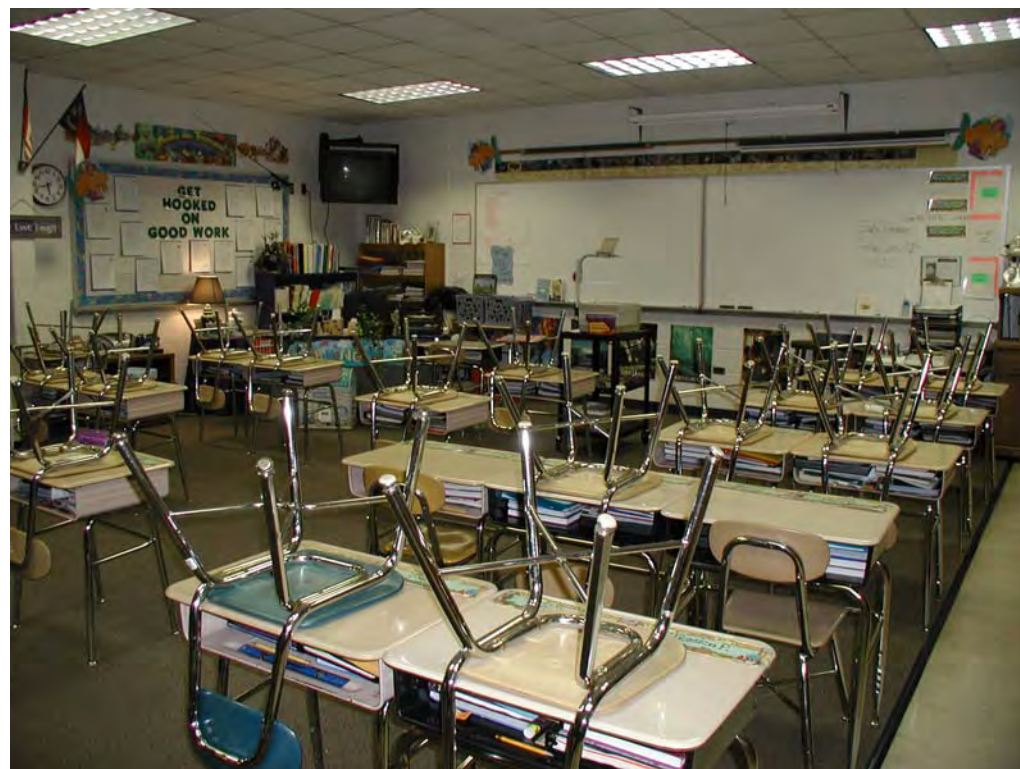
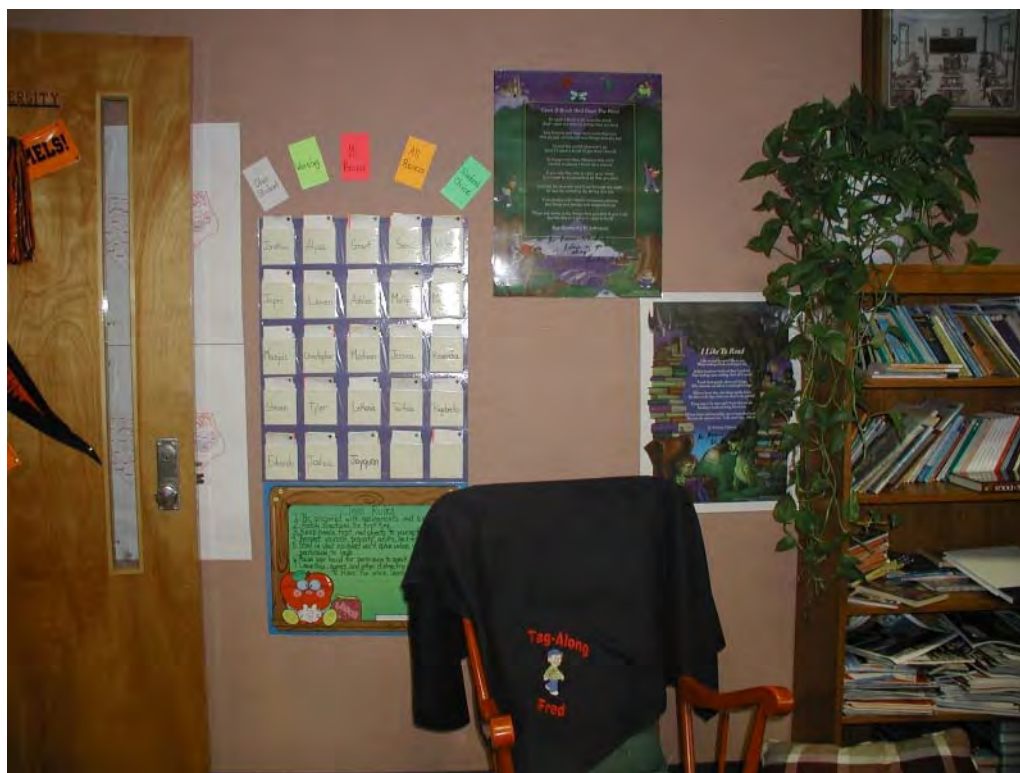
### Teacher A Observation Chart 1





## Appendix E

### Teacher A Classroom Photographs



## Appendix E cont.

## Teacher A Classroom Photographs





## Appendix F

### Teacher B Classroom Photographs



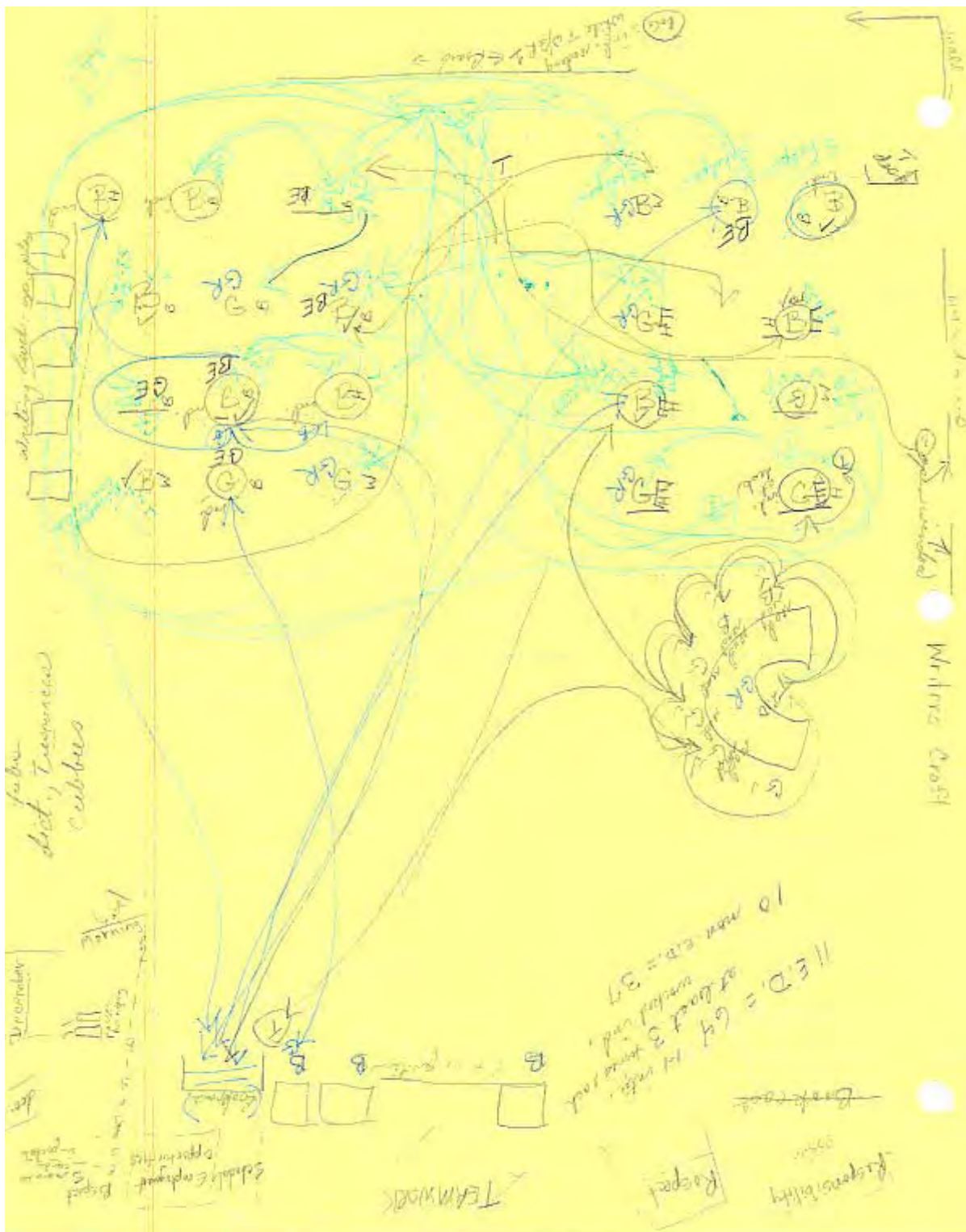
**Appendix F cont.**

**Teacher B Classroom Photographs**



### Appendix G

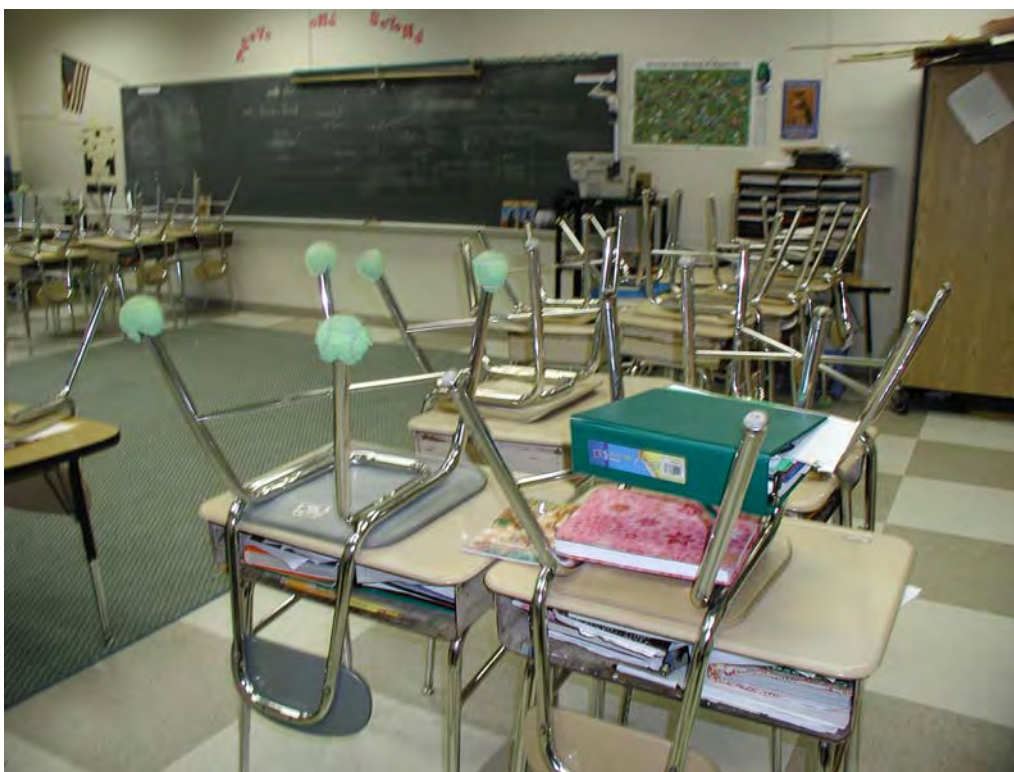
### Teacher B Observation Chart 1





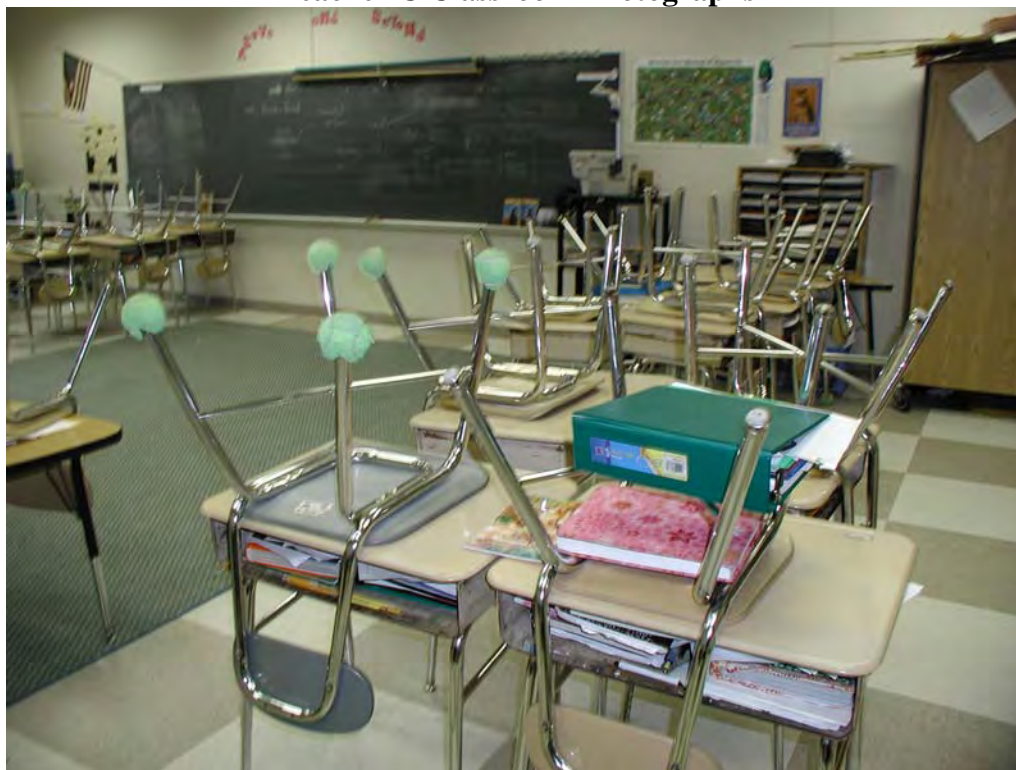
## Appendix H

### Teacher C Classroom Photographs



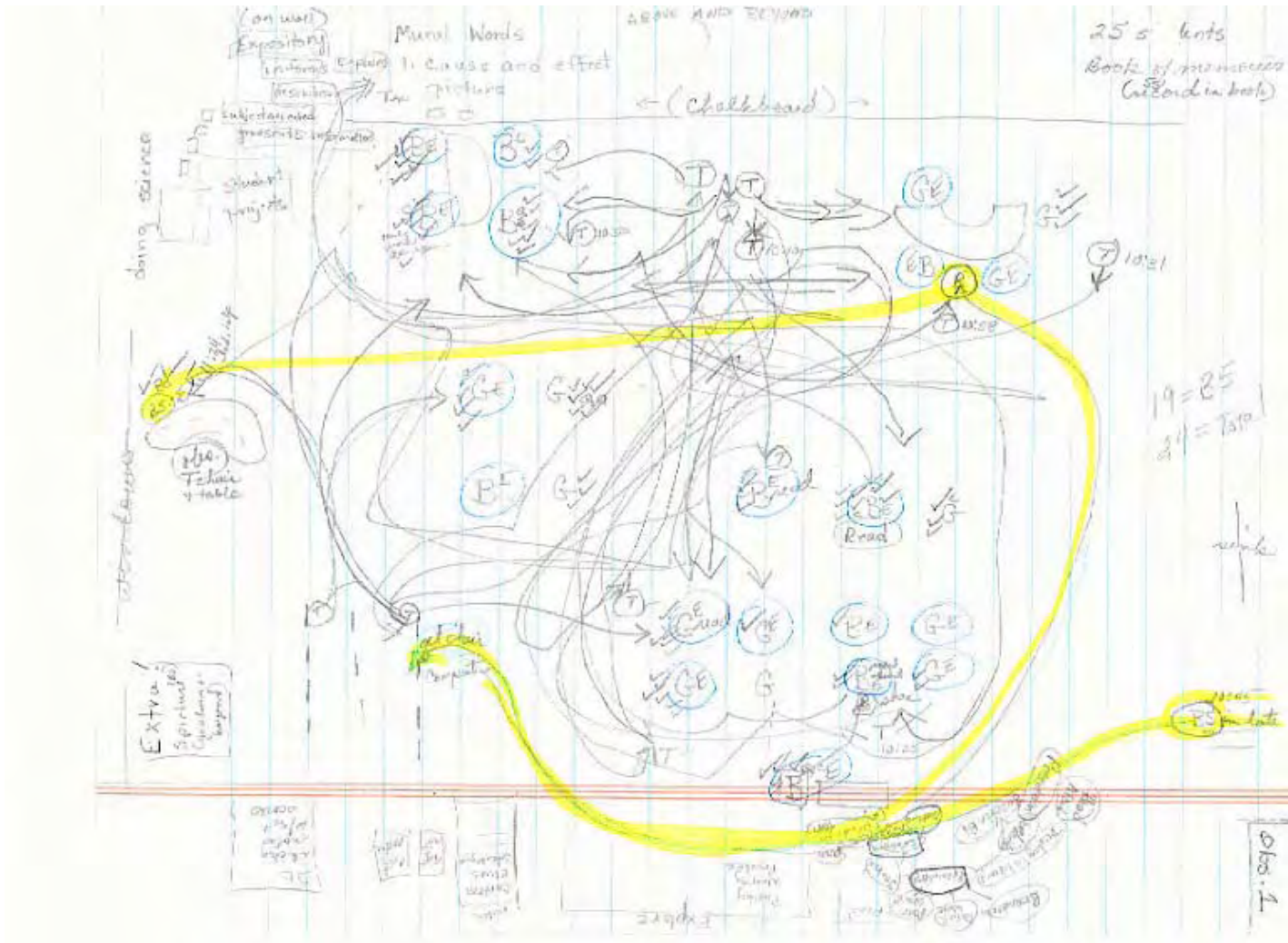
Appendix H cont.

Teacher C Classroom Photographs



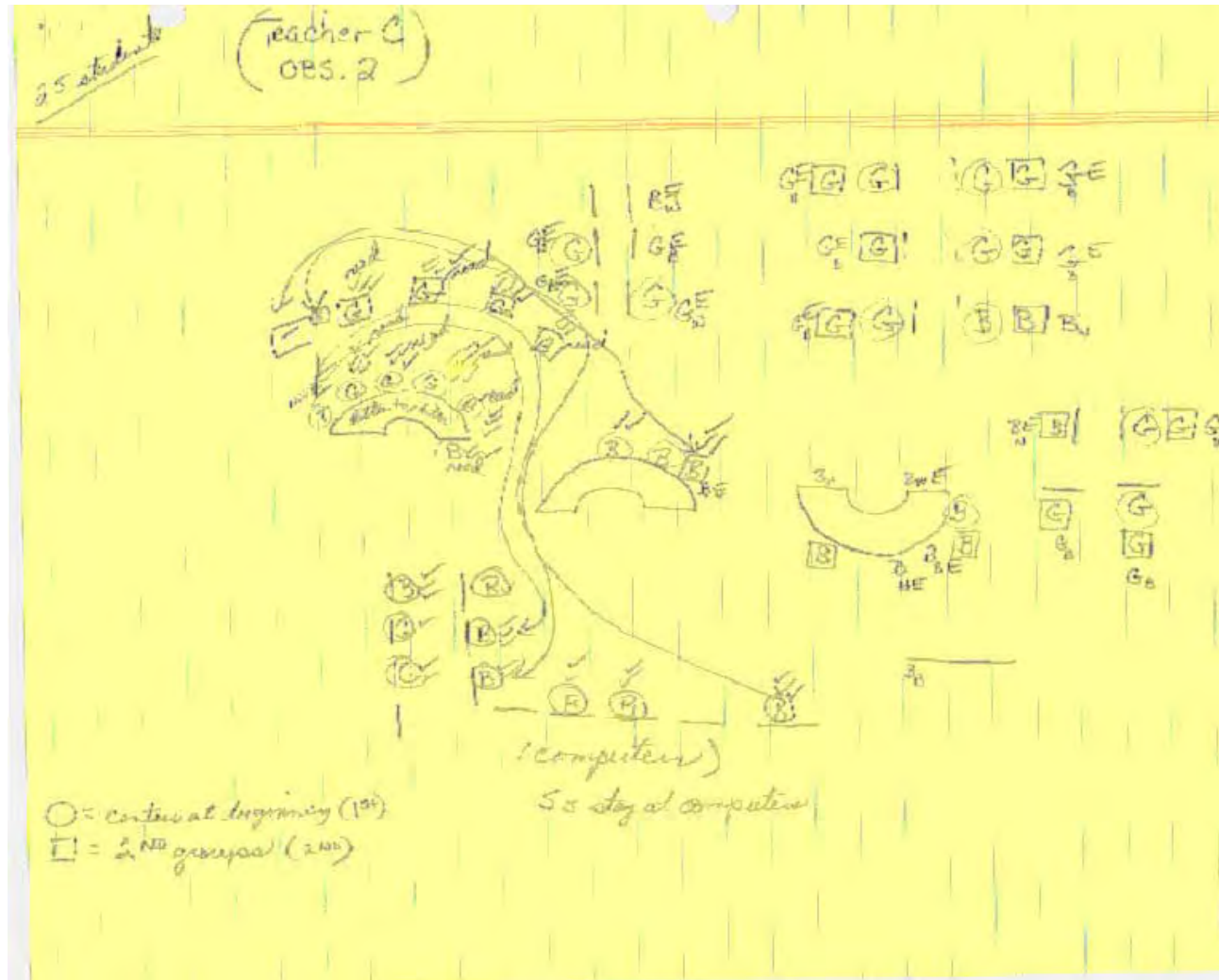
### Appendix I

### Teacher C Observation Chart 1



Appendix I cont.

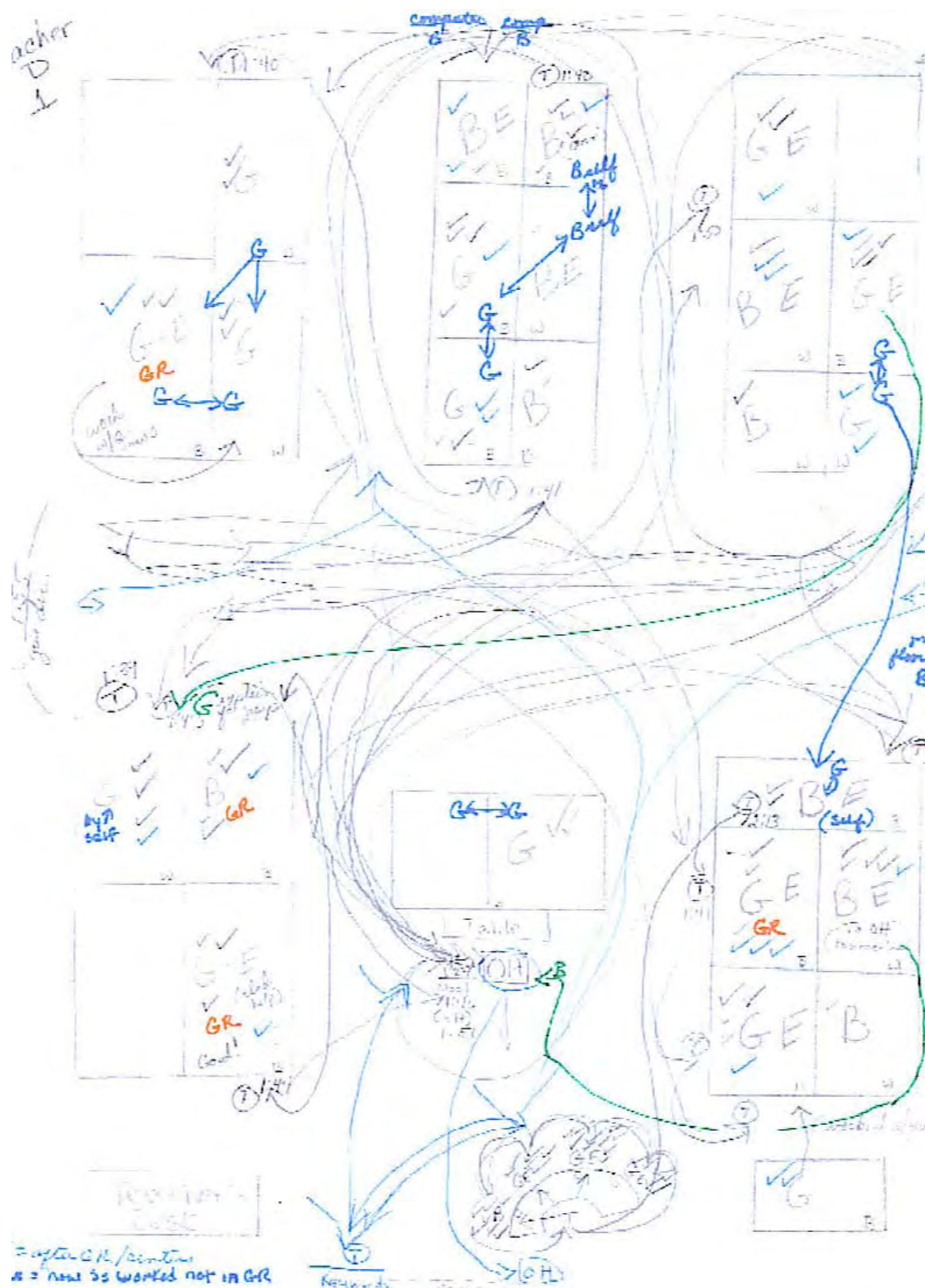
Teacher C Observation Chart 2





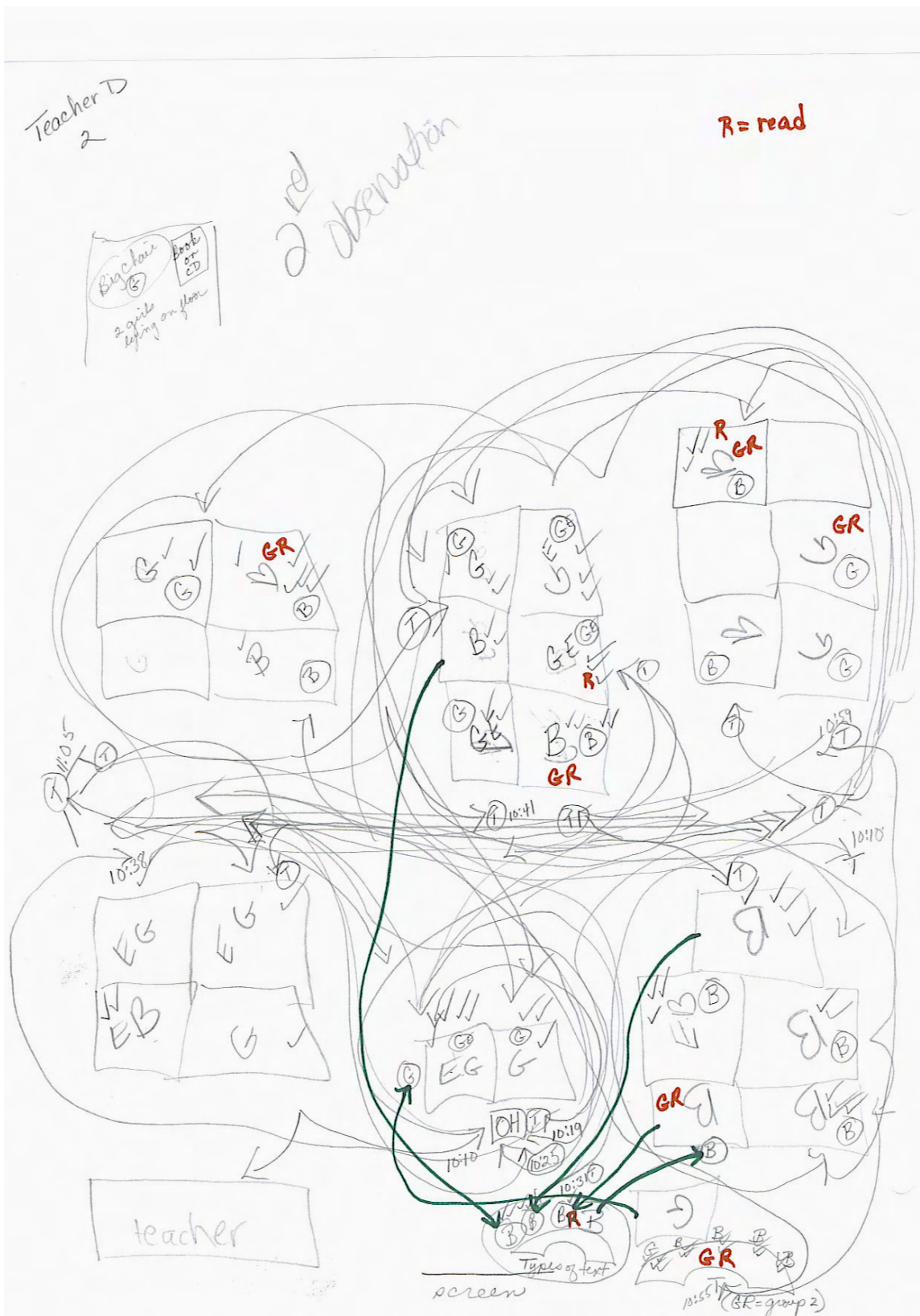
Appendix J

Teacher D Observation Chart 1



Appendix J cont.

Teacher D Observation Chart 2



## Appendix K

### Teacher D Classroom Photographs



Appendix K cont.

Teacher D Classroom Photographs



**APPENDIX L**  
**North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument**  
**(see 8.4 Reflective Practitioner)**

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 1

**TPAI-R Full Review---Experienced Teachers**

**Teacher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Assignment** \_\_\_\_\_

**School** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions**

- Based on the evidence from the formal observation of an entire class period, the pre-conference notes, rating form, and discussion, artifacts, and the Individual Growth Plan, the evaluator is to rate the teacher's performance with respect to the 8 major functions of teaching listed below.
- The evaluator must add pertinent comments at the end of each major function for which a rating of Above Standard, Below Standard, or Unsatisfactory is given.
- The teacher is provided an opportunity to react to the evaluator's ratings and comments.
- The evaluator and the teacher must discuss the results of the appraisal and any recommended actions pertinent to it.
- The teacher and the evaluator must sign the instrument in the assigned spaces.
- The instrument must be filed in the teacher's personnel folder.
- The rating scale will include the four Levels of Performance described below.

**4 Above Standard**

*Performance is consistently high. Teaching practices are demonstrated at a high level. Teacher seeks to expand scope of competencies and undertakes additional appropriate responsibilities.*

**3 At Standard**

*Performance within this function area is consistently adequate/acceptable. Teaching practices fully meet all performance expectations at an acceptable level. Teacher maintains an adequate scope of competencies and performs additional responsibilities as assigned.*

**2 Below Standard**

*Performance within this function area is sometimes inadequate/unacceptable and needs improvement. Teacher requires supervision and assistance to maintain an adequate scope of competencies and sometimes fails to perform additional responsibilities as assigned.*

**1 Unsatisfactory**

*Performance within this function area is consistently inadequate or unacceptable and most practices require considerable improvement to fully meet minimum expectations. Teacher requires close and frequent supervision in the performance of all responsibilities.*

**Above Standard**

**At Standard**

**Below Standard**

**Unsatisfactory**

**1. Major Function: Management of Instructional Time**

1.1 Teacher has materials, supplies, and equipment ready at the start of the lesson or instructional activity.

1.2 Teacher gets the class started quickly.

1.3 Teacher uses available time for learning and keeps students on task.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 2

**Above Standard****At Standard****Below Standard****Unsatisfactory****2. Major Function: Management of Student Behavior**

2.1 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern the handling of routine administrative matters.

2.2 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student verbal participation and talk during different types of activities---whole class instruction, small group instruction.

2.3 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student movement in the classroom during different types of instructional activities.

2.4 Teacher frequently monitors the behavior of all students during whole-class, small group, and seatwork activities and during transitions between instructional activities.

2.5 Teacher stops inappropriate behavior promptly and consistently, yet maintains the dignity of the student.

2.6 Teacher analyzes the classroom environment and makes adjustment to support learning and enhance social relationships.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Above Standard****At Standard****Below Standard****Unsatisfactory****3. Major Function: Instructional Presentation**

3.1 Teacher links instructional activities to prior learning.

3.2 Teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning activities that make these aspects of subject matter understandable and meaningful for students.

3.3 Teacher speaks fluently and precisely.

3.4 Teacher provides relevant examples and demonstrates to illustrate concepts and skills.

3.5 Teacher assigns tasks and asks appropriate levels of questions that students handle with a high rate of success.

3.6 Teacher conducts the lesson or instructional activity at a brisk pace, slowing presentations when necessary for student understanding but avoiding unnecessary slowdowns.

3.7 Teacher makes transitions between lessons and between instructional activities within lesson effectively and smoothly.

3.8 Teacher makes sure that assignment is clear.

3.9 The teacher creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

3.10 The teacher uses instructional strategies that encourage the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

3.11 The teacher uses technology to support instruction.

3.12 The teacher encourages students to be engaged in and responsible for their own learning.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 3

**Above Standard**

**At Standard**

**Below Standard**

**Unsatisfactory**

**4. Major Function: Instructional Monitoring**

4.1 Teacher maintains clear, firm, and reasonable work standards and due dates.

4.2 Teacher circulates to check all students' performances.

4.3 Teacher routinely uses oral, written, and other work products to evaluate the effects of instructional activities and to check student progress.

4.4 Teacher poses questions clearly and one at a time.

4.5 Teacher uses student responses to adjust teaching as necessary.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Above Standard**

**At Standard**

**Below Standard**

**Unsatisfactory**

**5. Major Function: Instructional Feedback**

5.1 Teacher provides feedback on the correctness or incorrectness of in-class work to encourage student growth.

5.2 Teacher regularly provides prompt feedback on out-of-class work.

5.3 Teacher affirms a correct oral response appropriately and moves on.

5.4 Teacher provides sustaining feedback after an incorrect response by probing, repeating the question, giving a clue, or allowing more time.

5.5 The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Above Standard**

**At Standard**

**Below Standard**

**Unsatisfactory**

**6. Major Function: Facilitating Instruction**

6.1 Teacher has long- and short-term instructional plans that are compatible with school and district curricular goals, the school improvement plan, the NC Standard Course of Study, and the diverse needs of students and the community.

6.2 Teacher uses diagnostic information obtained from tests and other formal and informal assessment procedures to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner.

6.3 Teacher maintains accurate records to document student performance.

6.4 Teacher understands how students learn and develop and plans appropriate instructional activities for diverse student needs and different levels of difficulty.

6.5 Teacher uses available human and material resources to support the instructional program.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 4

- Above Standard**
- At Standard**
- Below Standard**
- Unsatisfactory**

**7. Major Function: Communicating within the Educational Environment**

7.1 Teacher treats all students in a fair and equitable manner.

7.2 Teacher participates in the development of a broad vision of the school.

7.3 Teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and community agencies to support students' learning and well being.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Above Standard**
- At Standard**
- Below Standard**
- Unsatisfactory**

**8. Major Function: Performing Non-Instructional Duties**

8.1 Teacher carries out non-instructional duties as assigned and/or as need is perceived to ensure student safety outside the classroom.

8.2 Teacher adheres to established laws, policies, rules, and regulations.

8.3 Teacher follows a plan for professional development and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

8.4 Teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his or her decisions and actions on students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Evaluator's Summary:**  
Comments

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**Teacher's Reactions to Evaluation**

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Evaluator's Signature and Date

\*Teacher's Signature and Date

*\*Signature indicates that the written evaluation has been seen and discussed and does not necessarily indicate agreement.*