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**PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY GRADE TEACHERS ABOUT READING
CURRICULUM AND EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION**

by

Melody Elizabeth Carr

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Dedications

For my parents, Scott and Wanda. Thank you for being there to support me through this entire process. I could not have done this without your unwavering support. For my sister, Alisha. Thank you for being one of my biggest supporters. I am forever thankful for you and how you support me in life.

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Lastly, but certainly not least, for the love of my life, Jacob. Thank you for showing me more love and support than I could have imagined. The love and support you have shown me throughout this process makes me all the more excited to become your wife.

Abstract

Melody Carr

PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY GRADE TEACHERS ABOUT READING CURRICULUM AND EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION

2023-2024

Xiufang Chen, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

This thesis examines the perceptions of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention of primary grade teachers. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions: How do primary grade teachers view early literacy intervention? How do teachers perceive the basal reading program, *Reading Wonders*? While there are studies that focus on teacher perceptions, research is limited in the area of teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. Data was collected using a qualitative approach using a survey, interviews, and a focus group discussion. Findings reveal that teachers feel that they need to be prepared when providing early literacy intervention, while also needing to feel supported by the reading curriculum.

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Chapter I

Scope of the Study

During my two years of being a basic skills teacher, I have worked with students who are reading below grade level. As a basic skills teacher, I pull these students out of the general education classroom in small groups to focus on foundational reading skills. Students who are considered low-level readers come to my classroom to receive basic skills instruction. An area of inequity that I have observed is that students come to me right away, where there are no strategies put into place within the general education classroom before they come to see me for small group instruction. Classroom teachers are often not provided with materials or a curriculum that provides differentiation in the way that all students need. Students take part in a whole group lesson and are broken up into small groups. Students are grouped together based on their reading level, where I pull out students who are below grade level in reading.

Our school uses the *Reading Wonders* basal curriculum. Based on the *Reading Wonders* curriculum, I have guided reading books that I am supposed to use for my instruction. There are only three levels for each week: approaching leveled readers, on leveled readers, and beyond leveled readers. I began using these books for the first week of my guided reading instruction during my first year of teaching. However, I realized that the students I was servicing were not engaged with the texts, nor were they comprehending the text. I made the decision to use different guided reading books that met more of my students' needs. I chose books that were at their instructional level. I also chose books that would be of interest to students based on individual interests. However, classroom teachers in my school use the *Reading Wonders* guided reading books within

their small group instruction. Unfortunately, using the program does not provide students with choice in text selection, nor are they given opportunities to develop critical reading skills.

As I thought more about the books I used in my classroom and the reasons I decided to use alternative books, I began to wonder how teachers were feeling about their small group instruction. My school's budget continues to get cut every year, so I know that materials for classroom teachers are scarce. With this information, I began to think about what primary grade teachers do in their classroom and what materials they use for small group instruction. I began to wonder if they used the guided reading books provided with the curriculum, if they used books or passages from online resources, or if they bought their own sets of books to use. Throughout all of the questions I had, it always came back to wanting to understand teachers' perceptions of the materials they used, if they used materials provided by the reading curriculum, and what their perceptions are of their reading instruction and the reading curriculum.

When I realized how many students may be falling between the cracks because of this type of reading curriculum, I decided to study this topic further. As I started analyzing more of the curriculum I realized that there are issues of engagement and cultural responsiveness. Most of the texts are not engaging for students, which results in students not connecting to what they are reading. Although there are books and activities that address cultural diversity, students remain unengaged with the material. Due to this realization, I began to ask the following questions: What do teachers have to say about what is going on in their classrooms related to literacy instruction? Are their perceptions of this reading curriculum similar to mine or completely different? Understanding

primary grade teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and reading instruction in their own classrooms can benefit students and teachers alike. By gaining a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and reading instruction, the way curriculums are used in the classroom could improve and result in a positive impact on teachers' teaching and students' learning.

Based on the issues and inequities I have observed, I have chosen to focus on three teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and reading instruction. This study examined how teachers perceive the reading curriculum they use for their literacy instruction, as well as their reading instruction and how those two aspects combined impact students' learning.

Story of the Question

When I began looking at the *Reading Wonders* curriculum during my first year of teaching, I realized how the curriculum could be impacting reading instruction in a negative way. Before I began the current school year, I realized that students who test below grade level in reading during the beginning of the year assessment are pulled out of the classroom for twenty minutes a day. This made me think about reasons as to why students would be pulled out for small group instruction without interventions being placed within the classroom prior to them being pulled out. This led me to wonder if the reading curriculum does not provide teachers with enough differentiated instruction to provide support for struggling readers within the classroom. Another aspect I noticed was the levelings of the guided readers and the lack of engagement my own students had with reading them. The texts that I began using were the approaching leveled readers. The approaching leveled readers are designed for students who are reading below the

expected reading level using the Lexile scaling. However, the books had complicated words that students who were learning how to decode struggled with, as well as making little to no connection with the text. This resulted in my already frustrated readers becoming more frustrated, as they struggled to decode the words and make connections with the text. This led me to ask the questions, “Why are students who are considered low-leveled readers immediately pulled out of the classroom for basic skills? Does the reading curriculum play a role in students’ needs not being met?” These questions have led to further investigation of *Reading Wonders*.

I have been able to work closely with classroom teachers who use the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*. As a basic skills teacher, I discuss students’ needs with classroom teachers and continue to touch base with them based on students’ recurring needs or their progress. We work as a team to try to support students between the general education classroom and my classroom. The teachers I work with provide me with the skills they are addressing in their classroom so I can also reinforce what students are doing in the classroom as well as strengthening the foundational skills. Throughout the last two years, I have worked primarily with students in the primary grades who are considered to be low-level readers, as well as K-2 grade level teachers. I have had the opportunity to observe how students respond to the reading curriculum and how they respond to reading instruction outside of the reading curriculum. I have also had the opportunity to observe teachers using the *Reading Wonders* curriculum. I have seen students struggle with reading and maintain the label of low-level readers throughout the school year and even into the next. I have been able to observe students’ interactions with reading instruction in a small group setting.

Although I placed my focus on other books to use, I noticed that classroom teachers use the guided reading books that came with the curriculum in their instruction. This led me to question how classroom teachers use these books along with other materials provided with the curriculum in their classrooms. The other materials include high-frequency word cards, picture vocabulary word cards, a writing companion, decodable readers, unit assessments, and retelling cards. The high-frequency word cards contain one high-frequency word on each card. The picture vocabulary word cards contain a vocabulary word in the corner with a picture modeling the word. It also contains the definition of the word with examples of the word being used in sentences. The writing companion is a workbook that correlates with the reading textbook. Decodable readers are the readers mentioned previously that are used for guided reading instruction within a small group setting. Unit assessments are paper based multiple choice and short answer responses. The retelling cards contain support that is modeled and guided for students to retell selections from the curriculum. Another aspect that I noticed was how much content teachers had to look through when planning their lessons. The curriculum guides are thick with multiple skills to teach based on the needs of the class as a whole. As a basic skills teacher, I have flexibility in how I teach my students foundational reading skills. The basic skills program differentiates instruction for students based on weaknesses in reading. Due to this, the program provides opportunities to use additional strategies to provide students with opportunities to strengthen these skills in a small group setting. I follow where the teachers are in the curriculum to make sure my instruction still aligns with what teachers are teaching in their classrooms. However, I do not use the curriculum to the extent the teachers do in the classroom. I use

the information to help guide which strategies classroom teachers are using in the classroom, but I am able to form instruction based on student needs. This led me to inquire about primary grade teachers' perceptions of the curriculum since that is solely what they use in the classroom.

Statement of the Problem

The research question that will be investigated in this study is: How do primary grade teachers view early literacy intervention in our school? What are teacher perceptions of the required basal reading program in our school? What can be learned from teacher voices regarding the curriculum? Teachers play an important role in students' learning. Reading instruction within the classroom rests on teachers. Borko, Shavelson, and Stern (1981) state, "It also seems reasonable to assume that teachers' decisions are one of the factors that affect student learning" (p. 453). Teachers make decisions based on their students' needs in all content areas. Borko et. al. (1981) continued by stating, "Our conception of teachers' decision making suggests that grouping students provides a way for teachers to reduce the complexity of the task of teaching reading" (p. 460). Teachers use information that they learn about their students during whole group instruction and assessments to group them for reading instruction in small groups. Teachers make decisions based on their students' needs and levels. These decisions affect how students are grouped for small group instruction, as well as what skill set students need to focus on within reading.

Teachers make crucial decisions regarding reading instruction. Teacher perceptions are defined as "cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal perspectives and beliefs held by educators regarding various aspects of their professional roles, the teaching and

learning process, and the educational environment” (Polat & Çelik, 2023, p. 27).

Understanding and gaining a deeper knowledge of their perceptions of this instruction, as well as the curriculum they use, is important in understanding how they view their own instruction. It is also important because if teachers’ perceptions of reading instruction and reading comprehension become more known, the more instruction and curriculum can shift towards meeting the needs of all learners.

Teacher-centered curriculum provides teachers with material that is centered around a more scripted approach to teaching, rather than a student-centered approach. The basal reading approach tends not to be student-centered. The texts that are incorporated into the curriculum are, “commercially prepared and marketed resource materials that provide classroom reading instruction in elementary and middle schools” (Reutzel and Cooter, 2005, p. 162). Instructional materials are provided, which include texts. Teachers have a paced curriculum that they need to adhere to, which leaves little room for differentiation and reteaching skills as needed. As a basic skills teacher that works closely with primary grade teachers, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of their reading instruction and the reading curriculum that they use on a regular basis. In addition to gaining a deeper understanding about this, this study could also impact how primary grade teachers view the reading curriculum and reading instruction within their own classrooms.

For students to have the motivation to read within the classroom, high quality engaging texts need to be provided. In addition to engaging texts, students need to be provided with opportunities to interact with the texts through multiple forms, such as supporting activities that correlate with the texts. For students to become engaged with

reading, they must be provided with a positive literacy environment to be able to interact with. Guthrie, Alverson, and Poundstone (1999) state, “students who are not self-initiating readers will participate in reading if the classroom provides support in the form of relevant activities, guided choices, or social interchange” (p. 10). Struggling readers benefit from interacting with engaging and high quality texts. All students need to be given an equal opportunity to be able to actively engage with texts within the classroom in order to interact with texts in a positive manner.

Another aspect that struggling readers benefit from is responsive practice in order to support their achievement. Teachers’ practices within the classroom affect students in their comprehension and understanding. McTigue and Rimm-Kaufman (2010) state, “Findings showed that teachers’ use of RC (Responsive Classroom) practices contributed to better academic performance and social behavior as well as children’s positive perception of school” (p. 10). For struggling readers, the practices of classroom teachers having a responsive approach to instruction benefits students in not just reading achievement, but also in how they perceive school and their education.

As a middle-class teacher, I have been teaching basic skills at the same school for two years, as I am entering my third year of teaching at an under-served school. I have had the opportunity to observe students and families throughout the last two years. Although I did not go to a low-income school during my time as a student, this has provided me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that low-income schools face in comparison to other schools across the state. To be considered a low-income school, “20 percent or more of the children ages five to 17 served by the LEA must be from families with incomes below the poverty line” (Department of

Education, 2023). The community the study took place in is at a 16.1% poverty rate. Low-income schools are susceptible to budget cuts, so resources and materials become more scarce and the funds for a high quality reading curriculum become less (Wigger et. al., 2020). This seems to be the pattern for low-income schools districts across the country. Understanding the lack of funding that is provided to low-income schools provides a better picture of the lack of resources that teachers are able to acquire.

Students across the nation are showing a decrease in reading levels across grades Kindergarten to second grade. Data reveals from state testing that during the 2021-2022 school year, 37% of students were proficient in ELA (U.S. News). Although this percentage is revealed for third through eighth grade, it is important to have an understanding of where students within the school place within ELA, as foundational reading skills are important when taking this type of assessment. Primary grade level reading is when foundational reading skills are formed and developed. Gaining a deeper understanding of how teachers approach early literacy intervention and reading curriculum is important to understand how that impacts students as they continue through the rest of elementary school and into middle school.

Allington (2013) suggests that schools having a core reading curriculum have not proven to have lessons that are effective. The core reading curriculum being the reading curriculum that teachers use within the classroom as the primary form of instruction (Allington, 2013). Thus, reading instruction revolves around curriculums that do not provide texts or lessons that meet the needs of struggling readers. Allington (2013) states, “It is our struggling readers who will continue to pay the price for such ill-begotten plans” (p. 525). Curriculums that are paced and provide little to no room for

differentiation leaves struggling readers to continue to fall further behind. As they struggle to strengthen important reading skills, the curriculum continues to move along teaching new skills. Allington (2013) goes on to say, “The instruction we currently provide struggling readers too often focuses on isolated lessons targeting specific skill deficits” (p. 527). Instead of reading instruction providing a differentiated approach to reading, specific skills are focused on in isolated lessons, where those specific skills should be integrated through instruction.

Reading Wonders, which is a basal reading approach, represents that is “implicitly ideological and relatively inaccessible” (Jaeger, 2018, p. 133). The materials that accompany this curriculum are lacking in reading engagement and text complexity. Jaeger makes the observation that, “nearly all selections lead the reader to a predefined, noncontroversial point of view” (2018, p. 134). Furthermore, texts that are provided within this curriculum are difficult for readers to relate to, which results in a lack of reading comprehension. According to Duffy, Roehler, and Putnam (1987), “Instead of being given considerable latitude in how to use the basal textbook, as was formerly the case, many teachers are now expected to follow specific directions and procedures regarding its use” (p. 358). The basal reading approach has become a scripted and paced approach where teachers have little to no room for differentiation or redirection based on the needs of their students. The accompanied readers of this specific curriculum reveal the same problem.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter two will provide a review of literature that focuses on reading curriculum, and teachers’ perceptions related to literacy instruction. Chapter three will

describe the research methodology and the context of the study. Chapter four will review the data collected and provide an analysis of the data, as well as the findings of the study. Chapter five will include the conclusion of the study and implications for teaching and research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

As students in the primary grades across the country continue to fall further behind in developing critical reading skills, curriculums continue to be adopted and teachers continue to try to understand their students' needs while also adhering to the pace of the curriculum. Educators teach literacy everyday, yet some reading curriculum does not meet the needs of every student, nor do most teacher preparation programs adequately prepare teachers to teach literacy in their classroom (Will, 2018). Reading curriculum is a crucial part of a students' development of literacy skills. Educators use this curriculum to form their lessons and set objectives for their students to meet each day. Understanding teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and reading instruction, as well as their own instruction in how to teach reading, provides an insider look into how teachers form their instruction based on their student needs and the curriculum that is provided to them (Borko et. al., 1981). There are many benefits to hearing teachers' perceptions about what goes on in their classrooms. Understanding educators' perceptions of reading curriculum and reading instruction in their classrooms is important when approaching discussions about curriculum and instruction.

This chapter discusses studies focused on literacy instruction by examining pre-service and in-service teachers' understandings around implementing reading instruction. The chapter also reviews literature on teacher's reading curriculum preference.

How Teachers Learn to Teach Reading

There are numerous studies that reveal the level of understanding teachers have in literacy instruction based on their pre-service teaching experiences. Gaining a deeper understanding of the amount of instruction teachers received within literacy instruction leading up to becoming teachers is an important aspect to analyze when discussing perceptions they have regarding reading curriculum and reading instruction (Will, 2018). Having an understanding of teachers' knowledge base of literacy instruction can shed light on teachers' view of reading curriculum and reading instruction within their own classrooms (Borko, 1981).

Porter et. al. (2021) set out to characterize the literacy knowledge of teachers throughout the different levels of instructional support in a southern U.S. state. Instead of focusing on just general education teachers, Porter et. al. (2021) incorporated different types of educators into the study to determine the literacy knowledge base of a range of types of educators. Participants included one thousand five-hundred seventy four educators, which included general education teachers, reading interventionists, and special education teachers (2021). Data was collected using a knowledge test, which focused on teachers' knowledge of "phonological sensitivity, phonemic awareness, decoding, encoding, and morphology" (Porter et. al, 2021, p. 86). Any educator who is giving direct literacy instruction needs to understand these concepts in order to effectively provide students with foundational skills for reading. The results of this study revealed that, compared to all of the participating educators, reading interventionists were the most knowledgeable of all five areas of literacy that were included in the knowledge test. These results reveal that, because reading interventionists have had direct instruction

regarding how to teach reading, they have more of the knowledge base necessary to teach foundational reading skills.

Early Literacy Intervention

Early literacy interventions are important within the classroom because students are learning important literacy skills within the primary grades. Foorman et. al. (2017) conducted a study that focused on using two different pull-out intervention methods. One intervention consisted of materials that stood alone and the other intervention using materials that were incorporated into the main reading program (Foorman et. al., 2017). Data was collected through a reading baseline measure, focusing on “Letter Sounds (kindergarten only), Phonological Awareness (kindergarten only), Word Reading (grades 1 and 2), and Spelling (grade 2 only)” (Foorman et. al., 2017, pp. 4-5). There was also a language baseline conducted, which focused on “Vocabulary Pairs, Following Directions, and Sentence Comprehension (kindergarten and grade 1)” (Foorman, et. al., 2017, p. 5). This baseline measure was then compared to reading outcomes and language outcomes using some of the same subtests (2017). Participants in cohort 1 consisted of 27 schools with 1,598 students within one school year, while cohort 2 consisted of 28 schools with 1,870 students (Foorman et. al., 2017). The results of the study revealed that participants improved through reading and language within both interventions (Foorman et. al., 2017). Both interventions proved to be effective, but the embedded intervention contained comprehension activities, which may have supported English learner students (Foorman et. al., 2017). These results indicate that early literacy intervention is important for students while developing important literacy skills.

In a similar study conducted by Miles et. al. (2022), a focus was placed on the Reading Rescue intervention program and the impact small groups have in relation to one-on-one intervention instruction. Data was collected through two rounds of data collection from two cohorts. Participants in cohort one consisted of 10 schools in New York City, with 146 students. Participants in cohort 2 consisted of 8 of the original 10 schools with 104 students. Data was collected using pre and post assessment data, which focused on fluency. The results of the study revealed that students who received the intervention made growth in their reading skills compared to the students in the control group. The results also revealed that students who participated in the intervention within a small group made greater gains than students who participated in the intervention in a one-on-one setting. These results indicate that the students who participated in the intervention group received targeted instruction of specific reading skills and made growth based on the decisions that the teachers made regarding instruction in the classroom. The decisions teachers make to group students within instruction impacts their learning and understanding of literacy skills.

Teacher Perceptions of Reading Programs

When it comes to reading instruction, the standards that teachers use to teach reading impacts their perception of how students meet those standards (Schwartz, 2023). Tina Costantino-Lane (2020) conducted a study that focused on Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of reading instruction. The participants that were included in the study were Kindergarten teachers. Data was collected using "a researcher-designed questionnaire consisting of 35 closed-ended questions and two open-ended prompts" (Costantino-Lane, 2020, p. 238). This questionnaire focused on demographic, instructional strategies,

characteristics of students, mastery of standards in reading, and two prompts that were open-ended (Costantino-Lane, 2020). The results of this study revealed that teachers' perceptions of reading instruction in Kindergarten were "preposterous to teach reading in kindergarten before the oral language of students is adequately developed" (Costantino-Lane, 2020, p. 244). Teachers have a deeper understanding of students' and their needs because they are regularly in the classroom. Keeping teachers' perceptions in mind when discussing reading curriculum and reading instruction is important to gain a deeper understanding of needs of students that may not be addressed through the reading curriculum.

Understanding teachers' perceptions of assessments regarding components of reading is important when analyzing how they view curriculum and instruction (Guskey, 2003). Beachy et. al. (2023) conducted a study that related to teachers' perceptions of reading assessments. The purpose of this study was to continue to develop the Perceptions and Knowledge of Assessment in Literacy Survey (PKALS), a survey used to measure "teachers' perceptions and knowledge of reading assessment and data literacy" (Beachy, et.al, 2023, p. 573). Data was collected through a survey called, "Perceptions and Knowledge of Assessment in Literacy Survey" (Beachy et. al., 2023, p. 562). This survey focused on the following reading components: "phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension" (Beachy et. al., 2023, p. 562). The survey was designed to focus on these key aspects within reading assessment to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' knowledge and perceptions of reading assessments. The results of this study revealed that this instrument was valid when assessing teachers'

perceptions in these areas. This study provides an additional measure that can be used when analyzing teachers' perceptions of literacy concepts.

Reading instruction within the classroom is based around the reading curriculum a school district has implemented, as well as teachers' decisions on a daily basis. Giles and Tunks (2015) conducted a study that focused on teachers' thoughts on teaching reading. This study is based on teachers' perceptions of how students learn in relation to teachers' perceptions of the approach of teaching English Language Learners in regards to the approach of English for speakers of other languages (Giles & Tunks, 2015). Participants included seventy-six prekindergarten through second grade teachers. Data was collected using a two-part survey that focused on demographics and "reading readiness skills and emergent literacy" (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p. 526). Results of the study revealed that teachers who had more experience "were not as supportive of a reading readiness skills approach as those who had 6-10 years experience" (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p. 526). The results show that these teachers had two decades of experience within the field of education, which can be referenced to how the reading readiness skills approach were more supportive than those of who had less than six to ten years of experience (Giles & Tunks, 2015). A key take away from this study is that the way that teachers approach different strategies, implementations of those strategies within their instruction, and how long teachers implement those strategies affect the way that students learn.

In a similar study conducted by Jaeger (2018), the ELA curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, was studied within the context of analyzing how this particular curriculum has readers come to a determined conclusion, rather than allowing readers to decide meaning for themselves from a text. The implementation of this study was conducted by analyzing

the fourth grade *Reading Wonders* curriculum. The study examined the ideologies within the curriculum at the fourth-grade level, as well as complexity and engagement with the text. The results of this study revealed that most of the texts that are provided within the materials “support dominant beliefs about success and that, when applicable, most reflect the achievement ideology” (Jaeger, 2018, p. 129). The results also reveal that the texts are not engaging to students. In addition, the texts are unreachable in terms of text complexity (Jaeger, 2018). Since students are still learning critical thinking skills, this poses the additional problem of students being unable to review the texts from a critical perspective.

Uribe (2019) focused on teachers’ perceptions of curriculum-based readers theatre affecting English language learners and their understanding of reading. This differentiated approach was analyzed through quantitative and qualitative data to understand teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of this strategy. Participants included thirteen teachers who worked with students who were within second to fifth grade. These teachers participated in “a PLC committed to learning about and implementing readers theatre” (Uribe, 2019, p. 249). Data was collected using a survey, discussion boards, and interviews (Uribe, 2019). The results of this study revealed that when curriculum-based readers theatre was incorporated into instruction, it provided teachers with additional opportunities to implement other strategies with little additional planning (Uribe, 2019). When teachers are given the resources through the curriculum that their school has implemented, it makes it less challenging for them to introduce additional strategies to help support their students in their learning and understanding of reading and writing skills.

Conclusion

After reviewing literature that focuses on teachers' instructional strategies and reading curriculum, it is evident that teachers' perceptions of the instruction they give and how they incorporate the required curriculum into their instruction is important to gain understanding of how teachers view early literacy intervention, as well as how their perceptions of reading curriculum impact the instruction they provide. Early literacy intervention is an important aspect of learning key literacy concepts in the primary grades (Foorman et. al., 2017). It is also evident that having a strong knowledge base of literacy and how to teach literacy is important within early literacy instruction and intervention (Porter et. al., 2021). These studies also reveal the perceptions of teachers towards literacy instruction and the implementation of curriculum and assessments.

Chapter III

Research Design/Methodology

The design for this study is qualitative research using narrative inquiry.

Qualitative teacher research is research conducted most often emerges from teachers' observations within their classrooms and schools. As the researcher, I am examining literacy teachers in my school. Klehr (2012) states, "Qualitative methods offer a strong complement to numerical measures, allowing one to more comprehensively study how teaching and learning happen in dynamic classroom context" (p. 123). The qualitative research method differs from quantitative research in that, quantitative research focuses on numbers in order to provide data and details, whereas qualitative research focuses on data collected through other methods to provide an inside perspective of what is being studied. Using teacher research as a form of qualitative research provides educators with perspectives of the classroom based on observations made by teachers. When studying what transpires in a classroom during reading and writing instruction, teacher research offers the opportunity to examine how teachers view the curriculum, as well as their instruction. When conducting teacher research, an important aspect to consider is that the researcher is fully present throughout the entirety of the research process, meaning that the researcher is in the setting for the entirety of the study. The speculation regarding investigations within the classroom is that educators can recognize the application and implementation of practices through structured reflection (Klehr, 2012). Teacher researchers strive to conduct research that will positively impact classrooms towards a more equitable environment for all students. The goal of the research is to provide students with opportunities to strengthen their skills in a positive and impactful way.

Klehr (2012) states, “classroom researchers are able to examine the ways in which contributing factors like local conditions, curriculum decisions, reform policies, and students themselves intimately influence the processes and impact of teaching and learning” (p. 125). Teacher researchers focus on these key concepts when asking questions, conducting research, and continuing to develop questions. This study is positioned with the qualitative research model, as the aim of this study is to provide a more positive impact for students within the classroom by analyzing teachers’ responses to reading curriculum and reading instruction.

This teacher research study used narrative inquiry to tell the stories of three primary grade teachers. As Bell (2002) states, “Narratives allow researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexities and richness,” (p. 209). Narrative inquiry provides an additional component to understanding people’s perspectives and the reasons behind those perspectives. This provides researchers the opportunity to study and portray other peoples’ stories to analyze in order to use their knowledge and stories to help others better understand different aspects of personal experiences. Narrative inquiry provides researchers with three main components. The first component is that narrative inquiry provides researchers with the opportunity to understand the impact of an experience, not just analyzing the outcome of a study (Bell, 2002). The second component is that narrative inquiry allows researchers to analyze information and perceptions that participants have that they may not be aware of (Bell, 2002). The third component is that narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand the impact of one’s experiences at pivotal moments (Bell, 2002). This form of inquiry is a form of research that allows the participants’ experiences to be heard and analyzed in order to develop a narrative of their

stories. In this study, narrative inquiry will be used as a way to develop teachers' voices of their own experiences with the way they learned to read and write, as well as a way to collect teachers' perceptions of the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*.

Procedure of the Study

Before I began collecting data, I had conversations with the participants regarding their teaching experiences. I collected information about the length of time each of them has been teaching and the different places they have taught. I gathered baseline data through a researcher-designed survey to gain a deeper understanding of each teachers' feelings towards reading and writing instruction in their classrooms.

After analyzing the initial data of the surveys, I began conducting interviews with the participants of the study. I began conducting the interviews by starting with how teachers were taught how to read and write, as well as how they were taught to teach reading and writing. We discussed what they remembered about how they learned to read and write in school. After we discussed those aspects, we discussed what kind of instruction they received in their undergraduate programs in regards to literacy instruction. The questions on this interview (included in appendix) were designed to allow participants to think critically about their own reading and writing experiences in regards to their own learning and the instruction they received to teach literacy concepts in the classroom.

After I conducted the first round of interviews, I began the interviews that consisted of asking questions pertaining to teachers' views of the reading curriculum, as well as reading and writing instruction within their own classrooms. We discussed what kinds of support the reading curriculum provides in regards to reading and writing

instruction. This discussion included topics of differentiated instruction, as well as the use of materials that were provided with the curriculum. The questions for this interview were designed to provide participants with the opportunity to share their own experiences of the reading curriculum provided for them, as well as their experiences of providing instruction for their students in reading and writing.

The final data collected was a focus group discussion, which included all of the participants. This discussion was formed using questions and prompts (included in appendix) that were provided by participants from the two interviews. The focus of this discussion was to provide an additional perspective of the views the teachers have of literacy curriculum and instruction in a form of discussion with other educators. Guiding questions were used throughout the discussion to provide the participants with additional opportunities to share their own perspectives with educators within the same grade leveling. Since participants included a kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teacher, the discussion enabled these teachers to listen to and participate in an open discussion of the reading curriculum and the procedures within other classroom settings.

Throughout the study, a curriculum evaluation was conducted to analyze the reading curriculum. The evaluation was conducted using a curriculum evaluation rubric that was designed to assess a curriculum based on important literacy concepts. The rubric was used to determine whether or not the curriculum had areas of inequity, as well as how it addressed key literacy concepts. The collection of data using the evaluation was used to provide an additional perspective of what attributes a specific reading curriculum has and what it may be lacking. This was conducted to provide a better understanding of teachers' views of the reading curriculum.

Data Sources

The data was collected using a researcher-designed survey, recorded interviews, a focus group discussion, a curriculum evaluation, and my teacher research journal. To begin this study, I gathered data about teachers' feelings towards reading curriculum and reading instruction by providing a survey for teachers to complete. I examined the teachers' responses by looking for salient points in their stories and coding them. I then coded for similarities/differences in their stories. I used this knowledge to pose questions during the focus group discussion at the end of the study. Two interviews were also conducted with each participant. The first interview focused on how participants learned how to read and write, as well as how they were taught how to teach reading and writing in their undergraduate programs. The second interview focused on the participants' perceptions of the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, as well as their own classroom instruction. Throughout the study, I used audio recordings during interviews with the participants, as well as during the focus group discussion. In addition, I kept a teacher research journal throughout the study, which I used to keep track of additional questions that came out at different points throughout the study. My teacher research journal provided me with ways to keep track of additional questions, as well as my own thoughts and feelings that came up through interviews, the curriculum evaluation, and the focus group discussion. Finally, the curriculum evaluation was used to gain insight into the reading curriculum that had been implemented within the classroom throughout the study. This provided an additional insight into what teachers were provided with in their literacy instruction in regards to the reading curriculum.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed to reveal information on teachers' perceptions of reading and writing instruction, including their perceptions of curriculum. An inductive approach was used to show commonalities across the participant responses as well as their unique contributions to discourse related to perceptions of literacy instruction and curriculum for young learners in our school. This data was also used to help gain an understanding of The *Reading Wonders* basal approach and how it impacts teachers when it comes to reading and writing instruction, as well as how it impacts students in learning how to read and write. I used the initial survey to have a baseline of understanding of teachers' feelings towards the reading curriculum and how that impacts their confidence in teaching reading and writing in their own classrooms. When I analyzed this data, it gave me a better understanding of the similarities and differences between teachers' feelings towards the reading curriculum and their instruction. Data analysis showed three major patterns of response to the *Reading Wonders* curriculum across participants that include: 1. The importance of activities, 2. The amount of content in the curriculum, and 3. The lack of support.

Context

Community

Royal Heights Elementary school is in South Jersey and is the only school in the district. There are a total of 1,399 people living in the township, which is located in the southern part of New Jersey. According to the 2020 Census, the population resides in 870 housing units. Of these units, 593 are family households. Among these households 43.2%

are married couples, 19.2% are male householders with no spouse present, and 34.1% are female householders with no spouse present.

According to the 2020 Census, the racial makeup of the township is 1,243 White or Caucasian, 5 American Indian and Alaskan Native, 1 Asian, 25 Black or African American, 71 Hispanic or Latino, 22 that are some other race, and 103 that are 2 or more races. The amount of the population that are between the ages of 0-19 years of age is 344. 27.4% of the population is 65 years and older. The median age is 49.6.

As of the 2022 Census, the township's median income of family households is \$85,305, the median income of married-couple families is \$86,480, the median income of nonfamily households is \$29,063, and the median household income is \$60,982. At the present time, 10.8% of families in the township are considered to be living in poverty.

School

Royal Heights is a Title I School Wide program. There are currently 172 students enrolled that range from PreK3 to eighth grade with 37 contracted staff members. The ethnic makeup of the school include 17 Hispanic or Latino students, 144 Caucasian students, 3 Black students, and 8 students that are two or more races, which include students who checked off Asian, American Indian, and Black along with an additional race. Testing results reveal that 14% of students are meeting or exceeding in ELA and 9% of students at the school are meeting or exceeding in Math.

Classrooms

The kindergarten classroom consists of 15 students. There are 10 males and 5 females. The makeup of the class is 12 white/Caucasian students, 2 Caucasian/Hispanic students, and 1 Caucasian/Asian student. The first grade classroom consists of 14

students. There are 6 males and 8 females. The makeup of the class is 11 Caucasian students, 2 Caucasian/American Indian students, and 1 Hispanic student. The second grade classroom consists of 16 students. There are 8 males and 8 males. The makeup of the class is 10 Caucasian students, 1 Caucasian/African American student, 1 Caucasian/Asian student, and 1 Hispanic student.

Participants

There are three participants participating in the study. Cassidy, the kindergarten teacher has been teaching for 11 years full time and 2 and a half years as a long term substitute. This teacher worked for 4 years in a different school district and 7 years at the school district in which this study took place. This is her third year of teaching Kindergarten. Prior to that, she taught third grade in the same school district. She has had several encounters with different reading curriculums over the years, which allowed her to analyze advantages and disadvantages between different curriculums. The school district also allowed her to express input into which curriculum she felt would be most beneficial for students.

Alyssa, the first grade teacher has been teaching for 12 years full time at the school district this study took place. This teacher also worked 1 year as a long term substitute teacher after being a substitute teacher for 4 years at the same school district. She has taught first grade throughout her time as a long term substitute and as a general education teacher. During this time, she has had experience with different reading curriculums. This has allowed her to analyze similarities and differences between different curriculums. Like Cassidy, she also was allowed to express input into the reading curriculum that was chosen.

Elizabeth, the second grade teacher has been teaching for two years, entering the third year of teaching at the same school district where the study took place. Although she has only had experience as a classroom teacher with the same reading curriculum, she has had experience with different reading curriculums through her undergraduate program. Over the last three years, she has been able to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses with the reading curriculum based on her instructional practices on a daily basis.

Positionality

Cassidy and I have worked together for the last three school years. I have been able to be in her classroom first thing in the morning as students come in to start their day. Through this time, I have been able to talk with her about her own life and her success and frustrations in the classroom. I pull students for small group instruction in both reading and math. We discuss student success and areas that need additional support to come up with a plan that meets each student's needs. She has been very supportive when it comes to questions that I have regarding anything that is school related.

Alyssa and I have also worked together for the last three school years. We consistently check in with one another to discuss student progress. She is another person that I go to when I have questions about anything school related. She has been supportive throughout each school year. She has also been very supportive of my pursuit of going back to school. Whenever I have had a project that I need teachers to take part in, she is the first person to be ready to participate in whatever I have needed.

Elizabeth and I started working at the same time at the school. Prior to teaching together, we both attended the same university, where we served on the executive board

of the education honor society, Kappa Delta Pi. We corresponded through email and video conferencing during that time, as this all took place during the pandemic. Now that we work together, we meet regularly to discuss student goals. Over the last three years, we have both been able to support one another as new teachers.

As the basic skills teacher, I have been teaching for two years, entering my third year of teaching. My position includes pulling students out of the classroom for small-group or one-on-one instruction within reading and writing. Students are in my classroom for twenty minutes a day, five days a week. During small group instruction, we work on strengthening decoding skills, sight words, fluency, and writing. To practice decoding, students learn multiple strategies to pull from when decoding unfamiliar words. Sight word practice involves hands-on activities that keep students engaged and provides them with opportunities to interact with the words. For fluency, students focus on one book a week and continue to read it for meaning, while also becoming more comfortable with any unfamiliar words to strengthen the pace and tone of their reading. Writing involves different writing projects. A Writer's Notebook is provided for students to keep all of their writing in one place so that it is easily accessible, especially when they have a writing project that takes more than a day to work on.

In addition to pulling students out of the classroom, I work closely with kindergarten, first, and second grade classroom teachers in regards to student instruction. We discuss students' strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing. Based on strengths and weaknesses, I create lesson plans that are targeted towards students' needs. In addition to this, I discuss with classroom teachers the needs they see in their students within the classroom. Since students see me for twenty minutes a day, a majority of their

time is spent in the general education classroom. Cooperative teaching has been an essential part of my position and in the support of struggling readers as they continue to develop their literacy skills.

Chapter Four of this thesis will discuss the results of the data collected through the survey, interviews, focus group discussion, curriculum evaluation, and my teacher research journal. Chapter Five will then present the conclusion of the study, as well as implications of this study. Chapter Five will also provide recommendations for further research.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, with a focus placed on the research question, “How do primary grade teachers view early literacy intervention and the required basal reading program in our school?” As stated in chapter three, the data sources were a researcher-designed survey, two interviews with each participant, a focus group discussion, and a curriculum evaluation. After analyzing the data, the following patterns are revealed throughout the data analysis. The patterns revealed a lack of support for struggling readers and writers from the curriculum, lack of support for teachers from the curriculum, and too much content within the curriculum itself.

Revisiting the Study

Data was collected over the course of eight weeks in which teachers shared their view of reading curriculum and reading instruction. To begin, teachers completed the researcher-designed survey to provide insight on teachers’ feelings towards reading and writing instruction, as well as the curriculum. Through recording teacher responses during interviews and the focus group discussion, I was able to examine teachers’ responses in one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussion where participants were able to express their views with the other participants in the study. My teacher research journal allowed me to explore how my questions were being answered during the study, as well as observations I made throughout the study.

Cassidy

Cassidy is a Kindergarten teacher who has worked in the public school system for 11 years. Of those 11 years, 7 have been teaching at Royal Heights Elementary School, where this study took place. This is her third year teaching Kindergarten, as she had taught third grade in the past. During this time, she has had experiences with different reading and writing curriculums. Every morning during homeroom, I have gone into her room as students start their morning work and answer questions that they have to assist her as she takes lunch count and takes attendance for the day. As the basic skills teacher, I also work with some of her students in small group instruction for guided reading, so I also work closely with her when determining students' needs and setting goals. Through these daily interactions, I have been able to converse with her about her personal life, as well as her experiences in the classroom with her students. I have had the opportunity to hear first hand the successes and the challenges she has had in the classroom.

Throughout this study, I have been able to gain a deeper understanding of how she learned to read and write and how that impacts her teaching on a daily basis. I was also able to gain a deeper understanding of her thoughts and feelings towards the ELA curriculum, *Reading Wonders*. Being able to have these discussions and gain insight into how a Kindergarten teacher views the *Reading Wonders* curriculum has allowed me to understand her perspective of her students and how she interacts with said curriculum. Having this opportunity has allowed me to understand how a teacher who works with students who are in the beginning stages of gaining reading skills views the reading and writing process and how the curriculum has such an impact on classroom discussions and

activities. Throughout this study, I have had the privilege to hear her own perspectives of the current reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*.

One of the first things I learned about Cassidy in this study was that growing up, she loved to read. In middle school, her English teacher would do book projects, where they did hands-on activities that went along with whatever book or story they were reading. The other middle school teachers would do lessons surrounding whatever book they were reading in English class. She said, “They all really worked together to base it all around the book, which was a lot of fun.” She remembers less about what she read and more about the activities and the experiences that went along with whatever they were reading.

When it came to learning how to write, she remembers that she did not like writing. Although she does not really remember learning how to write, she does remember in early elementary school copying what the teacher modeled. She also remembers the teacher challenging her to use different words within her writing. She said, “I remember she would pass something back and even though it was a good grade, she would challenge me to look for different words.” Although she received good grades, she remembers being challenged in her writing. She acknowledged that it was good she was being challenged, she does not remember the positive aspects of her writing; only where she was given suggestions of how to word parts differently. She also did a lot of cursive writing in middle school.

As she recalled learning how to read and the experiences she had with reading and writing, she also recalled her experiences in college when learning how to teach those in her own classroom. There was only one class she could remember that dealt with reading.

She said, “They gave little ideas on how to, it was more center based things. I don’t remember actually them saying, ‘This is how you teach children to read,’ or ‘This how you teach children to spell,’ or anything like that.” There was a month of teaching about one specific activity that she never used, which was a more center based activity. She said, “I don’t use foldables to this day, so that wasn’t very useful.” The class also was very specific in what a teacher could do and what a teacher was not permitted to do in the classroom. Even though there was one class she could think of that dealt with reading, there was not much direction for learning how to teach reading and writing in the classroom. During her student teaching is when she felt she learned the most, since it was very hands-on and she had a cooperating teacher to guide and support her.

Now, as a Kindergarten teacher, she works with the reading and writing curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, on a daily basis. In the beginning of the study, Cassidy felt that the *Reading Wonders* curriculum is not a strong writing curriculum. Throughout the process of asking questions and thinking more deeply about the curriculum, Cassidy began to share more about her perspective of the curriculum in how it supports teachers and students; more specifically, struggling readers and writers. The first aspect that was discussed was how the curriculum addresses spelling. In the beginning, the curriculum teaches all of the letter and letter sounds. Although the conversation started with discussing the curriculum in general, Cassidy started posing concerns that she had with the curriculum. She said, “They jump into blending way too quickly because we haven’t even gotten through all the sounds yet, so I think, in my opinion, in order to spell, why are we jumping into blending these letters together and word families when we haven’t

learned all of the sounds?” Immediately, she began discussing her frustration and concerns with the pacing of the curriculum.

As the conversation continued, a more in depth conversation about how instruction is differentiated started to take place. After inquiring about how the curriculum provides ways to differentiate instruction, Cassidy began to open up more about the lack of support from the curriculum. As the teacher, she should feel some sort of direction from the curriculum that is being used when addressing all of her students and the different levels they are at in her classroom. However, she feels that the curriculum does not provide her with enough support in how to support her students. She said, “I feel like there’s not enough activities, like supporting activities. If my lowest group does not even get through the easiest book they provide, I’m just making up my own things.” As the teacher, Cassidy should be able to rely on the curriculum to provide her with ways to differentiate instruction for all of her leveled readers. Having materials already accessible through a curriculum impacts students’ learning.

She went on to discuss the stories that are provided. She does not feel that students connect with the stories that are provided through the curriculum. She said, “I’ve actually had 2 years in a row of an observation with one story and the observer said that the book was not the best choice, so I had to say, ‘It was in the curriculum.’ So I think it teaches it well and they give good ideas on how to present it, but it’s just something with the stories.” One of the important aspects of students learning how to read is engaging with the text. If students are unable to connect with the text, especially at the Kindergarten level, they remain unengaged with the reading, which results in a lack of comprehension.

The discussion about differentiation for reading led to a discussion about writing within the curriculum. Although Cassidy feels that the writing goes along with whatever reading is taking place, she feels that the pacing of that is also too fast. She said, “They require you to write so much in the beginning of the year, when they again, haven’t gone through the letter sounds, we haven’t even learned how to blend or actually segment.” She also included that the curriculum requires students to write too much in the beginning. She continued to talk about the lack of support that the curriculum provides for her as the teacher. She made mention of the amount of information that is in the curriculum and stated that it is too much. As a teacher who has lesson plans to make and papers to grade, she cannot flip through pages and pages of a curriculum to try to find the strategies that she needs, if that information is even in there.

When discussing areas of improvement that the curriculum can use, Cassidy was quick to reiterate that the teacher’s manual has too much information to go through. She said, “I really need someone to say, ‘This is most important. Don’t worry about this if you don’t get to it, but they really need this.’” She went on to discuss how there is so much information the curriculum expects to cover, but it is not realistic with the time that Cassidy has. She also reiterated that the writing is too much too early on. She said, “The writing is way too much too soon for them to have to write so much and the way the book is laid out, the amount of space they give you is unrealistic.” The amount of writing that the curriculum expects her students to do is more than what they are able to handle. Not only that, but they also are not given enough space to write. This indicates to Cassidy that those who designed the curriculum did not take into account the developmental level students are at in Kindergarten.

Alyssa

Alyssa is a public school teacher who has worked in the public school system for 12 years, all of those years in the first grade classroom at Royal Heights Elementary School, where this study took place. I have been able to work closely with Alyssa over the last three years. We talk regularly about students' successes and areas that students need additional support. When I had a Professional Development presentation to give for one of my graduate program assignments, she was more than willing to be a part of it. There was also a time I had to practice coaching another teacher and she was more than happy to be the teacher I got to coach through a lesson. Whenever questions arise, she is the one that most people go to. This year, I have had the opportunity to be push-in support during their writing time and provide support for her and for her students. Through this, we have been able to discuss more about strategies and activities that would benefit her students. Throughout our interactions, I have also been able to hear first hand the frustrations she has had with the curriculum *Reading Wonders*.

Growing up, Alyssa remembered being in elementary school, the teacher would let the students take turns going to the front of the classroom and reading to the class. She stated, "It kind of boosted the confidence up some because you wanted to get up there and read." She also remembered having hands-on activities when she was in third grade. She described how the teacher would have the students put on a play and they would be required to write and read the scripts. She also mentioned how in middle school, an aspect that she did not like about reading was how old the books were. She said, "The reading book that was given to us was so old and it wasn't even relatable." She also did not enjoy writing during middle school, as the teacher would not accept any work that

was not written in cursive. A memory that she has related to writing was being able to write a letter to senior citizens and being able to deliver those letters to a senior center. She also made the observation that they were able to write a letter the correct way after that activity, which was encouraging to her. Another aspect that she enjoyed about learning how to write was going up to the board and being able to write on the board in front of the class.

As far as learning how to teach reading and writing in her undergraduate program, she did not feel prepared for her own classroom. She said, “I feel like a lot of it was just coming from the book and not real life situations.” She continued to talk about how she did not feel prepared to assist students in strengthening their reading skills. The time she felt that the most instruction occurred during her undergraduate program was during her placement in student teaching in a Kindergarten classroom. Her mentor teacher was helpful during her student teaching to develop teaching skills within reading and writing.

As a first grade teacher in her own classroom, she works with the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, on a daily basis. Alyssa has a forty minute period for reading and a forty minute period for writing. Within this time, she focuses on phonics and comprehension. During this time, she makes sure to go over sight words and spelling words so that students are better able to identify these words when they see them in a text. For writing, Alyssa does her best to connect what they do in writing to what they did during reading. She has centers for students to rotate through. During center time, students are working on practicing building sight words and spelling words using magnetic letters, practice reading with a buddy, read with a group, a guided reading group that reads with Alyssa, and then working on an online platform that helps

strengthen their reading skills. A frustration she has with this is that there is a break between their reading and writing periods to when they are able to do centers.

One of the first aspects she mentioned about the curriculum is the differentiation. She believes that this is an area of weakness of the curriculum. She said, “I don’t think it really does a great job as far as going through weekly lessons for differentiating.” Part of this is addressed in small group instruction. She also made the statement that there is only one level provided for students when it comes to worksheets and materials. She said, “They don’t give you different copies for the different levels. It’s just one for all.” Although there is more differentiation through small group instruction, weekly lessons and materials are not differentiated for students in first grade. Due to the lack of differentiation, Alyssa feels that she supplements a lot of her materials in order to differentiate for her students, which costs her more time and planning.

A factor that she mentioned about the lack of materials is partially due to the fact that the school is only able to order the bare minimum of materials that come with the curriculum. Therefore, it makes it difficult for teachers like Alyssa to know where the cause of a lack of differentiation is coming from. This also raises the question: Is it from the curriculum itself or because the school is unable to afford the materials that are supposed to support the curriculum? This question is important to keep in mind, as Alyssa received a student last year that was classified as ELL. Although the curriculum provides ELL materials, the section is very small and due to the budget, all of the materials were not able to be purchased. She said, “And I have this lovely little section for English Language Learners, but we never purchased any of that, so this one little tiny

section does not help.” The small ELL section is about all that is differentiated, which is a small box at the bottom of the teachers’ manual for each lesson.

She also mentioned there not being any rubrics incorporated into the curriculum, specifically for writing. As a teacher, having rubrics already provided to score students’ work helps the classroom run more smoothly and the teacher and students know what is expected from each assignment. She said, “They don’t give rubrics or anything like that. I have my own rubric that I made.” She has had to make her own rubrics and even then, she struggles to know exactly how to grade specific aspects of writing.

Another aspect of the curriculum that Alyssa finds to be an area of concern is the pacing of the lessons, specifically the writing portion of the curriculum. She said, “I don’t think the pacing that they have in the reading curriculum works at all. I usually kind of look to see what they want us to do and then come up with my own plan, but I’m not a fan of the writing that came with the reading curriculum.” The curriculum is expecting students to be further along in writing than they realistically are. Not only does Alyssa need to supplement materials because the curriculum is not differentiated as a whole, but she also has to look at what the curriculum is showing what students should be able to do and adjust that according to where her students actually are. She said, “How are they going to write a story if they haven’t quite gotten the idea of getting complete sentences yet?” She began to reference the curriculum that they used in the past and compared it to how they differentiated instruction in reading and writing. She said, “In our old curriculum, they would give us examples of different levels of what they considered appropriate writing for each level the kids were on.” Alyssa has had experience with a curriculum that provided examples of different levels that students could be at for

teachers. It was a memorable aspect of the curriculum that Alyssa remembers having to be able to reference and use that information in order to plan future instruction.

An additional concern that Alyssa poses in regards to the curriculum is the amount of things within the curriculum to go over. She said, “Even if we do 180 days, I would never be able to make it through all 6 units. It’s impossible to do.” The 180 days is not taking into account the school’s annual field day, field trips, and assemblies or any other event that could happen during the scheduled ELA time. Alyssa made mention of that even if they started on the day they started school, it still would not match the timeline that the curriculum gives. In the beginning of the school year, she combines two weeks together in order to get further through the curriculum. Even with combining weeks, she still only gets to the second week out of six weeks in the final unit of the curriculum because of how much there is to unpack.

Elizabeth

This is Elizabeth’s third year of teaching and she has taught second grade in the same school. Before starting at the same school, Elizabeth and I both served on the executive board of the education honors society, Kappa Delta Pi. We worked together during Covid, so we interacted mainly through emails and Zoom meetings. After we both graduated in 2021, we both accepted a teaching position at the school we both now work at. I have two periods in my schedule that are devoted to guided reading for second grade, so I interact with her more than once on a daily basis. We converse about students’ needs that she notices in the classroom so I can better structure my instruction for her students. We celebrate students’ successes together when they have made progress and continue to

have conversations about what might need to change in instruction based on students' needs.

The reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, had been implemented when we were both hired three years ago. Therefore, this is the only curriculum outside of student teaching that we both have experience with. As a new teacher and one who has had the experience of student teaching, I was interested in hearing Elizabeth's perspective of the reading curriculum and how a newer teacher feels about planning and teaching lessons using this reading curriculum. Although I work with this curriculum, I have more flexibility within my position than classroom teachers. Being able to gain insight into Elizabeth's experiences has helped me better understand a newer teacher's experience with the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, and the additional challenges she faces through this.

Growing up, Elizabeth loved to read. Although she does not specifically remember how she learned how to read, she suspects that her parents had influence over her reading instruction early on. She remembers beginning to read before she was in Kindergarten. Reading was enjoyable for her. She said, "Reading was a safe space for me and escapism." The more she read, the more she wanted to read, specifically fiction books. This flowed into her love of learning how to write. She said, "I loved making up my own characters and you know, being in control of situations without anything tied to you because it's writing." Aspects of learning how to read and write, however, were not as appealing to Elizabeth. One of these aspects was how much pressure her teachers placed on the reading levels that students were at. She said that her teachers were basically saying, "You need to know how to do this," and, "You need to be at this level."

She made the comment about reading being taught as something that had to be done in order to continue to move up in reading levels, rather than something fun to enjoy.

When discussing activities that she remembers doing when she learned to read and write, she remembered a dog being brought to the school and having the opportunity to read to the dog. She also made the observation that students who are more quiet or less motivated to read out loud are more likely to read to a dog, since most kids tend to feel more comfortable with dogs. Another activity she remembers doing was readers theater, where students' parents got to come and it was a big deal. Students also got to dress up to be able to act out their play. She has fond memories of having this hands-on experience, which fueled her love of reading.

She started to discuss her experience within her undergraduate program and how she learned to teach reading and writing in her own classroom. When she discussed her classes' teaching of differentiating instruction in reading and writing, she did not feel like she felt prepared to differentiate instruction in her classroom. She said, "I don't think I was taught to differentiate as much as they used that buzz word." Differentiated instruction was discussed through different classes. However, she did not feel like her undergraduate program prepared her to differentiate her reading and writing instruction for her low students and her high students. She said, "It was very read about it, never apply it." She did share a positive experience that she had in one of her classes. She said, "There was one children's book class that I took every week and there were snacks and the professor would read to us like we were kids." She thought that was the best class that she had ever taken. She said, "That felt like a teacher class. It was more catered to what

we would actually be doing, which was nice.” Reading to students was modeled during this class, which helped Elizabeth feel more prepared in how to read to her students.

As a third year teacher, Elizabeth has used the same curriculum within her own classroom. An ELA lesson in her classroom begins with reading as a whole group. Throughout the reading, Elizabeth asks questions to check for understanding. After the story is finished, they reflect on the story as a group and focus on whatever comprehension strategy is for the week based on the curriculum. She then spends about five to ten minutes on grammar towards the end, which then goes into her writing block. Throughout her first two years of teaching, she struggled with the idea of having to get everything completed within a certain time frame. However, this year she feels that she has gained the understanding of being able to do it all at her own and her classes’ pace. Other than relying on what the teacher’s manual says needs to be completed in a day, she realizes that it is realistically too much to be able to complete.

An aspect that she has noticed about the curriculum through figuring out how to structure her lessons is the amount of content that the curriculum tries to incorporate. She said, “It’s too much. Like I wonder, ‘How long are your ELA periods? Because mine are clearly not as long as you need them to be.’” Due to having too much in the curriculum, Elizabeth does not feel like she knows what the most important concepts and strategies to teach are. She would like the curriculum to say explicitly what the standards that are absolutely necessary to teach and how to go about teaching that. She feels that the curriculum does not provide enough explanation of what students need to know. She also feels that the curriculum does not provide additional supporting materials for key

concepts. Being able to prioritize what needs to be taught from so much content makes it difficult to plan instruction accordingly.

In relation to this, the support that she feels as a teacher is minimum. She said, “I think it provides me with resources, but I don’t know if support is the word that I feel from *Wonders*.” Although Elizabeth feels that she is provided with multiple resources, there is a lack of direction in when and how to use the resources. She has joined a group on Facebook of teachers who use the *Reading Wonders* curriculum, which is where she feels she gets the most support. She said, “They’re actually in a classroom applying it versus somebody writing a humongous book of curriculum.” She feels that she consistently has to find material on other platforms in order to teach the concepts that the curriculum is expecting students to know based on the level that her students are at rather than what the curriculum expects of them. Having resources that are modeled and have direction in how to use the resources is important when planning and providing instruction.

When it comes to differentiating instruction, she feels there is a lack of support from the curriculum for both students and teachers. One of the first things she mentioned was the lack of leveling for students. When being asked if the curriculum provides differentiation, she responded, “Yes, but it’s kind of like the lowest is categorized as ELL. I have ELL work in my workbooks that I would give to my low students and I guess because it’s just basic and not fluffed with a bunch of words that would confuse them.” However, she also brought up the aspect that although it has less wording, it still does not meet their level. She raised the same problem when addressing the assessments that are provided to monitor students’ progress. She said, “If I gave them a regular

progress monitoring test from *Wonders*, I don't think they would be able to do it independently." She supplements materials often in order to differentiate instruction for her students. She said, "I get a lot of supplemental stuff that goes along with it because that just seems to be more simplified than the workbook." She went on to state that the curriculum and materials are geared towards the average student and not the high and low students in addition to the average student.

When it comes to the writing portion of the curriculum, it has exceptionally high expectations for second grade students. Elizabeth stated, "It correlates by genre or theme, but I think it has a lot higher expectations than what second grade actually looks like." Although the writing correlates with whatever skills and strategies students are learning in the reading component, the curriculum asks too much of second grade students. Elizabeth even made the mention of having to supplement materials for writing in her classroom. She went on to say, "Their writing is a lot more limited than what is expected of them." To have too high of expectations from the curriculum for students puts Elizabeth at a disadvantage when it comes to planning instruction. Due to the high expectations for her students, she finds herself trying to supplement materials that provide students with the differentiation they need in developing their writing skills.

Data Analysis

After analyzing the data from the data sources, I found that three patterns emerged in response to how each participant views early literacy intervention and the basal reading program, *Reading Wonders*. The three patterns include the importance of activities, the amount of content in the curriculum, and the lack of support. These patterns

suggest that teachers perceive early literacy intervention as an aspect of education that needs explicit guidance with approaches to strategies and curriculum.

Pattern #1: Importance of Engaging Activities to Support Learning to Read and Write

The first pattern that emerged was based on participants' own experiences and how those experiences carry over into their own classrooms. All three participants discussed what they remember about learning how to read and write.

Cassidy: So she (Language Arts teacher) would pick a really interesting book and everything revolved around it. We would do writing that revolved around it, our social studies would be connected. We had 3 teachers and they all really worked together to base it all around the book, which was a lot of fun. We would do projects, like little art projects that went along with it.

Alyssa: I liked the fact that there were different things that we were allowed to do after a story. Third grade was probably one of my favorites because we either put on a play, but we had to read and write the script, and things like that, so that was really fun.

Elizabeth: We did a lot of readers theatre, that was always fun. Parents came in and it was always a big deal. We had costumes, so that was really fun. Interactive things with the class and more fun things that kind of disguised the reading as the main goal of it.

This pattern addresses the question of how teachers perceive early literacy intervention. The pattern that became evident was their memory of activities that were incorporated into instruction. The primary aspect that all three participants responded

with were hands-on activities that they remembered doing throughout their time in school as they learned how to read and write. Cassidy discussed the projects she had in school and how teachers would make it a point to bring in cross-curricular lessons to revolve around whatever story they were reading. Alyssa and Elizabeth discussed having to read scripts and performing in a play as an activity they fondly remember when they were learning important literacy skills.

Through this initial interaction with each participant regarding their own instruction when learning how to read and write, each one focused on engaging activities that they remember doing in school and it was less about the worksheets or the specific ways they remembered when learning how to read and write. They enjoyed these activities enough for them to remember them years later. This interaction with literacy was positive for them, which was when this pattern of the importance of engaging activities to support learning how to read and write began to emerge. As participants discussed their own experiences with engaging activities to support literacy skills, they recalled how memorable each activity was and the purpose behind those activities.

Participants also discussed the lack of activities that the curriculum provides when it comes to early literacy instruction and intervention. Participants were adamant throughout the discussion about early literacy intervention that hands-on activities are an important aspect of early literacy intervention. Throughout the discussion, all three participants discussed the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, and how the program lacks activities and support for students to be able to connect deeper with the literacy skills they are learning about. This results in teachers having to supplement materials for students to be able to have opportunities to interact with literacy with hands-on support.

Cassidy: I feel like there's not enough activities like supporting activities.

Alyssa: A lot of the time, we have to make things on our own.

Elizabeth: I think it provides me with resources, but I don't know if support is the word that I would feel from *Wonders*.

In all three interviews, participants reacted in the same way to the lack of activities that *Reading Wonders* provides. In addition to the lack of activities, participants discussed the reasons behind why they supplement materials for their students in the focus group discussion. In the discussion,

Elizabeth: I get a lot of supplemental stuff that goes along with it because that just seems to be more simplified than the workbook. And I just feel like my centers are all supplemental, like I don't feel like I get anything at all on either side of the spectrum, so a lot of it is just me trying to find something that will work for them.

As someone who has many second graders at all different levels, she feels like she has to supplement materials in order to meet the needs of her students.

The supplementation of materials reveals a lack in engaging activities from the curriculum to support learning to read and write. Based on participants' responses, it is evident that they believe that engaging activities are essential to strengthening their reading and writing skills. Being provided with hands-on activities to support reading and writing better support students who are struggling.

Participants were asked to respond to survey prompts regarding *Reading Wonders* curriculum and how the participants feel about what the curriculum provides in regards to

reading and writing support for students. Results varied between participants. The results are as follows:

Figure 1

Curriculum Support of Developing and Strengthening Reading Skills

I feel the Reading Wonders curriculum provides me with enough tools to develop and strengthen my students' reading skills.

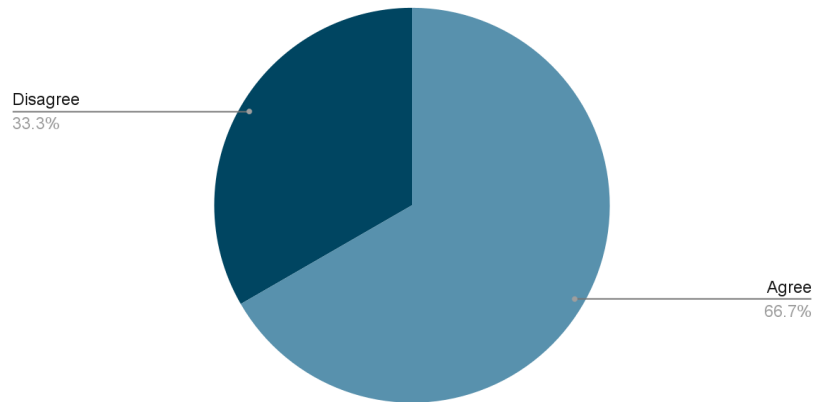
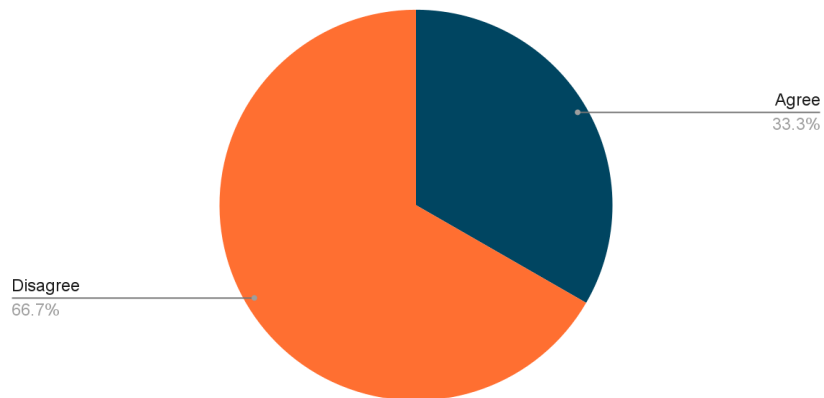


Figure 2

Curriculum Support of Strengthening Writing Skills

The Reading Wonders curriculum provides students with opportunities to strengthen writing skills.



It is important to mention that the participants that responded that they disagreed with the statement that they felt that the *Reading Wonders* curriculum provides students with opportunities to strengthen writing skills have been teaching for over ten years.

Through analyzing the data throughout the study, it is evident that the curriculum *Reading Wonders* does not provide engaging supporting activities to help strengthen reading and writing skills. Teachers often have to supplement materials to provide additional activities for students to participate in to be able to continue to develop those skills. It is essential for students to be provided with opportunities to interact with literacy through hands-on activities.

Pattern #2: Curriculum Content and Pacing

Being able to identify what students need within instruction is essential within early literacy intervention. The second pattern that emerged was the amount of content that is in the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*. Throughout the interviews, focus group discussion, and survey, it became evident that the curriculum has large amounts of content to be completed. Since there is so much content within the curriculum, the pacing of the curriculum was also a factor being analyzed within this specific pattern.

Through the survey questions, two of the participants stated that they disagree with the statement that, “I feel that my students are able to keep up with the pace of reading lessons in the classroom.” One participant stated that they agree with the statement. While initially analyzing this piece of data, it seemed interesting that two participants did not feel like students were able to keep up with the pace of reading lessons. There was a similar statement posed within the survey that said, “I feel that my students are able to keep up with the pace of writing lessons in the classroom.” Two

teachers put that they disagreed with that statement and one participant put that they strongly disagreed with it. As the study progressed, it became clear that the reason the reading and writing lessons feel high paced for students is because of the amount of content that is in the curriculum.

Using this as baseline data, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding as to how teachers felt about the pacing of their lessons within the classroom based on the information that the curriculum requires them to teach. Since the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, addresses both reading and writing, I wanted to give teachers the opportunity to address reading and writing lessons separately to gain a better understanding of their feelings towards the pacing of the curriculum. Two participants stated that they did not feel that students were able to keep up with the pace of a reading lesson in their classroom. Two participants stated that they did not feel students could keep up with the pace of a writing lesson in their classroom, while one participant felt strongly that their students could not keep up with the pace of a writing lesson. This data allowed for more inquiry as to why teachers felt that was the case.

Throughout the interviews with each participant, two participants touched on the amount of information within the curriculum. Cassidy discussed the amount of information that is within the curriculum and the lack of time that she has to be able to look through all of the information that is in the curriculum.

Cassidy: There is so much information, which sounds helpful to have too much information, but I really need someone to say, ‘This is most important.’

Cassidy acknowledged that it sounded like a positive aspect of the curriculum to have that much information, but went on to state that there is a lack of direction in what to do with all of the content that is provided. Alyssa expressed the same concerns with the curriculum

Alyssa: I don't think the pacing that they have in the reading curriculum works at all. I usually kind of look to see what they want us to do and then come up with my own plan.

Alyssa specifically stated that the pacing in the reading curriculum is too much in the classroom. Elizabeth expressed similar concerns.

Elizabeth: I definitely try to slow it down from what the book suggests you do in a day. It's too much.

Teachers are having to pick and choose what they do in order to get through instruction for the day because there is so much information and content within the curriculum. All three participants specifically mentioned the pacing of the curriculum within their separate interviews.

In the focus group discussion, participants were asked about what they would like to see be provided through the curriculum as they plan and implement literacy instruction. This question initiated a discussion about how teachers perceive the amount of content that is in the curriculum.

Cassidy: Less in the book. I feel like the curriculum itself, for me, is just way too much.

Elizabeth: No, it is too much. It's way too much, because you don't know what's important.

Alyssa: Even if we do 180 days, I would never be able to make it through all 6 units. It's impossible to do.

The curriculum provides plenty of content. However, the amount of content is overwhelming to teachers. Within the focus group discussion, participants posed some serious concerns with the amount of content and the pacing of the curriculum. Participants feel overwhelmed by the amount of content they need to look through in order to plan a lesson. That was the first aspect that teachers mentioned when being asked what support they would like to see from the curriculum. Elizabeth brought up the concern about not knowing what information is important because there is so much content to look through. Alyssa also stated how even if she taught everyday with how the curriculum sets it up, she would not be able to get through all of the content. This piece of data is alarming because even if teachers taught every single day and were even able to keep up with the pace of the curriculum, they still would be able to get through all of the content that is provided.

This pattern indicates that in order to have a successful curriculum, the pacing needs to be at a level that teachers feel comfortable with teaching at. The content that is provided for teachers also needs to contain directions and examples for students in order to best support their students with the content being provided. This also means that there could be additional support provided through instructional time for students who need additional support, as the curriculum would allow time for that support to occur.

Pattern #3: Need for Support

The third pattern that emerged through analyzing the data that came across through the previous pattern is the lack of support participants have received while

deciding what is the most important content to go over versus content that is there as additional support if needed. Within the survey, one of the statements stated, “My school has a strong writing curriculum in place.” Two participants stated that they disagreed with the statement, while the other participant stated that they strongly disagreed with the statement.

With this statement, participants did not feel as though the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, contained a strong writing curriculum. This piece of data lead to further questions as to why participants felt that way, which gave way to the pattern of a lack of support from the curriculum.

Through the interviews, it became more evident in the lack of support that teachers feel from this curriculum. In Cassidy’s interview, she brought up the point that teachers are not provided with guidance when it comes to navigating the curriculum.

Cassidy: Like telling me it’s okay not to stress about the story, have them do these spelling activities or something, sounding out, blending or whatever it may be. Because I’m just hoping that it works whatever I do.

Her statement about hoping that what she is doing works for her students because *Reading Wonders* is not providing her with the support that she feels is necessary to meet students’ needs.

Within her interview, Alyssa focused more on the lack of support when differentiating instruction for students. Alyssa discussed that when it comes to differentiating instruction, the curriculum does not provide teachers with the support they need.

Alyssa: I don't think that it really does a great job as far as going through the weekly lessons for differentiating. That's more trial and error and figure it out on your own.

An important aspect of literacy instruction is differentiation. If teachers do not have support from the curriculum in this area, it will be trial and error, like Alyssa stated.

Elizabeth focused on the area of how much content is provided and how little support is given.

Elizabeth: I have plenty to work with, but I think I need more like, 'Here's what you can do with these resources.'

She went on to say how she goes to other platforms for support like social media in order to get ideas from other teachers based on what they do in the classroom during literacy instruction. Having a curriculum that provides so much content but does not provide support for teachers with that content causes teachers to feel overwhelmed and searching other places to be able to meet the needs of their students.

Throughout their separate interviews, it was evident that participants felt a lack of support from the curriculum. Each participant mentioned a lack of direction from the curriculum as far as instruction and differentiation. To provide support for students, teachers need to feel like they have support and direction from the curriculum.

In the focus group discussion, the lack of support was a main topic. A question that I brought up in the focus group discussion was focused on what would help the participants feel more supported to be able to implement what they were being asked to implement.

Elizabeth: Tell us what is absolutely necessary, like standards wise. Here's what you must teach. But it just feels all thrown at you and you're like, 'I don't know what to prioritize over others.

Alyssa chimed in by stating that the curriculum needs to provide clarification as to what support to provide students based on students' mastery of skills. Towards the end of the focus group discussion, participants were asked, over everything that was discussed, what they felt was the most important.

Cassidy: For me, I think it's making sure I'm prepared because I can't deliver and have them be successful if I'm not prepared and I don't feel prepared.

Elizabeth was quick to agree that teacher support was one of the most important topics that was discussed during the focus group discussion.

Through analyzing the survey results, interviews, and focus group discussions, the pattern of a lack of support from the curriculum was of significant importance. This lack of support from the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, leaves teachers feeling like they do not have a clear direction as to what to teach students and the best way to support them. Having strong support from a curriculum provides teachers with the resources they need to best support all of their students. A lack of support from a curriculum leaves teachers with having to figure out what is the most important information to teach, figuring out how to meet all of their students' needs, and supplementing materials in order to try to meet the needs of their students. In order for reading and writing curriculum to be successful, it is important to include support for teachers and direction as to how to navigate the curriculum to form instruction.

Summary of Data Analysis

After looking across the data, I discovered that teachers feel that there should be an emphasis placed on the importance of activities that correspond with early literacy instruction and intervention. Through discussion and the analysis of the data, it became clear that teachers feel that the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, does not provide students with enough supporting activities in order to provide them with additional support in the development of literacy skills. Additionally, teachers feel that there is too much content within the curriculum. So much so that it makes it very difficult to know what to teach because there is so much content to cover. Teachers also feel that there is a lack of support from *Reading Wonders*. Through discussions and the analysis of the data, it is evident that the curriculum does not provide the guidance that teachers need in order to determine what direction they need to take when meeting their students' needs.

Chapter Five will present the conclusions and implications of the study, in addition to recommendations for further research.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications for the Field

Summary

In concluding the study, I found how three teachers perceive reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. After conducting a survey, interviews, and a focus group discussion, I found that this study provided a voice for teachers by gaining their perceptions of the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, as well as their perceptions of early literacy intervention. This study provided insight into three primary grade teachers' perceptions that revealed the importance of teachers' voices being included when approaching reading curriculum and early literacy intervention.

Through conversations with the Kindergarten teacher, the first grade teacher, and the second grade teacher over the course of this study, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how each of them learned how to read and write, as well as how they perceive the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, and early literacy intervention. At the conclusion of the study, participants clearly stated through interviews, as well as the focus group discussion, their view of *Reading Wonders* and their perceptions of early literacy intervention.

Participants revealed that they all felt that it is important to provide students with engaging activities when approaching learning how to read and write. Through experiences that they all had as they learned to read and write, there was an emphasis placed on the importance of using engaging activities as a crucial part of teaching students how to read and write. Participants felt that they have to supplement materials in

order to provide students with engaging activities, as they do not feel that *Reading Wonders* provides them with those materials.

Additionally, participants revealed that the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, has large amounts of content and that because of this, the pacing of the curriculum was of a higher pace that was difficult to maintain. Due to this, participants did not feel comfortable with teaching at the pace that *Reading Wonders* suggests. They do their best to meet the needs of their students, but the pacing of the curriculum does not provide time to go back to previous concepts that students may need additional support in. They revealed that they look at the lessons that are provided and come up with their own plan.

Furthermore, participants expressed the lack of support that they receive from the curriculum. All three participants discussed the amount of time it would take to go through the teacher's manual and that they do not have enough time to go through everything. They feel a lack of direction when it comes to the teacher's manual. They do not feel as though *Reading Wonders* provides them with tools and resources in order to implement strategies that would best support all students, not just the average student.

The findings of my research suggest that teachers need to be provided with a reading curriculum that provides engaging activities to reinforce literacy strategies as students learn how to read and write. The findings also suggest that the reading curriculum needs to be coherent for teachers to be able to implement strategies and instruction that meets the needs of all of their students. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that teachers need to feel support from the reading curriculum in order to develop reading and writing instruction to support students in their development of crucial literacy skills.

Conclusions

After analyzing the data, my study was able to provide voices for teachers that allowed their perceptions of the reading curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, and early literacy intervention to emerge. This is important because primary grade teachers interact with the reading curriculum everyday. This also affects how teachers approach early literacy intervention. As previously stated in Chapter 1, Boroko, Shavelson, and Stern (1981) state, “It also seems reasonable to assume that teachers’ decisions are one of the factors that affect student learning” (p. 453). Providing teachers with a voice on these two topics is important because their decisions play an important role in students’ learning.

In addition, understanding teachers’ perceptions of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention can help provide insight when designing curriculum and instruction for primary grades. This was evident throughout the study as teachers revealed strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and how they form their instructional practices based on the support or lack thereof from the curriculum. This was evident through the survey questions, interviews, and focus group discussion.

The findings of this study aligned with literature and studies consisting of curriculum, early literacy intervention, and teachers’ perceptions. An example of this within early literacy intervention can be referenced in Chapter 2 in the study conducted by Foorman et. al. (2017). The results of this study revealed early literacy intervention is a crucial part in reading improvement within schools, whether it be through a standalone intervention or an embedded intervention (Foorman et. al., 2017). In a similar study that is also referenced in Chapter 2, Miles et. al. (2022) conducted a study that revealed the early literacy intervention, Reading Recovery, improved students' reading skills for

struggling readers. I found that my research supported the idea that teachers view early literacy intervention as a crucial part in developing early literacy skills.

An example of literature that aligns with the results of this study pertaining to studies that consist of curriculum is a study conducted by Jaeger (2018), which focused specifically on the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*. The findings of this study revealed that *Reading Wonders* lacks engagement and lacks equity within the texts and resources provided (Jaeger, 2018). I found that my study supported the idea that teachers perceive the curriculum, *Reading Wonders*, as a curriculum that is inaccessible for both teachers and students. In a similar study, Uribe (2019) conducted a study that focused on teachers' perceptions of a curriculum based readers theatre. This study revealed that teachers felt that multiple strategies were able to be conveyed through the readers theatre (Uribe, 2019). I found that my research supported the idea that teachers perceive engaging literacy activities as important to students' learning of important literacy skills.

Throughout the study, teachers were able to converse in a way that brought voice to their perceptions and allowed those responses to be analyzed. The teachers were also able to converse with one another about frustrations within their own classrooms regarding *Reading Wonders* and early literacy intervention, which was beneficial in validating their own views and perceptions.

Limitations

One major limitation that affected this study was the sample size. This study took place in a small elementary school and there were not multiple classrooms of each grade level. A larger sample size would have led to more participants to give their perceptions of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. This would also provide a larger

range of teaching experience. This issue occurred because of the location that the study took place.

Implications for the Field

After analyzing the data that was collected throughout the study in order to analyze teachers' perceptions of *Reading Wonders* and early literacy intervention, I found implications for early literacy classrooms. One implication that can be taken from this study is the providing teachers with choice in choosing a reading curriculum and how that can benefit both students and teachers. Providing teachers with the opportunity to share their experiences within their own classroom can provide the insight that is necessary to choose a reading curriculum that is beneficial to both teachers and students. Another implication that can be taken from this study is the importance of early literacy intervention when approaching literacy instruction in the primary grades. Teachers need to be given the proper resources to provide successful early literacy intervention within their classrooms based on their students' needs.

After concluding this study, I found additional areas that could be researched further. One area that I noticed would be researching using a large sample size. Teacher researchers who conduct research in their schools would benefit from having a large sample size, as this would provide more teachers' perceptions to be analyzed and used in order to change how reading curriculum and early intervention is perceived through those who are not in the classroom on a regular basis. An additional implication for further research is the tools used to collect data. Having additional data collection tools may benefit teacher researchers when analyzing data. Being able to have both quantitative and qualitative data to analyze could benefit future research when approaching discussions

and studies regarding teacher perceptions, specifically in regards to reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. Teachers conducting research on teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention may benefit from considering using additional data collection tools in order to collect additional data.

Another area that could be studied further would be to include other educational professionals in the study. Being able to compare the data collected across different participants may provide other opportunities to analyze the perception of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. Including administrators, supervisors, reading specialists, and other educational professionals could lead to a better understanding of how reading curriculum is chosen, how early literacy intervention strategies are perceived, and how these coincide across educational positions.

In summary, teachers' perceptions of reading curriculum can provide valuable insight when forming and choosing reading curriculum, as well as how early literacy intervention is approached. This study suggests that teachers rely on reading curriculum to help form instruction and support for students in developing critical literacy skills in the primary grades. A lack of support from the reading curriculum can leave teachers supplementing materials. A high paced curriculum that has large amounts of content puts teachers in the position of having to figure out what to teach and how to best support their students. By providing teachers with the opportunity to share their perceptions on curriculum and early literacy intervention that involve their own classrooms, this provides the opportunity to ensure equity within the classroom and provide support for both teachers and students in early literacy intervention.

Throughout this study, I have learned more about the importance of hearing teachers' perceptions regarding reading curriculum and early literacy intervention. I have learned about the importance of having a reading curriculum that meets the needs of both students and teachers. Being able to have a curriculum that provides support to teachers enables teachers to effectively meet the needs of their students based on their individual needs. Understanding teachers' feelings about the resources that they feel is necessary to meet the needs of their students can lead to change in how early literacy intervention is approached and how that can provide additional resources to teachers in how to deliver those interventions. This study has helped me have a deeper understanding and appreciation of primary grade teachers and how their perception of reading curriculum and early literacy intervention impacts their teaching.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Email Subject: Thesis

Good evening!

I hope you all have had a great day! I am currently in the process of finishing my Thesis proposal and an area I really want to study is primary grade teachers' perceptions on reading curriculum. Would you be willing to be my participants in the study? It would consist of answering questions through interviews, answering surveys, and doing some reflection. I can definitely give you more details, but wanted to know if you would be interested and willing to be a part of the study.

Thank you,
Melody

Appendix B

Informed Consent

KEY INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

TITLE OF STUDY: Perceptions of primary grade teachers about reading curriculum and reading instruction.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Susan Browne

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in questions 1-9 and 14 below. The purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Dr. Susan Browne, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research study is for a thesis to evaluate the perceptions that primary grade teachers have of reading curriculum and instruction. A specific aim of this study is to identify how a basal reading approach impacts reading instruction. Another aim of this study is to identify possible reasons why the basal reading approach is incorporated into reading curriculum and instruction.

2. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are a primary grade level teacher. Since this study focuses on primary grade level reading curriculum and instruction, it is a requirement to be a primary grade level teacher to take part in the study. This study also focuses on the perceptions of primary grade level teachers in relation to reading curriculum and instruction.

3. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

If you take part in this research study, you will be asked to answer questions within a survey related to reading curriculum and instruction. You will also be asked to participate in two interviews with the co-investigator at Downe Township Elementary School. Two interviews will be conducted throughout the study. Lastly, you will be asked to participate in a focus group at the end of the study where all of the subjects will be led in a discussion and will be moderated by the co-investigator.

During the two interviews and focus group portions of the study, a smart phone will be recording the interviews and focus group in order to collect data from conversations. After the interviews and focus group discussions have been completed and the recordings have been listened to for additional information, they will be deleted from the phone.

4. Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?

The target population is primary grade teachers. The nature of this study is specific to primary grade level teachers. If teachers are not primary grade level teachers, they will be excluded from the study.

5. How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?

This study may take up to two months and will be conducted at Downe Township Elementary School. Throughout the two months of this study, the survey, interviews, and focus group being conducted will take 1-2 hours each to complete.

6. How many visits may it take to complete the study?

The number of visits may vary depending on the amount of information being gathered. Visits will be conducted weekly or bi-weekly.

7. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

A potential discomfort you might experience if you take part in this study is frustration, as you will be discussing your experiences with reading curriculum and reading

instruction. Another potential discomfort you might experience is stress, due to the amount of time that you will be participating in the study. A risk you might experience that is less likely to occur is the potential to be identified based on personal identifiers.

8. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

There may not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Results of the study may enhance the ability to locate research based reading curriculum that meets the needs of all students.

9. What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?

Your alternative is not to participate in the study.

10. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

There will be three subjects enrolled in this study.

11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

There will not be any cost to you to take part in this study.

13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

14. Are you providing any identifiable private information as part of this research study?

We will be collecting identifiable private information in this research study. As previously stated, recordings will be kept on a phone of the interviews being conducted, as well as the focus group. During these discussions, identifiable private information may be in these recordings. Your identifiable information will not be used in any of the future research projects or disclosed to anyone outside of the research team.

15. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. Recordings and data will be stored and maintained using password protected files, to which only the primary investigator and co-investigator will have access to.

16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. Susan Browne at 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028..

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

17. Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Susan Browne
(856) 256-4500 Ext. 53830

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

18. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Consent Form Addendum

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM**

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Susan Browne. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio tape interviews and the focus group being conducted as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team.

The recording(s) will include your name.

The recording(s) will be stored on the co-investigator's mobile device and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date:

Appendix D

Initial Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school has a strong reading curriculum in place.				
I feel confident in teaching struggling readers in my classroom.				
I feel confident in teaching advanced readers in my classroom.				
I use books provided by the <i>Reading Wonders</i> curriculum in guided reading groups.				
I feel the <i>Reading Wonders</i> curriculum provides me with enough tools to develop and strengthen my students' reading skills.				
I feel that my students are able to keep up with the pace of reading lessons in the classroom.				
My school has a strong writing curriculum in place.				
The <i>Reading Wonders</i> curriculum provides many opportunities to develop writing skills.				
I feel that my students are able to keep up with the pace of writing lessons in the classroom.				
The <i>Reading Wonders</i> curriculum provides students with opportunities to strengthen handwriting skills.				
The <i>Reading Wonders</i> curriculum provides students with opportunities to strengthen writing skills.				
I feel confident in teaching struggling writers in my classroom.				
I feel confident in teaching advanced writers in my classroom.				

Appendix E

Interview #1 Script: How Teachers Were Taught Literacy

1. What assessments were you given in school to monitor your reading?
2. How were you taught to write?
3. What did you like most about learning how to read/write?
4. What did you like least about learning how to read/write?
5. What activities do you remember doing during reading and writing that have stuck with you?
6. In college, what kind of instruction did you receive regarding literacy instruction?
7. Did you interact with any specific reading curriculum when student-teaching or other types of field experience?

Appendix F

Interview #2 Script: Curriculum and Instruction

1. What assessments do you give to monitor student reading? When?
2. How is spelling addressed in the curriculum?
3. When you plan your reading instruction, what are the different aspects you incorporate into your instruction?
4. How do you differentiate instruction in your classroom?
5. Does the reading curriculum provide ways to differentiate instruction? If so, what does that differentiation look like?
6. What does the pace of a reading lesson look like in your classroom?
7. What are key concepts you focus on in your instruction?
8. Do you feel the reading curriculum provides you with support in teaching key literacy concepts?
9. How does the writing portion of the curriculum correlate with reading instruction?
10. What support does the curriculum provide in writing instruction?
11. Do you have experience with other reading curriculums? If so, what were they like compared to *Reading Wonders*?
12. What are some areas you notice that are strengths within the reading curriculum and/or instruction?
13. What are some areas you notice that need improvement within the reading curriculum and/or instruction?

Appendix G

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Interviewer: The purpose of this focus group is to discuss reading instruction and the reading curriculum in the primary grades. This is a way to discuss as primary grade educators the reading curriculum that you use on a daily basis and how that influences your reading instruction in your classrooms.

1. Thinking about the survey you filled out and the interview questions you answered, how do you feel about reading instruction in your own classrooms?
(some prompts include how they feel about teaching the struggling and advanced readers in the classroom?)
2. In addition to this, how do you feel about teaching the struggling and advanced writers in the classroom?
3. When it comes to advanced and struggling readers/writers, what kind of support do you feel they need compared to the support they receive?
4. Thinking about the curriculum, what are some things you would like to see provided for you when planning and implementing your literacy instruction?
5. Of all of the things we have discussed, what do you feel is the most important?