A Case Study of an Elementary School's Reading Assessment Practices While Implementing Response to Intervention

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A case study of an elementary school’s reading assessment practices while implementing Response to Intervention

By

Sandy Davidson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of Mississippi State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2015
A case study of an elementary school's reading assessment practices while implementing Response to Intervention

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This case study, conducted during the 2014-2015 school year, examined the reading comprehension instruction and assessment practices at an elementary school implementing the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. Observed assessment practices were compared to what the International Literacy Association (ILA) deems appropriate assessment standards for literacy achievement. 3 educators from an elementary school (~ 750 students) participated in this case study. The participants included females of various backgrounds; a school administrator, lead teacher, and fourth grade classroom teacher. 3 research questions guided this case study: (1) What does reading comprehension assessment look like in a school implementing RtI?; (2) What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?; (3) In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning? Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted as well as observations, and artifacts were examined in relation to reading comprehension
instruction, assessment, and RtI. Data were analyzed at 2 levels – the school and classroom. From this analysis 4 themes were identified regarding the nature of assessments: (a) Administrators valued and required teachers to use multiple summative assessments to track students’ progression and make decisions regarding students’ remediation; (b) Teachers’ reading instruction decisions were heavily influenced by district, state, and national education mandates; (c) Teachers used formative assessment data to inform reading instruction, but questioned its validity and the quality of their instruction when results contradicted summative assessment data; and (d) The school’s assessment practices were not reflective of the International Literacy Association’s Assessment Standards. Results also included the role of the federal initiative Response to Intervention (RtI) and its impact on assessment practices. The findings of the study suggest implications for school and district administrators, classroom teachers, and teacher educators.

Keywords: Response to Intervention, reading assessment, reading comprehension
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Chad and our two wonderful boys, Chase and Chance. Before I even started this academic journey, we sat down and agreed together as a family that we would see this till the end. Thank you for agreeing and not wavering from this commitment. I love you guys with all my heart.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who have made this possible and without their help this dissertation truly would not have become a reality. First, I must acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with the verse from Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” With God on your side anything is possible.

To my dissertation committee: Dr. Kathleen Alley, Dr. Devon Brenner, Dr. Kay Brocato, and Dr. Nicole Miller, a huge thank you. Dr. Alley, how can I ever repay you for all the time you have invested in me - the long meetings, the late night phone calls, the late night emails and working till the wee hours of the morning on this dissertation. I am so grateful you became a part of my team and know God sent you right when I needed someone to help get me on track. It has been a pleasure working with you. Dr. Brenner, I have learned so much from you as a professor and mentor. Thank you for challenging my mind and pushing me even further and harder than I thought I could go. I became a better student and person because of you. Thank you for your guidance and direction for this case study and believing in this research. Dr. Brocato, thank you for being that cheerleader with your words of encouragement and supporting me by making me believe I can do this. Dr. Miller, you will never know how much your words of wisdom and guidance early on helped me through my coursework and dissertation. You knew exactly how I was feeling and listened as I unloaded all my fears and frustrations. I feel truly blessed to have this group of professional educators as my dissertation
committee. All of you are so knowledgeable and have been behind me every step of the way. Thank you for believing in me.

To my three participants, without them this case study would not be possible. They graciously accepted me into their school and classroom and allowed me to conduct this research. I now have a deeper understanding of RtI, reading comprehension instruction, and assessment. Thank you for educating the young minds at Rolling Hills.

To my mom, Mary Holifield, who always believed in me and knew I would reach the end even when I was unsure. I enjoyed our long chats on my way home from night classes and all the trips back and forth to the university. You made sure I didn’t fall asleep and was safely home. Thank you for being a loving and supportive mother. To my in-laws, Mary Jo and Wayne Davidson, who would come and help out Chad and the boys when I was overloaded with schoolwork or take the boys so I could think and write. You gave of yourselves so freely. Thank you for treating me way better than a daughter-in-law deserves. To my sister, Stephanie, who had the pleasure of being my proofreader for this dissertation and serving as a fill-in mom when I couldn’t handle the boys’ extracurricular activities. To my dear friend and fellow educator, Tosha, who was the only person I could talk to about reading instruction/assessment and RtI; you knew exactly what I was talking about. To my co-worker Kathy, who was by my side every day while I was taking classes and saw firsthand the hard work it takes to complete this degree. You were a great “little researcher” and such an asset for reading my papers. To Dr. Beth Jackson, who was the one person who encouraged me to start this journey and said it would change my life. How right you were my friend. I learned so much working with you.
Lastly, to my men, Chad, Chase, and Chance – sons, I hope you have seen through my example that your education is a life-long commitment and that with hard work, perseverance, and God’s help you can become anything you want to be. I can’t wait to see what your futures hold. Chad, you survived all of my emotional moments the past couple of years and never complained. You have always been by my side no matter what and pushing me till the end. Thank you for sacrificing so much to do this and taking care of the boys and me. I am so blessed to have all of you.
IN MEMORIAM

John T. Holifield – the greatest dad a girl could have. I know you are smiling from heaven because I finally accomplished what you wanted for me so many years ago. You were my role model for a strong work ethic, always doing your best, and giving your all. I miss you tremendously and wish you were here to celebrate this milestone in my life.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Reading and comprehending are critical abilities all students must have in our digital world, and teachers play a pivotal role in the instruction and assessment central to the development of students’ reading capabilities. Good comprehension teaching includes explicit instruction using specific reading comprehension strategies with numerous opportunities for students to read, write, and discuss text to build requisite skills (Duke & Pearson, 2002). A balanced approach is desirable, where teachers spend time teaching strategies while engaging their students in actual reading and writing. Effective teachers of reading comprehension use strategies such as questioning, discussion, and summarization to help build their students’ reading comprehension abilities (Duke & Pearson, 2002). As well, teachers use high-quality literature in various group structures, having students read for different purposes such as increasing their knowledge base or performing a task (Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, & Pressley, 1999). However, not all students receive this type of balanced instruction.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), our nation’s report card, results in 2013 show 34% of 4th graders and 32% of 8th graders are reading at a proficient level or above. This assessment gives an extensive view of how students in the United States perform on reading comprehension tests based on grade level reading passages. According to this measure, students across the country have lower
reading performance in relation to other nations. Thus, the vast majority of students continue to lack the prerequisite reading skills required to obtain meaning from grade level text. Given the implications of reading skills failures on future reading performance and academic performance in general, prevention through early intervention efforts is crucial (Torgesen, 2002).

The federal government took action to address reading comprehension over fifteen years ago and organized a group of researchers and educators to investigate the best practices for literacy instruction. This panel of experts limited their focus on research studies that were empirical in nature and met their specific qualifications for consideration. The findings from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) addressed five components of reading instruction: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) vocabulary, (d) fluency, and (e) comprehension, and provided instructional recommendations for each. In 2001 President George W. Bush signed into law a major educational initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), with hopes of pushing the educational community into action. These two federally supported plans were catalysts in changing what administrators and educators viewed as best practices and emphasized instructionally in the classroom.

Additionally, a third piece of legislation was added concerning students with disabilities and students struggling academically. President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004, spawning the birth of a new initiative – Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is a method of providing early intervention to any student struggling academically by targeting reading problems early in a student’s educational life (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).
Two primary purposes for RtI are to provide an alternate method for identifying a student for special education services rather than using the severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability, or to provide a means to deliver additional assistance or early intervention for a student at risk of school failure (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). The RtI model allows teachers to move away from the practice of waiting for a student to fail, to one of “failing to wait” when a student is struggling (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The majority of states across the country have implemented or are in the process of adopting RtI, and many individual schools have taken action into their own hands by implementing RtI prior to required mandated deadlines (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009).

Schools implemented RtI in multiple areas including behavior, mathematics, and reading. In the domain of reading, two complex components of RtI are reading instruction and reading assessment (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007; NICHD, 2000). The law specifies that students with disabilities must achieve at the same level as students who do not have disabilities. In order to achieve this goal, individual states, school districts, and schools are using an RtI framework to assess and plan instruction. RtI places a strong emphasis on the instruction of foundational reading skills (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). Remediation and intervention begin at the earliest age with the goal of preventing school failure. The intention is for teachers to rely on assessment data through universal screeners and progress monitoring to determine students’ reading abilities and progress (Fuchs et al., 2003). Thus, there is a need for teacher expertise to use a variety of assessments to inform instructional decision-making.
According to Wixson and Valencia (2011), “teachers need to know and understand the critical components of language and literacy relative to the developmental levels of their students so they can ensure that the essential areas are assessed and appropriate instruction is provided” (p. 468). Therefore, teachers need to have a deep understanding of screeners, formative and benchmark progress monitoring, and summative outcome assessments (Wixson & Valencia, 2011). Among the areas where teachers need knowledge are ways to: (a) determine which assessments are more or less appropriate for the different purposes for gathering data, (b) interpret assessment data collected for different purposes so they can be used appropriately to inform next steps for assessment or instruction, (c) administer a range of diagnostic assessments including their own classroom assessments and observations to ensure that the information they have is sufficient for planning instruction, and (d) document students’ progress in the context of their daily instruction so they can determine if that instruction needs to be adjusted.

As with other models for reading practice, RtI rests on the lynch pin of assessment, which is intended to drive instruction. However, there are shortcomings in RtI assessment practices. For example, the identification of students needing remediation through interventions depends on the results of universal screeners. These universal screeners are a snapshot of a student’s overall reading ability and do not address each component of reading instruction. Research-based practice asserts first assessing with a universal screener to identify students performing below grade level expectations and then administering the universal screener again for verification of needed remediation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). The progress monitoring focus of the RtI framework has been criticized for leading schools to focus on the assessment of fluency with little to no
assessment conducted that focuses on students’ abilities to comprehend what they read (Hale et al., 2011).

Prior to this case study, I conducted a pilot study that was influential in my thinking about how the RtI process should work and exactly how an elementary school’s assessment practices are influenced by this mandated initiative. I gained knowledge about teachers’ perceptions of the RtI process, but wanted a more thorough understanding of the dynamics between reading instruction and assessment within the RtI framework.

**Influence of Pilot Study**

In the fall of 2013 I conducted a pilot study with three classroom teachers at an elementary school in the community where I live concerning their perceptions and attitudes regarding RtI implementation. I conducted interviews and observations of these teachers and collected documents pertaining to RtI paperwork and forms. From this pilot study I gained knowledge and understanding of what RtI implementation was like for these teachers and their school. It was this experience that was influential in my desire to return to this setting in order to acquire an even deeper understanding of what this school’s practices included for reading comprehension instruction and assessment within the RtI framework. As Glense (2011) describes, in returning to this setting I would be conducting “backyard research” (p. 41) since this school is literally in my backyard and my own children attended there several years ago.

Though my focus in the pilot study was primarily RtI oriented, I found myself wondering what other assessments teachers were using to guide their instructional decisions and to monitor their students’ progress towards successful achievement of objectives. Additionally, I wondered how much the school’s implementation of RtI was
influencing the types of assessments being administered to monitor students’ reading progress. Finally, I wondered if the focus on RtI implementation might cause teachers to weigh more heavily the RtI assessment data in comparison to formative assessments occurring in the classroom on a daily basis. These wonderings led to my desire to more deeply understand the school’s complete reading assessment process, and the assessment of comprehension in particular because it is imperative that upper primary grade students become enthusiastic, independent readers who successfully use literacy skills as they “read to learn” new material across all subject areas.

**Purpose of the Study**

For better or worse, RtI has dramatically changed the way states, school districts, and schools address students who are identified as below grade level. As schools have implemented the RtI model, researchers have examined different aspects of the model through qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, studies have been conducted gathering data from the stakeholders responsible for the implementation of RtI. However, research has primarily been gathered from the perspective of teachers (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, & Moore, 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2010/2011; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012), as well as school psychologists and speech-language pathologists (Machek & Nelson, 2010; Sanger, Mohling, & Stremlau, 2011; Sansosti, Telzrow, & Noltemeyer, 2010).

Screening assessments are given within the RtI model to identify each student’s strengths and weaknesses and determine which students are struggling academically. Research addressing the assessment piece of RtI has primarily focused on universal screening and progress monitoring for students in kindergarten and first grade (Vellutino,
Scanlon, Zhang, & Schatschneider, 2007). There are fewer studies that examine how assessment practices are implemented in the later primary grades (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003), or that examine assessment of comprehension specifically (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Thus, the purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school, were influenced and determined while the school implemented RtI.

One overarching question guiding my thinking involved how teachers assess their students’ reading comprehension in the upper primary grades within the framework of RtI, and how this relates to what leading research says should be assessed, as well as how it should be assessed at the upper grade levels. I used the International Literacy Association’s (ILA) standards for the assessment of reading as a lens of comparison to narrow my focus and guide my thinking regarding this elementary school’s assessment practices. ILA is an international professional organization comprised of teachers and scholars, known for its cutting edge research studies in the area of reading and writing and for providing practical resources for all educators. ILA (2010) has developed 11 specific standards to assess reading (see Table 1), stating the classroom teacher is responsible for ensuring his or her students are mastering the curriculum, and in the area of literacy that all students are learning how to read at their grade level.
Table 1

ILA Assessment Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The interests of the student are paramount in assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Assessment must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assessment must be fair and equitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first and most important consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Assessment must be based in the local school learning community, including active and essential participation of families and community members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>All stakeholders in the educational community – students, families, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the public – must have an equal voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Families must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I chose ILA assessment standards three, five, and eight specifically to guide my thinking for this study because of their potential direct impact on teachers’ instruction and student achievement. ILA standard three posits the purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. This standard allows me to evaluate if this elementary
school uses their assessments as a way to drive their instruction for overall school and classroom improvement in support of student learning. The importance of analyzing assessment data and having a thorough understanding of how best to meet students’ needs is essential. ILA standard five states assessment should reflect the complex nature of reading and the importance of societal influences on literacy development. Analyzing a school’s reading instruction and assessment practices using this lens uncovers if school decisions reflect reading’s complexity and multidimensionality to provide information on literacy progression in this digital age. ILA standard eight involves using multiple perspectives and sources of data in the assessment process. Knowing the key individuals involved in the assessment process and which assessments are utilized provides information about the entire assessment system within the school setting.

Understanding the intricacies of the relationship between instruction and assessment, and assessment practices from the perspectives of school stakeholders, could prove beneficial and extend current thinking. Since the implementation of the NCLB (2001) legislation, teachers’ instructional decision-making has been driven by assessment and accountability results. Teachers need to have an in-depth understanding of the different assessments available, how to interpret assessment results, and how assessment data can impact their instruction and their students’ learning since teachers are held accountable for student achievement based on multiple types of assessment.

To this end, the goal of this case study was to learn how teachers implement and interpret assessments, and how this knowledge affects their reading instruction decisions, based on the perspective of an elementary school administrator, a lead teacher, and an upper primary grade teacher. This case study was conducted because there is limited
research and knowledge related to reading comprehension and assessment within an RtI framework. Another critical purpose of this research was to better understand reading comprehension instruction within the context of a school implementing RtI. This dissertation research may provide implications that help schools examine their reading comprehension instruction and assessment, particularly within the framework of RtI, to determine their effectiveness in improving student achievement for all students, including those who are at-risk. Further, the research site for this case study was an elementary school, which allowed me to examine how an elementary school conducted reading assessments for upper grade level students, including potential implications affecting reading comprehension instruction and assessment practices.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this case study were:

1. What does reading comprehension assessment look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?

2. What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?

3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?
Theoretical Framework

I selected social constructivism as my theoretical framework, a sub-theory of constructivism. Researchers who conduct studies from the perspective of constructivism look at everyday life with its disorganization, its commonness, and its extraordinariness that pushes the boundaries between the theoretical and methodological limits (Brookhart, 2004). This framework is useful for understanding three individuals’ assessment practices, which themselves represent everyday life or routine habits. The foundation of constructivism originates from theorists such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky (Twomey Fosnot, 1996; von Glasersfeld, 1996). “Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently” (Patton, 2002, p. 96). Therefore, the world of human perceptions has been influenced and impacted by cultural and linguistic constructs (Patton, 2002). Constructivists examine the multiple realities formed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and collaborations with others (Patton, 2002).

Social constructivism (Liu & Matthews, 2005) extends the premises of constructivism. We know learners construct their own knowledge of the world based on their experiences (Vygotsky, 1978), and human perception in the realm of social constructivism is influenced by cultural and language constructs (Patton, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (in Patton, 2002) state the following about social constructivism: “Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another, neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another…” (p. 98).
In this research study three people (the administrator, the lead teacher, and the fourth grade teacher) interacted with the researcher to help extend each other’s knowledge of reading assessment practices within the RtI framework. Learning about reading instruction and assessment practices at this elementary school is a personal and individualistic process where each person may not be in agreement. The assessment and instruction relationships while intertwined are influenced independently by the social and cultural experiences of each individual. This perspective helped me to fulfill the need for a closer inspection of each stakeholder’s understandings and perceptions so the researcher and practitioners might gain increased insight regarding this phenomenon (Phillips, 1995; von Glaserfeld, 1996).

**Summary of Methodology**

In order to understand the phenomenon of reading assessment practices within an RtI framework, I focused my research on the stakeholders who were held accountable for decision-making and implementation – the administrator, the lead teacher, and a fourth grade teacher. I used descriptive case study because this methodology is useful in education when little research has been conducted and knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon are desired (Merriam, 1998). Data were collected for the case study from three sources: (a) interviews, (b) observations, and (c) artifacts. Each participant was interviewed no more than three times with each interview being recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Observations consisted of classroom instruction and meetings pertaining to reading comprehension instruction and assessment, and RtI implementation. Various artifacts were collected as additional data sources to the
interviews and observations. This triangulation of data increased my depth of understanding for the phenomenon and added reliability and validity to the case study.

Data analysis were inductive, coinciding with data collection. The research questions in this case study provided additional direction for data analysis and coding (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña’s (2013) coding method of First and Second Cycle coding was followed. During the First Cycle of coding, descriptive and evaluation coding were used for development of themes and patterns. Second Cycle coding required reorganizing and reconfiguring First Cycle codes to develop a smaller and more select lists of categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions. Data collection and analysis are described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Definition of Terms**

Many of the following terms are commonly used by educators and are found in educational literature. For the purpose of my dissertation research, I operationally defined the following terms as an additional way to provide clarity to their meaning and my own understanding of their use herein.

1. *Curriculum-based Measurement (CBM)* – is a formative evaluation method used to assess student progress in specific academic domains, including reading, mathematics, written expression, and spelling (Deno, 2003).

2. *Formative Assessment* – wide variety of approaches teachers use to conduct evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs and academic progress during a lesson, unit or course.
3. **Intervention** – An evidence-based strategy used by an educator to improve a specific skill for a student demonstrating non-mastery (Fuchs et al., 2003).

4. **Metacognitive Monitoring** – Reflecting on what one has read, said, or written to see if it makes sense (Pearson, 2000).

5. **New literacies** – a mode of communication through digital form such as blogs, Web browsers, virtual worlds, listservs, etc. (ILA, 2010).

6. **Performance Assessment** – involves the demonstration of a particular skill and often the process of accomplishing a performance specific to that skill.

7. **Progress monitoring** – A form of assessment conducted by a teacher to measure a student’s level of growth in learning (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008).

8. **Research-based instruction** – a particular program or collection of instructional practices that has a record of success [also known as evidence-based instruction and scientifically-based instruction] (ILA, 2010).

9. **Response to Intervention (RtI)** – is a specific, three-tiered approach to providing interventions and remediation to students who struggle academically or behaviorally (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

10. **Summative Assessment** – are used to evaluate student learning, academic performance and standards mastery at the conclusion of project, unit, course, semester, program or school year.
11. *Three-Tiered Model* – Instruction provided to students with three levels of intensity. Tier I is the core curriculum provided to all students. Tier II is supplemental instruction for students who need additional instruction. Tier III is intensive, one-on-one instruction that is highly specialized for individual students (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003).

12. *Universal Screening* – Screening conducted typically three times a year to identify students who may be performing below grade level expectations and/or who need additional support, thus informing the teacher for further assessment (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

**Chapter Summary**

I described the importance of reading comprehension instruction and assessment at the beginning of this chapter, and how the RTI framework is a key component in providing additional instruction and intervention to students who are struggling readers. I expressed the need for a study that would add to research knowledge about an elementary school’s reading assessment practices, and how their practices compare to a professional organization’s statements about best practices relating to multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning. Through observation and interaction with teachers at this school during a pilot study, I developed a desire to understand assessment and instruction practices with greater depth. I outlined the research questions as well as the theoretical framework I used as a lens for analysis.

In chapter two I explain the complexities of reading instruction and assessment and how these are dependent upon each other. I share how various perspectives and stakeholders have influenced both reading instruction and assessment. Within both
complexities, I describe the role of RtI and its impact. From the review of relevant RtI literature I identify four themes regarding elements required for successful RtI implementation from the perspectives of various stakeholders: collaboration, professional development, assessment, and school leadership. Lastly, the ILA’s Assessment Standards are explored, as they provide criteria of how the school’s reading assessments in this research study compare. The remaining chapters outline the data collection, methods, findings, and implications of this study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Instruction is only effective if it supports student learning; students learn little if teachers teach content students already know, or teach students concepts they are not yet ready to learn. That is why assessment has become the central process in effective instruction (Wiliam, 2011). It is only through assessments that teachers can determine what students are ready to learn and if their instruction has resulted in their students’ acquisition of the intended learning outcomes.

The purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school, were influenced and determined while the school implemented RtI. The research questions guiding this case study were:

1. What does reading comprehension assessment look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?

2. What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?

3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?
A review of the research clearly provides support for the claim that reading instruction and reading assessment are interdependent, as well as how these two reading components mutually impact teacher instruction and student learning. A student’s ability to read and comprehend proficiently is contingent upon quality reading instruction and reading assessments (e.g., Shepard, 2000; Snow, 2002). An additional piece to this relationship is the requirement of school districts to implement and execute the components of RtI for students who are struggling in the area of reading. In 2010 the ILA and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) developed standards for the assessment of reading and writing based on best practices from literacy research to inform and serve as a model for educators. At that time few studies were conducted to determine the effectiveness of a school’s reading assessment practices within the framework of RtI implementation. This gap in the research is significant because it is important to study and understand, particularly at the elementary level, if school stakeholders are assessing students’ reading abilities based on what research has identified as best practice for reading assessment, regardless of mandated RtI directives.

The purpose of this study and stipulated research questions guided me to identify overarching areas within the literature, which I defined as the “Complexities of Reading Instruction” and the “Complexities of Reading Assessment.” I begin this chapter with a discussion of these two areas, focusing on reading comprehension instruction and RtI interventions within instruction, reading comprehension assessment and RtI assessment protocols, formative and summative assessments, and the ILA’s assessment standards. While ILA has 11 assessment standards it holds as essential for reading and writing (see Table 1), I selected standards three, five, and eight specifically to organize my thinking
when sharing research findings because they more directly relate to the relationship between instruction and assessment. Within this discussion, I illustrate how reading instruction and assessment are significant aspects of RtI, as well as the importance of each in relation to student learning and achievement in the general curriculum. I conclude this review of literature by sharing four themes from research on educators’ perceptions of reading instruction and assessment within the context of RtI implementation; the importance of collaboration, professional development, understanding of assessment, and school leadership.

The Complexities of Reading Instruction

Historically, many researchers have questioned how to teach reading, especially reading comprehension. Within the complexities of reading instruction, differing perspectives abound. In this section I share divergent perspectives from research, followed by a description of views espoused by cognitivists, socioculturalists, and governmental legislation that influenced reading instruction and assessment practices. Next, I share definitions and requirements from RtI, a specific governmental mandate influencing reading instruction and assessment in the past decade. I end this section with a discussion of reading instruction guidelines developed by the ILA.

Perspectives on Reading Instruction from Research

Literacy experts have long debated what is deemed best practice for the teaching of reading. Two groups of researchers, the cognitivists and the socioculturalists, have conflicting views for how to teach reading. From the cognitive perspective, reading comprehension is seen as a process of constructing meaning while interacting with texts
and utilizing prior knowledge (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley, 2000). According to socioculturalists, the reader and the socio-cultural context play a significant role in how readers construct meaning based on their knowledge of language, the material being read, and the environment around them (Gee, 1996; John-Steiner, Petoskey, & Smith, 1994). These two groups differ in their epistemological foundations causing tensions between the cognitivist perspective with a focus on skills-based/phonics instruction, and the sociocultural perspective with a focus on a whole language method as the way to approach reading comprehension instructional.

Cognitivists view the important role of phonics instruction and the essential role of word recognition skills, letter-sound relationships, and decoding skills in learning to read. As well, the use of cognitive strategies is essential for students to learn how to comprehend reading material effectively (Pearson, 2000). Supporters of phonics instruction emphasize reading instruction where the teacher is in the role of facilitator during lessons. Opponents of the cognitivist view see a need to emphasize the social nature of learning. Rather than students being instructed in stringent phonics rules and patterns, social-culturalists believe reading instruction is a continuous process, including the importance of the social setting and cultural influences on the child (Snow, 2002). In the socio-culturalist perspective, reading comprehension includes more than using cognitive strategies to decode words and aid in oral language comprehension; it involves the immediate, socio-cultural, and historical contexts of reading text, with students reflecting on their thought processes and engaging with others about their reading (Serafini, 2012). Tensions between these two groups regarding how children become
accurate readers still rage, with both sides believing their approach to instruction is most effective in teaching children how to read. This difference of opinion related to methodology has only reinforced the complexities of reading instruction, and in recent years generated a new way of thinking - a balanced approach to reading instruction including aspects from both perspectives (Pearson, 2000).

In addition to literacy researchers, politicians became part of this national conversation concerning how students should be instructed in the area of reading. The federal government has been overtly aware of the importance of literacy instruction based on NAEP results and the concerns raised regarding students’ reading achievement nationwide, as well as achievement gaps noted between minority and low-income students and their peers. In the late 1990’s Congress instituted an investigation by a national panel of leading experts and educators to study what research had to say were best practices for the teaching of reading. The findings in the report from the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) not only summarized research on what the panel determined to be the major components of reading, but also what should be considered in the federal literacy policy in the passing of the NCLB (2001). From an extensive examination of empirical research studies, the NRP (NICHD, 2000) presented a research base for five components teachers should address for reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

This panel’s report had a significant influence on reading instruction across the nation. The panel provided instructional strategies on each component for teachers to use as a guide for developing reading lessons based on proven research. Teachers in the early grades (i.e. Kindergarten-second grade) devoted large blocks of time to phonemic
awareness and phonics instruction which served as the foundation for learning how to read. Teachers in the upper grades concentrated more on the fluency, vocabulary and comprehension aspects of reading instruction.

Beyond these five components of reading instruction, Snow et al. (2005) stressed the importance of teachers knowing the intricacies and complexity of language. Snow and colleagues posited teachers of reading must know how to motivate students using a wide range of reading materials that interest them, and the importance of students having an appreciation for literacy in their lives. Teachers must first know that literacy is contingent upon language, and effective teachers of reading know the complexity involved in skilled reading. Without this knowledge, teachers will not have a literacy understanding and thus be unable to prepare their students for the literacy expectations of their surroundings. Teachers who have a thorough understanding of the complexities of language are knowledgeable in what quality reading instruction looks like.

**Reading Comprehension Instruction**

Reading comprehension instruction is powerful when it builds readers who are able to comprehend complex text for various purposes. The NRP (NICHD, 2000) defines comprehension as a complex process involving the use of cognitive strategies. Since the 1970s, researchers have viewed reading comprehension as purposeful and active rather than as a passive, receptive process (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). “Meaning resides in the intentional, problem-solving, thinking processes of the reader that occur during an interchange with text” (NICHD, 2000, p. 4-5). Explicit instruction of specific cognitive strategies can create competent, self-regulated readers who are able to make meaning from text when they encounter difficulties. According to the panel, this type of
instruction can be beneficial to readers by supporting their use of such strategies, as well as leading to increased motivation for readers’ learning.

Building on the work of the NRP, Duke and Pearson (2002) posited reading comprehension instruction should be balanced, including teaching specific comprehension strategies and affording students the opportunity for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text. These notions extend the NRP’s reading instruction guidelines by including the relevance of authentic reading experiences for specific purposes, as well as the importance of discussion of text. Research indicates instruction is the greatest and most significant way of developing students who comprehend proficiently, as well as preventing reading comprehension problems (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

These differing views have created tensions and complexities within the literacy research community regarding how reading comprehension instruction should be taught in elementary classrooms.

**Cognitive strategy instruction.** Cognitivists view reading comprehension strategies as goal-directed cognitive operations that are taught through teacher-directed instruction (Sinatra, Brown, & Reynolds, 2002). Two important components teachers use during cognitive comprehension strategy instruction are direct explanation and scaffolding (Sinatra et al., 2002). These different reading strategies can be used with a variety of texts and contexts with students (e.g., poetry, newspaper article, job application). Research indicates readers with good comprehension skills use multiple strategies continually rather than using one strategy at a time (Duke & Pearson, 2002).
Effective teachers of comprehension explicitly teach a variety of reading strategies for different purposes, modeling when certain strategies should be used in specific contexts.

There are several lists of comprehension strategies shared within the research. Some of the most frequently cited include the use of predictions, questioning, summarizing, comprehension monitoring using think alouds and other strategies, identification of text structures, and use of visual representations such as graphic organizers with content material (e.g., Duke & Pearson, 2002; Snow, 2002). Research also suggests the use of instruction models to scaffold students’ use of comprehension strategies. One such model includes five components (Duke & Pearson, 2002):

1. An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.
2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action.
3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action.
4. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility; and
5. Independent use of the strategy. (p. 208-209)

With this model the teacher explicitly teaches the comprehension strategy in a step-by-step process and through much modeling and scaffolding progressively allows the student to have independent use of the strategy. Students develop their ability to apply the strategy in actual reading and writing assignments.

The use of comprehension strategies provides students’ opportunities to self-monitor what and how material is read. When students use comprehension strategies across disciplines such as science and history, students’ reading comprehension of
material increases (Snow, 2002). For example, effective teachers of reading comprehension can pose high-level questions (a comprehension strategy) to support their students’ development of thinking beyond the text, and to facilitate their students’ ability to make connections to the text being read in relation to their own background experiences (Snow, 2002). This type of instruction that actively uses comprehension strategies, such as questioning and summarizing, improves a student’s ability to comprehend all levels of text.

In addition to the use of comprehension strategies, cognitivists believe students using their background knowledge, or schema, can impact and aid in comprehending written text. Students who are proficient readers use their schema to understand new information as they read and store that new information with connected information in memory (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). From the cognitive theory of reading, this connection of new information, to information in memory makes it easier for students to remember and reapply new information. Students use their schema to make connections from text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). These connections to and from the text enable students to monitor meaning, infer, make predictions, draw conclusions, and synthesize while reading and learning. The role of the teacher is to assist and help build schema throughout reading instruction.

**Socio-cultural factors and instruction.** In addition to cognitive strategies, research indicates other factors teachers should consider when teaching reading comprehension. While cognitive-strategy instruction has a part in the reading comprehension instruction process, consideration should also be given to the following
factors: socio-cultural, historical, political and pragmatic aspects of reading (Serafini, 2012).

*Socio-cultural.* The socio-cultural context offers the cultural and pragmatic features of why someone is reading and how the text should be comprehended. Readers construct meaning actively, transacting with texts in particular times, places, and settings, bringing their prior cultural, linguistic, literary, and life experiences to the reading process. Four components are important in the socio-cultural perspective, in addition to the cognitive strategies utilized by readers: the text, the author, the reader, and the immediate and socio-cultural context (Serafini, 2012). The text contains the written language for interpretation and readers create meaning of that written language based on their knowledge of language, text, and the world around them. Within this understanding, text becomes a vital component of the reading comprehension lesson for both the teacher and student, in addition to the comprehension strategy employed when reading the text. The texts, purposes, and contexts in which readers read are not inferior to the strategies themselves.

*Historical and political.* Students bring meaning to the texts they read based on the historical and political experiences around them. Learners are shaped by the world that they are in and bring meaning from the larger cultural systems (Smagorinsky, 2003). Students as they are reading texts draw upon their prior knowledge and experience for understanding, but also rely on the text to gain understanding of the world around them. Therefore, the meaning students construct during the act of reading are always historically embedded in local and particular contexts and are always political, working towards particular interests. (Larson & Marsh, 2010). The meaning students construct
during the act of reading is socially embedded, temporary, partial, and plural (Corcoran, Hayhoe, & Pradl, 1994). Students are always able to adjust and reconsider the meaning they construct based on transacting with the text multiple times.

**Additional considerations for instruction.** Research also indicates for reading comprehension to be successful, teachers should provide considerable blocks of time for actual text reading, as well as time to discuss the text being read among students in pairs and small group and with the teacher (e.g., Allington, 2012; Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Within that discussion, students build vocabulary and language knowledge. When teachers’ reading instruction includes these factors (increased time for reading and discussion of text), students are more likely to be motivated to continue reading and learning. These factors should be connected, iterative activities, complementing each other within the classroom setting. Students should also be exposed to a wide range of texts that prove engaging for discussion. For optimal effectiveness, teachers should facilitate the time students spend reading and discussing text while gradually releasing control given to the student, with this cycle repeating itself as increasingly complex texts are introduced and taught to the students, building disciplinary and world knowledge (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011).

**Reading Instruction and Response to Intervention (RtI)**

The RtI initiative requires teachers of reading to instruct specific students who are struggling academically in the area of reading. To have an understanding of the dynamics of RtI requirements within reading instruction, it is first important to have a clear understanding of what RtI is and is not. RtI is an approach to identify students who are
struggling academically and have the potential of being diagnosed with a learning
disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). It is a multi-tiered system where teachers provide
layered interventions for students in need of additional instruction beyond the core
curriculum given to all students (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

RtI is described as the “practice of providing high-quality instruction and
interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions
about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important
educational decisions” (National Association of State Directors of Special Education
[NASDSE] 2006, p. 2). It has also be described as a multi-tiered prevention system that
can prevent students from long-term academic failure (Fuchs et al., 2003). Fuchs and
Deshler (2007) see three main goals with RtI: (a) to have general and special education
working together, (b) to have more students with disabilities in mainstream instruction,
and (c) to strengthen the academic achievement for all students, particularly those who
are low achieving or have a reading disability. Other educators extend this understanding
through their view of RtI as a system enabling schools to provide interventions at
differing levels of intensity for students in general education, with intensity increasing
based upon a student’s instructional needs (Fletcher and Vaughn, 2009). Barnes and
Harlacher (2008) identified five principles consistent across schools and districts
implementing RtI (see Table 2). Further, they described these five principles to be
connected to each other with an emphasis on prevention, intervention and proactive
decision-making.
Table 2

*Principles and Features of Response to Intervention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proactive approach</td>
<td>Multiple Tiers; SPED referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional match</td>
<td>Assessment System: Reviewing the data, Frequency of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving orientation and data-based decisions</td>
<td>Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective practices</td>
<td>Evidence-based instruction/interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parameters of judging response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems level approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Source: Barnes and Harlacher (2008).*

While the key principles of RtI do not change, the features of RtI may differ depending on the school or school district (e.g., Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Bender & Shores, 2007; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009), which enables some districts to implement a three or four tier model.

**Three-tier structure.** Multiple sources have described the three-tier model as what the majority of schools and school district adopt for their RtI model (Berkeley et al., 2009, Vaughn, 2003). Within this model, students’ progression at each level is based upon their needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn, 2003). Vaughn and her colleagues designed the three-tier model (Marston, 2003) for reading instruction and intervention for students in kindergarten through third grade. Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010)
equate the RtI framework to the health prevention model with three levels of prevention and response: (a) primary, (b) secondary, and (c) tertiary care. Primary care is for the population in general, with individuals who need specialized attention being the smallest portion of the society (Mellard et al., 2010). This correlates to the conceptual framework of RtI.

The model description (see Figure 1) consists of each tier level and the approximate percentages for each. Vaughn’s (2003) description for Tier I focus on classroom teachers providing core reading instruction for all students for approximately 90 minutes per day. Reading instruction conducted with students should be researched-based and focus on the areas of phonemic awareness, alphabetic understanding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension depending on students’ needs (Vaughn, 2003). Tier I, also known as the preventive tier, is where teachers teach the core curriculum and assess using the universal screener (Berkeley et al., 2009). Approximately 80% of the students in a given school have their academic needs addressed and met in Tier I (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Students in need of supplemental instruction to the core reading program are assigned to Tier II and given typically 30 minutes of additional reading assistance from general education, special education, or other resource personnel (Vaughn, 2003). Tier II, or the secondary intervention tier, is for small groups of three to five students and consists of approximately 15% of students (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). At this level any “at-risk” student receives core instruction like all other students, as well as additional intervention instruction with close progress monitoring conducted to determine student progress and the effectiveness of the intervention (Berkeley et al., 2009). If a student fails
to respond to the supplemental instruction in Tier II, the recommendation is for the student to advance to Tier III for more intensive and strategic instruction (Vaughn, 2003).

Instruction in Tier III is either one-on-one or with no more than three students per group, with a specialized reading teacher in two 30-minute sessions each day. Tier III, or tertiary intervention, is typically for only 5% of the student population in a school (Berkeley et al., 2009; Vaughn, 2003). Depending on the school and school district, some see Tier III as more intensive intervention instruction for a longer duration and then as a post special education tier (Bender & Shores, 2007), known as the Tier IV structure. Most school districts adopted the three tier approach which is most prevalent (see Figure 1).

![Three tier model for students with academic or behavior needs.](image)

**Figure 1.** Three tier model for students with academic or behavior needs.


The tiers differ in that the time and intensity of instruction changes at each tier level, which affects the number of minutes for instruction and instructional group size (Mellard et al., 2010).
Types of RtI models. There are two types of RtI models: a problem-solving model and a standard protocol model. The two types of RtI models are alike in nature because they both include interventions that are scientifically research-based with assessment systems to monitor student progress and growth (Bender & Shores, 2007; Berkeley et al., 2009). They differ in who provides the interventions to the students and whether the process is a precursor to special education eligibility or the process is the student’s eligibility for special education (Fuchs et al., 2003). With either model, RtI is a multi-tiered system, with tiers ranging from two to four or more (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Currently, no one model has been deemed better than the other and each have core attributes that included: “(a) high quality, researched-based instruction, (b) universal screening, (c) continuous progress monitoring, (d) research-based secondary or tertiary interventions, (e) progress monitoring during interventions, and (f) fidelity measures” (Bradley et al., 2005). Both models address students struggling in the area of reading, but differ in how interventions are determined with the problem solving model depending on teachers collaborating together to develop appropriate interventions. School districts and schools were given flexibility in choosing the type of RtI model implemented with most preferring the three-tier approach (see Figure 1).

In RtI the problem-solving model is used frequently by practitioners and has been implemented by a significant number of school districts, including the elementary school featured in this case study (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Bergan (1977) had considerable influence on the conceptualization of the problem-solving model. The method relies on interventions that are specifically modified to meet an individual student’s needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), though they differ from student to student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). At
Tier I the teacher may meet with the student’s parent to collaborate on how to address the student’s problem (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). At Tier II a shared decision-making team is responsible for designing a strategy for a student’s behavior or academic problem, implementing the strategy and assessing the student to determine if the strategy was successful (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). A small percentage of students are moved to the next level, which could lead to possible special education testing.

The process followed when using the problem-solving model the same no matter what the problem may be for the student: state the problem, determine the causes for the problem, develop interventions for the problem, evaluate the problem, and make any modifications to the intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Careful examination of a student’s academic or behavioral concern through problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation is necessary (Fuchs et al., 2003). According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), the problem-solving method assumes practitioners are experts in the field of intervention and assessment as they are the individuals who must measure and assess the students with knowledgeable information concerning interventions and assessments that require significant professional development training in those areas (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

Educators utilizing the standard protocol model are given specific guidelines to assist in their problem-solving process. Interventions in this model are selected from a set of research-proven interventions based upon the resources at the school (Berkeley et al., 2009). In contrast school districts utilizing the problem-solving model rely on teachers’ literacy knowledge to development specific interventions for each individual student.
**RtI reading intervention instruction.** RtI reading intervention instruction supports engaged literacy by fostering a focus on comprehension to improve a student’s ability to gain meaning from text. The use of the RtI model in school districts across the country has renewed the emphasis on student literacy achievement, bringing it to the forefront of teachers’ classrooms (Allington, 2009). RtI focuses on providing research-based interventions in the areas of reading and language for students at their earliest stages of reading development (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). The model suggests that schools should specifically address students’ early reading abilities to prevent any potential reading difficulties (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006) by matching the reader to his/her text level using motivating material, by using very small groups for tutoring delivered by a reading expert, and by coordinating all interventions with core classroom instruction (Allington, 2009).

The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) states local school districts may utilize a process for determination purposes if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation process. This flexibility in the law allows local school districts the capability to provide research-based interventions for students considered “at-risk” in hopes of preventing later reading failure or the need for a special education referral. IDEA (2004) requires basing intervention instruction in research and evidence (Johnston, 2010). For some school districts, the use of the RtI model is one way they can fulfill what the IDEA (2004) law proposes. When teachers provide evidence-based instruction, school districts have a greater probability of achieving higher levels of student achievement and can also rule out poor instruction as a factor in poor performance (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008).
If the core instruction provided by the classroom teacher at the Tier I level is effective and equitable with students responding to this instruction, poor instruction can be disregarded as a factor when students do not achieve (Crockett & Gillespie, 2007). However, if less than 80% of the students are failing to achieve at the mastered benchmark level for a specific learning environment, the first action step is to adjust, differentiate, or change the core instruction to better meet the needs of the students academically (Hoover, 2011). “We begin in Kindergarten (or prekindergarten if possible) [with reading instruction] and work harder and more expertly with those students most in need” (Allington, 2009, p. 9). This means struggling readers at the earliest age possible receive more instruction from their teacher, including more intensive reading lessons, supporting students’ opportunities to improve and become readers like their peers.

Two key factors for successful instruction are a research-based curriculum and evidence-based interventions that enable all students the ability to learn how to read (Hoover, 2011). A research-based curriculum is one with materials, processes, enrichment activities, and extra supplements as a program of study for a specific content area such as reading (Hoover, 2011). Evidence-based interventions are detailed step-by-step methods for implementing a particular intervention in an area of need (Hoover, 2011). Hughes and Dexter (2011) believe a scientifically based core curriculum for reading should be based on the NRP’s key components to early reading instruction. RtI intervention instruction in these terms appears to contrast with what socio-culturalists posit is needed for effective reading comprehension instruction, though evidence-based interventions might include the teaching of cognitive strategies in line with the cognitivist view.
Vellutino et al. (2007) suggests that when students are evaluated to determine their risk for reading difficulties, are effectively identified using screener results, and are provided with supplemental reading intervention throughout their kindergarten year, most at-risk students can accelerate to grade level performance by the end of first grade. The small percentage of students who still experienced reading difficulties at the end of first grade required specialized instruction, qualified for a reading disability, or received ineffective instruction.

The entire RtI process depends on accurate and reliable assessment in order to guide instruction at each of the three tiers. However, there has been little research to determine how schools assess while implementing RtI which is why this study is needed. The RtI model requires schools to implement research-based and effective Tier I instruction for all students. The ILA describes 10 principles for sound literacy instruction that support the items I wrote above concerning comprehension and RtI. These are discussed in the next section.

**International Literacy Association Reading Instruction Guidelines**

The ILA asserts literacy instruction should be evidence-based; a set of practices that are reliable, trustworthy, and support potential literacy growth. Such practices help guide and assist teachers in becoming effective literacy instructors. ILA supports instructional practices set forth by Gambrell et al. (1999):

1. Teach reading for authentic meaning-making literacy experiences: for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task.

2. Use high-quality literature.
3. Integrate a comprehensive word study/phonics program into reading/writing instruction.

4. Use multiple texts that link and expand concepts.

5. Balance teacher and student-led discussions.

6. Build a whole-class community that emphasizes important concepts and builds background knowledge.

7. Work with students in small groups while other students read and write about what they have read.

8. Give students plenty of time to read in class.


10. Use a variety of assessment techniques to inform instruction.

Teachers should regularly conduct these literacy practices and experiences, described as best practices, to promote reading engagement for all children (ILA, 2010).

These ten instructional practices are inclusive of the five NRP components of reading, but extend the NRP’s focus by recommending practices to enact the components of reading in the classroom. Direct instruction in decoding, word study, and comprehension are included in both the NRP and ILA instructional guidelines; however, the ILA instructional practices foreground the importance of authentic literacy interactions for specific purposes, the use of high-quality literature, the importance of multiple texts and balanced discussions about text between teacher and students, as well as how to create classroom environments through grouping and other means to provide a
conducive context for learning. This study focuses on the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment within the context of ILA’s guidelines and standards for reading instruction and assessment.

**The Complexities of Reading Assessment**

Like reading instruction, researchers have questioned how to assess students’ reading abilities, specifically in the area of reading comprehension. The influences of various perspectives have shaped what types of assessments are given and how. In this section I share the relationship between reading instruction and reading assessment and what is needed for a balanced assessment system. Next, I describe how cognitivists, socioculturalists, and government legislation have shaped assessment design and practices. Included in this discussion is the role of formative and summative assessments in the classroom. To conclude the section I share the role of assessments in the federal initiative of RtI.

**Perspectives on Reading Assessment from the Research**

Reading assessment is parallel to reading instruction in its complexity as it too has been shaped and guided by different theoretical and political factors. While the cognitivists and socio-culturalists impacted reading instruction, their perspectives also influenced the realm of reading assessment. In the early 1970’s the emergence of state assessments became a part of each state’s accountability system with tests reflecting a multiple-choice format and a focus on the literal recall of textual elements (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2002). Hence the reporting of district-by-district and state-by-state accountability results on these high-states assessments. Tensions grew between the
cognitivists and educators of that time because of the stringent assessments that states were administering. The cognitivists believed in the importance of prior knowledge, the role of strategic reading and the texts itself. They influenced assessment format by requiring passages that were longer in length and questions that were thought provoking rather than literal comprehension questions. In contrast, the socio-cultural perspective and its intellectual shift to the social nature of learning influenced assessment by infusing questions that were more open-ended, thought provoking and response-oriented to literature rather than skills-based. Each of these groups impacted the design of assessments given in the area of reading.

The concerns of politicians and the federal government about student literacy impacted reading assessment. Through the administration of the NAEP, our nation’s report card, all states’ growth and progress for student proficiency in reading are reported (Cross, 2010). The NAEP results are not only used for comparison from state to state, but include a ranking of performance in relation to other countries around the world. The passage of the NCLB in 2004 dramatically changed the dynamics of student assessment. School districts, schools, administrators, and teachers became accountable of student reading assessment results required by federal guidelines. The impact of these high-stakes assessments has all stakeholders actively involved, particularly classroom teachers, in striving to obtain adequate yearly growth and progress for every student. Moreover, assessment has become a critical tool in determining student achievement for teachers and school administrators when striving to improve student learning and mastery of essential skills (Stiggins, 2008).
**Reading Comprehension Assessment**

Assessment of reading comprehension is as complicated as the complex, multidimensional nature of reading comprehension (Fletcher, 2006). Assessment is defined in the research as collecting student data to guide teachers’ instructional planning, which has the capacity to yield greater student engagement and learning (e.g., Stiggins, 2008; Wiliam, 2011). Assessment systems should be balanced, including a variety of both formative and summative types of assessment as a way to gather data. Assessment necessitates collecting information about students’ performance, understanding, and level of achievement. In today’s digital world that provides endless literacy experiences for students, different kinds of assessments should also be used to inform teachers regarding their students’ performance and their own instructional effectiveness.

Across the literature, there are different guidelines for what reading assessments systems should include. Stiggins (2008) shared seven explicit assessment actions to make assessments a more effective instructional tool: (a) balanced assessments, (b) refinement of academic achievement standards, (c) confirm classroom assessment features, (d) students as assessors of learning, (e) change feedback approaches, (f) strengthen student assessment confidence, and (g) teach assessment literacy to all stakeholders. Shepard (2000) believes in an assessment system that is modeled after the social constructivist pedagogy, where learning and assessing are a social and cultural process. These reconceptualized classroom assessment practices represent a paradigm shift from historical perspectives where teachers taught and assessed as separate measures (Shepard, 2000). In this paradigm, classroom assessments must change in two critical respects:
questioning in all subject areas must denote key ideas and problem solving skills, and teachers and students must adapt how they view assessment (Shepard, 2000). This type of assessment is used to support and increase student learning, emphasizing how assessment and instruction work together as partners to increase students’ learning and achievement.

Connections between reading instruction and assessment. ILA posits that in order to understand literacy assessment one must first have a thorough understanding of literacy instruction. This understanding includes what literacy instruction is, as well as the relationship between instruction and assessment. While ILA sets out several generic standards for assessment, it’s important to also understand some key components in reading comprehension in particular. One single measure in the area of reading comprehension cannot accurately describe the depth and breadth of understanding a student may have in such a complex domain (Brookhart, 2009). Teachers need multiple sources of data to make informed and logical decisions regarding instructional planning and strategies to ascertain and improve a student’s reading comprehension ability.

When assessing reading comprehension and comprehension strategy use it is important to utilize various types of texts and have an understanding of the texts’ features and structures. Different types of texts can impact student understanding and comprehension. Both narrative and expository texts are recommended for use within assessment as each type of text makes different demands on the reader (Flippo, 2014). Narrative texts include more story-type materials, including characters, events, and actions. They are organized in a sequential pattern with a beginning, middle, and ending with specific settings, plots, and actions (Flippo, 2014). Therefore, assessments that include narrative texts have questions related to the character’s actions and feelings,
conflict problem and resolution, and plot of the story. In contrast, expository texts are more content-related and informational in nature. Assessments using expository texts are generally more difficult for students to read and comprehend due to the complexity and density of the concepts presented (Flippo, 2014; Vacca & Vacca, 2002). When evaluating reading comprehension, both types of texts should be used to assess students’ understanding, as well as to promote growth in their comprehension levels (Flippo, 2014; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 2006).

One area of contention in reading comprehension assessments is the format of test questions. Most assessments used at the state and national levels are standardized assessments with a multiple-choice item format. Strong argument has been made that multiple-choice reading assessments only assess cognitive abilities as collections of isolated skills without the actual context in which they were applied (Resnick & Resnick, 1992; Campbell, 2005). The argument is that truly knowing a student’s ability to construct meaning from the text is unknown because of the multiple-choice format. The other question format option to consider for use is a constructed-response comprehension question. In a constructed-response question students write to produce the answer rather than choosing from a list of choices. The open-ended question permits students to write their thinking, sharing thought processes used when developing their answer. A review of the literature shows that either test question format can assess a student’s comprehension ability (Bracht & Hopkins, 1970; van den Bergh, 1990); however, different test question formats can reveal different students’ reading abilities and difficulties (Birenbaum & Tatsuoka, 1987; Manhart, 1996; Ward, Frederiksen, & Carlson, 1980). The complexity of
which test question format is most reliable in providing a true, comprehensive picture of a student’s ability is unclear (Campbell, 2005).

**Cognitive approach to assessment.** Within the cognitivist perspective, classroom practices include a focus on prior knowledge when using new texts, explicitly teaching comprehension strategies with attention to the structure of the text being taught, and students using metacognitive monitoring while reading (Pearson & Hamm, 2005). The influence of the cognitive approach on reading assessment includes tests with longer text passages, more challenging questions, and different question formats. Passages used in assessments were created by testing companies prior to the cognitivists’ influence, with little to no input from educators. Cognitivists advocated to include authentic, relevant texts with open-ended test questions that included the possibility of more than one answer. Test items also required students’ use of reading strategies when determining the correct response.

**Socio-cultural factors and assessment.** The socio-cultural influence changed the dynamics of reading comprehension assessment by infusing more social and cultural experiences in the format of the assessments. Socio-culturalists paved the way for more open assessments as response to literature articulated an open and reflective stance toward reading in contrast to a skills-based approach (e.g. What do you think is important or significant about what you read; and, what questions do you have about the story?) (Pearson & Hamm, 2005). Students were active participants in reading comprehension assessments by providing evidence from the story to support their answers. The socio-culturalist perspective influenced the emergence of reading comprehension assessments
requiring students to justify their answers and provide evidence from the story to support their thinking.

These changes led to the use of portfolios and performance assessment, which allowed teachers and students to be active members of the assessment process. Portfolios maintained for each student enable teachers to organize valuable reading assessment data and provide opportunities for student reflection and self-assessment of learning (Flippo, 2014). Portfolios contain students’ written papers, tests, reports, teacher commentary, and multimedia materials (e.g., PowerPoint, video). They are characterized by three functions: documentation, evaluation, and showcase (Afflerbach, 2012; Valencia & Calfee, 1991). Documentation in a portfolio contains detailed accounts of student work and progress during the school year and can be selected by the teacher or with input from the student. Teachers require students to include common contents that bring consistency to the work that students include. Portfolios also encourage students to showcase their best work, which is representative of their individualism.

Also in line with the socio-culturalist perspective is the use of performance assessments. Performance assessments can be utilized in teaching and learning content and help students learn to become self-assessors (Black & Wiliam, 1998). One example of a performance assessment is having students write in response to a story they read. An open-ended question is posed and students develop a written response. Grading for the writing is based on a prescribed rubric scale. Performance assessments can be used across the curriculum for any content area, allowing students to complete a task based upon the knowledge they have gained from reading and instruction from the teacher. Many performance tasks require students to locate and use various sources of information to
evaluate and perform specific tasks, which helps to measure their comprehension and understanding. Both portfolio and performance assessments reflect the ideology of socio-culturalists and the active role students play in their learning and assessment.

**Formative and summative assessment.** An effective assessment system in the area of reading comprehension includes both formative and summative assessments (Afflerbach, 2012). Each of these types of assessment serves a different purpose, with formative assessment guiding teachers’ instruction continuously and summative assessment informing teachers once instruction is complete (Roskos & Neuman, 2012). Teachers need to keep in mind the purpose of each of these types of assessment and what they can and cannot provide, to help teachers best analyze student reading achievement.

The use of ongoing, formative assessment to inform teachers about student growth and progress toward academic standards is key. In order to effectively implement formative assessment, the student-teacher role must transform so assessments are used while learning and for learning, rather than at the end of learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Formative assessment is a process that is ongoing and not held to a specific timeframe (Cooper, 1997; Stiggins, 2008). Formative assessments become a collaborate endeavor between the teacher and student that enables the teacher to determine effectiveness of instruction and the student to determine overall mastery of learning (Cooper, 1997). Reading and writing assessment should mirror genuine reading and writing (Cooper, 1997).

Discussion is a powerful form of formative assessment (Alexander, 2008). Alexander describes discussion as the foundation of learning as the teacher and students communicate with each other and learn in the talking process. Teachers can learn through
discussing with students their level of understanding for material and concepts taught. The teacher can determine the students’ ability to fully answer questions and at various degrees of difficulty. It gives the teacher direction for needed additional instruction and reteaching as well as the confirmation to begin new instruction.

Another type of formative assessment developed by teachers is common assessments which are benchmark assessments covering small teaching blocks. The blocks of teaching time per assessment ranges from two to three weeks of instruction. These assessments are recommended for use within a grade level at short periods of time, and advocates suggest they enlighten teachers about curricular strengths and weaknesses and can allow instructional adjustments before summative assessments are given (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). Short quizzes, writing assignments, and teacher observations are also viable formative assessments (Guskey, 2003), reflecting what teachers do on a regular basis in the classroom setting. Teachers can trust these assessments and their results because they truly reflect classroom goals and instruction (Guskey, 2003).

A second avenue for collecting data on student performance and achievement is the use of summative assessments. Summative assessments are given at the end of instruction to measure students’ knowledge of grade level material. They are indicators of standards mastery and school program effectiveness (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). Therefore, a summative assessment can range from an end-of-unit test, chapter test, or semester exam, to a state mandated assessment given once per year. A summative assessment can serve many purposes in relation to the student, teacher and school (Black, Wilson, & Yao, 2011). For the student, a summative assessment may provide information about learning growth overall. For the teacher, summative assessments may provide one
indicators of the effectiveness of instruction he or she provides. For the school, summative assessments may show how to construct class groupings, as well as provide some data regarding teacher effectiveness for accountability systems (Black et al., 2011).

Summative assessment can be sorted into two categories – internal and external (Harlen, 2005). Internal summative assessments involve teachers’ grading decisions, informing stakeholders regarding student progress and achievement of desired outcomes (Harlen, 2005). Teacher judgment plays a significant role in internal summative assessment. External summative assessments are used for monitoring the school’s performance and accountability, which in many cases includes high-stakes state assessments (Harlen, 2005). These types of summative assessment place demands on teachers and students alike and can impact not only the students’ learning experiences, but also the nature of the assessments themselves.

Harlen (2012) asserted that certain types of summative assessments such as state-mandated assessments could adversely affect teachers and their instruction in the classroom. Based on her review of 12 empirical studies conducted on summative assessments, she found teachers and schools focused on what was to be tested rather than what students needed to know and learn. Teachers’ decision making for assessments were narrowly focused because of testing expectations such as those required in states’ accountability systems. Yet, the classroom has narrowed its focus of instruction to this single assessment by teaching to the test (Harlen, 2012; Paris, 2000). Researchers recommend a larger range of indicators be used when determining a school’s success or failure (e.g., Harlen, 2012; Paris, 2000).
The designation of formative or summative assessment is determined in some cases by the manner a teacher chooses to use a particular assessment (Afflerbach, 2012). No matter which type of assessment selected, the main goal is to use a balance of both formative and summative reading assessments to inform understanding and increase student learning and growth (Afflerbach, 2012). It is crucial for teachers to identify assessments that deliver the immediate, beneficial information for formative assessments, and those assessments whose information could also aid in the summative assessment role.

The types of assessments utilized by teachers vary from formative, summative and state-mandated tests. These assessments provide information to teachers of student achievement on a day-to-day basis and at the end of instruction. Assessments results are influential in how teachers determine what should be taught and when. Teachers use a variety of assessment tools to determine student understanding through discussion, questioning, portfolios, and performance tasks. It is important to have a clear understanding of teachers’ assessment practices and how these practices influence their reading instruction.

**Reading Assessment and RtI**

Assessments are important pieces in the RtI framework. Within the RtI model, assessing students is an integral part of determining which students receive additional assistance and intervention (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006). Assessment data provide knowledge and direction for the teacher regarding student instruction. To determine which students are “at-risk”, teachers need quality assessments that provide descriptive information. RtI requires specific assessments be given, with each having a specific purpose in identifying
how and why students are struggling academically to inform possible intervention strategies. Additionally, assessments must be ongoing and frequently conducted in order for teachers to respond immediately if students are not demonstrating sufficient mastery and growth (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008).

The two key assessments pieces within RtI are universal screeners to identify struggling students and progress monitoring for those students identified at the Tier II and Tier III level. It is during progress monitoring that the majority of RtI assessments are completed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Assessments are done regularly to see if students are making progress with their prescribed interventions. Typical assessments focus on small, measurable aspects of reading and focus on fluency in sounds, words, and meanings. RtI assessments provide teachers with information about a student’s letter sound fluency (kindergarten), word identification fluency (first grade), passage reading fluency (second-fourth grades), and comprehension fluency consisting of filling in the blank for every fifth word (fifth-seventh grades; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012).

**Universal screeners.** Universal screeners are the beginning assessments in an RtI model, and for teachers are often the first opportunity to determine if students are on target or below target when measured against grade level expectations. They are quick and easy to administer, and can give teachers immediate results that suggest whether students need additional assessment or attention. Universal screeners require high-stakes decision-making regarding student placement in the RtI process (Davis, Lindo, & Compton, 2007). The first step in implementing the RtI framework is to identify students at risk of reading failure and to provide a baseline for growth measurement. The universal screener used in the RtI framework provides data about students who may be struggling
to learn the general education curriculum, as well as the students who are struggling when provided supplemental instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). Once students are identified according to universal screenings, they are placed into Tier II or Tier III and progress monitoring becomes the means of assessment.

Schools can use a universal screener that is norm-referenced or criterion-referenced (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Some schools employ a one-time universal screener at the beginning of the school year that briefly measures reading abilities, while others use a screener in conjunction with a five-week progress monitoring tool (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) suggest screening with a universal screener, providing instruction for five weeks, and then screening again to prevent over-identification of students needing remediation and intervention. A multi-stage screener is also recommended to identify risk for academic difficulties to reduce false positives (students who are identified as needing remediation who do not truly require remediation). This rescreening, typically completed late in the first semester of school and again in the spring of the second semester, helps to catch false positives and identify students who were missed in the first screening (Vellutino et al., 2007).

The uses of universal screening is paramount in an RtI model to identify the students who are experiencing reading difficulties and are in need of supplemental instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Shapiro, Solari, and Petscher (2008) conducted a study where two screening measures were used with students in third-fifth grades to predict reading performance on high stakes state assessments. The first universal screener administered only tabulated students’ oral reading fluency; all other aspects of reading, including reading comprehension, were not measured. Their findings indicated that oral
reading fluency was a good predictor of a student’s performance on state assessments. However, the addition of a second measure that included a reading comprehension component enhanced the teachers’ abilities to determine which students had problems with reading comprehension. Later research examined the effectiveness of screeners to correctly identify students for intervention at the elementary school level (Shapiro et al., 2012). Researchers noted teachers who disagreed with indicators from initial universal screeners (e.g., Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills [DIBELS], a short oral reading fluency assessment; 4Sight Benchmark, a one-hour timed reading assessment) were using multiple sources of data in their decision-making concerning students in need of intervention (Shapiro et al., 2012).

Questions have been raised about the importance of examining how the elementary school in this study used universal screeners with its students, for what purposes, and how often universal screeners were administered. A point of interest concerns whether decision-making was based on a one-time administration to determine services within the RtI model, or if the screener was administered multiple times. It was also critical to understand what information the universal screener provided to the school administration and teachers in relation to reading level and grade placement.

**Progress monitoring.** Progress monitoring assessments are only administered to students who are identified for placement in Tier II and Tier III of RtI based upon low universal screener results (Hughes & Dexter, 2011) Unlike the universal screener that can be a one-time test administration, progress monitoring occurs throughout the school year. By using progress monitoring, teachers and other school personnel are able to determine which students are mastering reading objectives and standards, which students are in
need of continued support, and which direction teachers should go for determining intervention programs (Stecker et al., 2008). Progress monitoring tools need to provide teachers with reliable and valid data in reading competence to determine a student’s improvement over a period of time (Deno, 1985). Progress monitoring may vary depending on if the student is in Tier II or Tier III. No progress monitoring is conducted in Tier I. Frequent monitoring is conducted at Tier II with even more intensive monitoring at Tier III (Berkeley et al., 2009). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) believe progress monitoring should typically occur two to three times a month for students in Tier II and Tier III; in fact, they posit once per week as the preferred timeframe for progress monitoring, though no less than one time a month is crucial.

There are other methods to progress monitoring and each differ in reliability, validity and other essential progress monitoring principles (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The most widely used progress monitoring tool is Curriculum-based Measurement (CBM), where the student reads a list of words or short paragraphs at grade level for one to three minutes with scoring based upon errors in reading as compared to grade level benchmarks (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Through the use of CBM measures, teachers can determine whether their instruction does result in improvement in general reading outcomes since teachers assess students’ abilities in an ongoing fashion (Deno, 1985).

**A call for the use of multiple assessments.** Literacy research recommends a wide-range of assessment tools be used to assess students reading levels and to assist teachers in making decisions regarding their reading instruction. Recommendations include using running records or words per minute techniques to monitor student progress, with both techniques offering curriculum-based information on reading
accuracy, achievement, and fluency (Allington, 2009). Running records and words per minute techniques have students reading aloud to assess development. Some literacy researchers question using oral reading samples alone to monitor reading development (e.g., Allington, 2009; German & Newman, 2007). A concern raised is that students may read aloud well, but they encounter difficulties when reading silently, particularly when being assessed for reading comprehension. In addition, findings indicated struggling readers might read aloud poorly but read well silently (Allington, 2009; German & Newman, 2007). Thus, assessing reading comprehension within the RtI framework may be problematic if educators and administrators do not also look at additional assessment data, beyond the information provided by universal screening and progress monitoring.

Further, most RtI assessments in the early grades concentrate on the foundational aspects of reading which typically measure a student’s reading fluency using a CBM that determines words correct per minute (Deno, 2003). One way schools counteract this assessment issue in the upper grades is by using a CBM called Maze Comprehension that assesses a student’s reading comprehension level. Students are required to read a 150-200 word passage and then complete a comprehension check by correctly choosing the word that fits the blank for every seventh word. The use of this measurement to assess reading comprehension has been shown in research to provide questionable results because teachers cannot assess if students comprehended the passage due to reading it silently (Hale et al., 2011). Findings raised concerns regarding whether reading comprehension could be accurately measured in a read aloud or silent assessment since a student might be strong in one reading mode and weak in the other; results might not accurately represent whether the student deeply comprehended what he or she read (Hale
et al., 2011). Typically, teachers assess students’ ability to comprehend by using comprehension questions, which could prove difficult for teachers due to the timeframe progress monitoring requires. Concerns such as these raised in research emphasize the importance of knowing how teachers in an elementary school implementing RtI use universal screeners and progress monitor their students, and if any range of assessments are administered to understand student reading comprehension performance.

**Components of successful RtI implementation.** Whether instructing, assessing, or implementing a new initiative, the importance of educators and the role they play cannot be diminished. In order to gain a true understanding of the RtI framework and the dynamics of the processes involved, it is essential to examine the perspectives of educators who are instrumental in its implementation. In a synthesis of research studies examining the perception of educators, several groups’ perspectives have been investigated including school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and special education directors, with general and special education teachers comprising the majority (Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011; Sanger, Friedli, Snow, Brunken, & Ritzman, 2012; Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011; Swanson et al., 2012). In relation to these research studies, four components were identified across these groups’ perspectives regarding successful RtI implementation: the importance of collaboration, professional development training, a thorough understanding of assessment, and school leadership. These components paint the picture of what educators view as important elements when implementing RtI, and thus are germane to my thinking regarding reading assessment within the RtI framework.

**Collaboration.** In many studies collaboration was viewed as a critical component to successful RtI implementation (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Carey, 2012; Dougherty-
Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2012; Hoover & Love, 2011; Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012; Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011; Robins & Antrim, 2012; Shepherd & Salembier, 2010, 2011; Swanson et al., 2012). In order to increase student achievement there must be mutual agreement from school personnel to work together for a common goal (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). When diverse perspectives were respected and shared willingly, the focus and goal of everyone was student outcomes and improved instructional decision-making (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Reading specialists worked with literacy coaches who worked with special and general education teachers, and the atmosphere within the school setting changed from “my kids” to “our kids.” Bean and Lillenstein (2012) reported educators being flexible not only to different schedules but to each other, which aided in creating an atmosphere of collaboration. The collaboration process did not center on each person liking the other, but rather valuing the person for the expertise being offered (Carey, 2012).

General and special education teachers, as well as librarians redefined their roles and responsibilities when RtI was implemented in order to promote a problem-solving approach for students’ needs, work collaboratively in school decision-making for student progress, and assist in creating successful instructional lessons (Robins & Antrim, 2012; Shepherd & Salembier, 2010; Swanson et al., 2012). This new collaboration influenced how these groups of educators bonded with each other, whereas prior to RtI each individual would have been in their own classroom working independently. In a unified system to improve literacy instruction, Shepherd and Salembier (2010) stated, “The flexibility of the literacy block approach allowed teachers and paraprofessionals to engage in informal communication… what was working and not working for individual
students, and what changes might need to be made to support…the overall success of literacy instruction” (p. 42). Collaboration witnessed included opportunities for support staff to aid general education teachers, who increasingly relied on their librarians and special education colleagues’ instructional knowledge in relation to reading instruction, differentiated instruction, and instructional planning. Teachers within the RtI framework had “an increased sense of purpose, capacity, and empowerment in their schools” (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011, p. 9). This increased communication between teachers also led to opportunities for teachers to collaborate with school administrators.

Research indicates RtI teams can provide opportunities for collaboration as teams worked together to problem-solve for any student experiencing academic difficulty, such as low reading performance (Hoover & Love, 2011). When an RtI team is established and assists with implementation of the RtI model, any problems or situation is immediately addressed, discussed and solved. Research showed group meetings provided the avenue for all educators to discuss assessment procedures and results, as well as providing the focus for the task at hand (Hoover & Love, 2011; Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011). Teachers began to view themselves as change agents working together where collaborative data-driven practice was critical to the successful enactment of their RtI model. Teachers’ collaborative effort led to a shift in school culture and in feelings of efficacy.

While many researchers studied the use of RtI teams, Murakami-Ramalho and Wilcox (2012) focused on how an elementary school administrator infused the school setting with collaborative efforts to create buy-in from the entire faculty for RtI implementation. This administrator demonstrated to her faculty through listening skills more could be accomplished to improve language and literacy instruction. Through this
school administrator’s efforts to restructure the school, the implementation of the RtI framework was the means for a whole organization turn around and collaboration was at the center of its success (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012).

In contrast, Dougherty-Stahl et al. (2012) identified lack of collaboration as a hindrance for successful RtI implementation. These researchers worked with teachers from three urban schools in the first year of RtI implementation. Gains were made in relation to students’ reading abilities; however, findings indicated “a lack of cohesion in the school’s efforts to work together for the good of the individual child. Voices were left out of the collaboration and school faculty often lost sight of the individual child resorting instead to generalized solutions” (p. 373). Researchers posited an essential component that is needed for successful RtI implementation is collaboration, creative scheduling, and classroom teachers who promote the importance of the general education curriculum (Dougherty-Stahl et al., 2012).

**Professional development.** A common theme in literature about RtI suggests that a lack of training for RtI implementation has been a primary barrier to effectively implementing RtI (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Sanger et al., 2012). The need for teachers to have on-going professional development with training concentrating on effective instructional strategies and intervention was necessary if the majority of students were going to be successful with the general education curriculum (Dulaney, 2012). Also, teachers had gaps in their knowledge base regarding the components of RtI (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). When questioned about the definition and purpose of RtI, many teachers could not explain a thorough understanding of the RtI process nor the goals within the framework. The lack of training concerning using
evidence-based interventions and data-driven instruction was also evident, and according to the teachers was at the heart of their source of dissatisfaction with the process (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Researchers posited teachers lacked not only the skills to implement the RtI framework, but also the necessary skill set to effectively instruct students in a setting with a high population of English Language Learners (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Teachers’ demonstrated frustration and hopelessness as their insecurities and unpreparedness in how to bridge the literacy gap became evident. Professional development addressing RtI practices and processes combined with literacy instruction was called for, utilizing a collaborative-based approach (Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

Further evidence of the need for professional development was present in the work of Sanger et al. (2012). Educators were provided a professional development workshop on a description of RtI, the three-tier model, and language-based literacy interventions pertaining to reading fluency and comprehension as well as written language. The need for additional training became quite clear not only for the educators, but paraprofessionals as well at the end of the first year of implementation, especially because the model was being implemented at the secondary level. Educators voiced concerns about how their training was not sufficient in relation to the expectations and requirements set forth for them to accomplish, mainly because all information was concentrated at the elementary level (Sanger et al., 2012; Sansosti et al., 2011).

Understanding and using assessment. To ensure successful RtI implementation, identifying students who are academically deficient and in need of intervention is paramount (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Teachers should use a variety of assessment tools to provide results indicating students who are responding to interventions and those who are
not (Wilcox, Murakami-Ramalho & Urick, 2013). Across the research, assessments consisted of teacher-made, curriculum-based, and progress monitoring assessment. Often a form of CBM was used three times a year with progress monitoring being administered ranging from weekly to once a month, based on students’ tier placement (Jenkins, Schiller, Blackorby, Thayer, & Tilly, 2013). A schedule for routine assessments did not appear to be needed or required, since teachers gave assessments as students needed them in an ongoing fashion.

Research findings also demonstrated how teachers used data not only to monitor progress, but also to change instructional techniques (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). Grade level meetings became the avenue for teachers to identify, discuss and analyze individual student reports for growth patterns. Greenfield et al. (2010) concluded that due to RtI, teachers were monitoring the reading progress of their students more closely and strategically. “Teachers were developing skills to use and interpret data, within a tiered model, that allowed them to enhance problem solving of instruction planning and instruction and, therefore, to increase student achievement levels” (p. 59). Most teachers became better informed about the progress and ability level of their students. However, there were some teachers who collected assessment results and never used them to address student needs or to inform possible changes to their instruction (Wilcox et al., 2013).

Research also examined how school psychologists regarded RtI and its assessment practices (Machek & Nelson, 2010; Sansosti et al., 2010). School psychologists have been primarily responsible for evaluating students who are failing in the general education classroom, and in an RtI model a different approach with
assessment is used. In both studies identified, researchers found school psychologists receptive to using RtI, including as an option for the IQ-achievement discrepancy model in place for many years to determine if a student has a reading disability (Machek & Nelson, 2010). These school psychologists understood the importance of assessment for progress monitoring and its connection to instruction and intervention. The role of the school psychologist is changing within the RtI framework as they contribute their expertise to academic interventions and assessment data (Machek & Nelson, 2010; Sansosti et al., 2010; Sullivan & Long, 2010).

**School leadership.** Across research, teachers and other school personnel believed the school administrator was a significant factor in successful RtI implementation (Carey, 2012; Dulaney, 2012; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). Researchers posited schools implementing RtI successfully had strong support from district and school administration (Mellard, Prewett, & Deshler, 2012). Mellard et al. (2012) found school administrators had four practices that created a culture of support for RtI: (a) master schedules were protected with daily schedules providing ample time for teachers to understand and incorporate RtI, (b) school administrators took an active role in RtI implementation and decision-making, (c) school administrators conveyed the expectations of RtI and made it a defining part of the school, and (d) school administrators protected the time and resources school personnel needed for RtI.

White, Polly, and Audette (2012) described how one school completed two years of planning before implementation began. The school administrator exhibited a deep level of commitment and communicated to the faculty why RtI was important to their school and the students they served. This particular school administrator wanted full
implementation of RtI, and saw the potential to improve student achievement for those with and without reading disabilities. Communication from the school administrator at the beginning of implementation negated any reservations or frustrations teachers may have experienced later in the process (White et al., 2012).

Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss (2010) conducted a study that centered on school principals to gain an understanding of the difficulties in implementing RtI at the secondary level. At the secondary level many factors contribute to the success or failure of RtI. They concurred stating, “Clearly, principals are a major catalyst for change within school buildings and the success of RtI depends, in part, on the processes such leaders put in place within their respective schools” (p. 288). These studies suggest that successful implementation of the components of RtI were dependent on the leadership of the school administrator.

Four components were identified across various educators’ perspectives regarding successful RtI implementation: the importance of collaboration, professional development training, a thorough understanding of assessment, and school leadership. Educators viewed each of these components as important and necessary elements for the success of RtI implementation within a school.

ILA’s Assessment Standards

The ILA (2010), in conjunction with the NCTE researched and developed 11 standards (see Table 1) to guide literacy educators as they develop instruction and assess students’ reading capabilities. According to the ILA, these assessment standards are the guidelines by which literacy instructors should develop and model assessment practices. These standards represent the ILA’s objective of ensuring quality assessments based
upon 40 years of research about literacy and language development. While ILA describes
11 standards they deem are essential for literacy assessment, I selected three focal
standards to describe and address in relation to student reading instruction and
achievement: standards three, five, and eight. These three standards were chosen because
of their relationship to reading instruction and student learning. In this section, I will
describe these three standards in greater detail, summarizing some of the relevant
research that helped to explain these standards as assessment principles I selected to
guide my data collection and analysis.

**Standard Three: The Primary Purpose of Assessment Is to Improve Teaching and Learning**

ILA identifies the most important reason for assessing students is not for
accountability purposes, but rather for improvement of teacher instruction and student
learning. ILA understands assessment can be utilized in many capacities, such as
diagnosing disabilities, teacher evaluations, and program performance; however, the
essential objective of assessment is strengthening the educational system as a whole for
the teacher and student. ILA asserts validity of an educational assessment practice must
inform instruction and direct teachers to improved teaching and learning. Cooper (1997)
describes the most effective assessments are an integral part of instruction. This informs
teachers exactly how their students are performing. Important conditions to remember are
where the assessment is given and how it is administered. ILA further explains that
higher standards should equate to higher quality instruction, which is the central function
of assessment.
Standard Five: Assessment Must Recognize and Reflect the Intellectually and Socially Complex Nature of Reading and Writing and the Important Roles of School, Home, and Society in Literacy Development

According to ILA, literacy is multifaceted and ever changing to reflect society’s advancements in reading and writing abilities. The digital world students live in today requires educators to use assessments in all forms of medium. Therefore, literacy assessments in classrooms no longer consist solely of a paper/pencil and multiple-choice format, but rather reflect broader literacy tools and practices involving the digital and virtual world. Students must be competent in their ability to use word processors, blogs, wikis, Web browsers, instant messaging, listservs, bulletin boards, virtual worlds, video editors, presentation software, and numerous other literate tools and practices. ILA stipulates new literacies integration in reading comprehension instruction and assessment should reflect the broader media culture. No longer are students assessed on a set of isolated, independent skills in a high-stakes assessment, but with assessments that are frequently given as part of classroom performance.

In line with thinking from ILA standard five, research findings suggest the ways new literacies affect teacher instruction and assessment (Mokhtari, Kymes, & Edwards, 2008). Online and offline reading comprehension instruction is described as not requiring the same type of instruction nor assessment. Online reading comprehension assessment requires students to use the Internet as the means to research, synthesize, analyze, and evaluate information. The researchers propose teachers will need professional development and leadership for a complete understanding of the nature and complexities of online reading comprehension for students in the future (Mokhtari et al., 2008).
Coiro (2003) contends that reading comprehension on the Internet by using different literacy texts and tasks requires new instructional methods and knowledge from the teacher. The Internet provides new text formats (e.g., hypertext and interactive multiple media), which in turn requires new thought processes on the reader. The use of electronic texts can impact a student’s ability to read and comprehend this type of information (Coiro, 2003). With electronic texts students are exposed to a range of symbols and multi-media formats that demand new ways of thinking. These new demands require students to learn about how to manipulate and access these new literacies. Coiro (2003) states assessment for reading comprehension should mirror the new literacies instruction through the use of the Internet.

Karchmer-Klein and Shinas (2012) offer four guiding principles for using new literacies in the classroom to promote reading and writing. They are: (a) be aware that technology is constantly changing, (b) acknowledge the complexities of new literacies, (c) students in today’s classrooms still have a lot to learn, and (d) reexamine assessment methods. Students need guidance as they navigate, research and read information from the Internet on their own. Teachers’ online reading instruction differs from regular print because online reading involves video, images and moving graphics. Assessments need to evaluate not only the students’ reading and writing capabilities online, but their degree of knowledge related to technology skills (Karchmer-Klein & Shinas, 2012).

**Standard Eight: The Assessment Process Should Involve Multiple Perspectives and Sources of Data**

No assessment is immune from errors, biases, or limitations in its format. Therefore, ILA views the assessment process as not one single act or test, but rather one
requiring different perspectives from a wide range of people and data sources. The ILA supports assessments that are fair, impartial, and representative of all stakeholders. It acknowledges literacy should reflect reading and writing from multiple perspectives and cultures and the differences found in each of these. Effective assessment is multidimensional requiring the use of samples of writing, student retellings, checklists, and self-evaluations to name a few of the ways to measure student understanding (Cooper, 1997). Having multiple measures is important when assessing a student’s reading and writing capabilities due to the complex and multidimensional nature of literacy. According to ILA, no single test should determine a student’s academic placement or academic action plan, but rather information from different perspectives could lead to different avenues of knowledge and guidance.

**Conclusion**

Across the research reviewed in this chapter, the complexities of reading instruction and assessment are apparent. While there are differences in opinion about how to teach and assess reading comprehension, there is still much to learn regarding the type of assessments teachers should utilize to provide the vital information needed to help students grow to become competent readers with high levels of understanding and comprehension. Also, using the ILA’s reading assessment standards as a measurement may enlighten how this elementary school’s assessment system compares to these international standards. This review of the literature proposes that knowledge of an elementary school’s reading comprehension instruction and assessment within the framework of RtI needs to be investigated, and information from the perspective of stakeholders in the elementary school setting is warranted. Additionally, regardless of the
RtI model schools and districts choose to implement, reading instruction and assessment are integral components of any model so gaining an understanding through thick, rich description (Glense, 2011) will address a critical gap in the literature.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter consisted of my literature review where I explained the complexities of reading instruction and assessment, sharing how their relationship is symbiotic in nature. Effective reading instruction was described, including the influence theoretical and political perspectives as well as legislative mandates have played, and the need for balance in light of these influences. I also shared information about ILA’s reading instruction guidelines and the reading assessment standards co-produced by NCTE and ILA. Three specific ILA’s assessment standards were discussed as the comparative guidelines for my research study. I also gave an overview of what Response to Intervention necessitates, including its role in reading instruction and assessment, and I reviewed four components supporting successful implementation of RtI based on the perspectives of various educators: collaboration, professional development, assessment, and school leadership.

In Chapter Three I explain social constructivism to share how the purpose of my study and research questions are grounded in this theoretical framework. Next, I describe the dissertation method and techniques used in the research study, including an explanation for participant selection, data collection, and how data analysis was completed.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension, at an elementary school were influenced and determined while implementing RtI. The methodological lens of my study was case study research (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). The research questions guiding this case study were:

1. What does reading comprehension assessment look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?

2. What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?

3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?

In this chapter the design and method of this case study are presented and include the purpose as well as information about the participants in the study. A description of data collection and analysis, validity, reliability, and delimitations of the research study, as well as a section on the implications of the study are included. The chapter is organized in the following sections: (a) Theoretical Framework; (b) Dissertation Method;
(c) Researcher’s Role; (d) Method of Collecting Data; (e) Method of Organizing and Analyzing Data; (f) Validity, Reliability and Delimitations of Study; and, (g) Study Implications.

**Theoretical Framework**

Social constructivism is grounded in the belief that the physical world is different from the human world (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) presented three foundational questions related to social constructivism:

1. How have the people in this setting constructed reality?
2. What are their reported perceptions, truths, explanations, beliefs, and worldview?
3. What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact? (p. 96)

Social constructivists investigate how people create their own multiple realities, and the consequences of these realities on their personal lives and their communication with others (Patton, 2002).

This study was grounded in the social constructivist framework, guided by the belief that learning is a process and knowledge is gained through interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, the two elements that are essential for people’s intelligence and their perceptions are language and culture. People’s language abilities give them the capability to defeat the natural limitations of their perceptions through applying culture’s definitions and meanings on the world (Vygotsky, 1978). An individual is able to experience, communicate and understand reality through language and culture. Glense (2011) states, “You focus on the complexity within the case, on its
uniqueness, and its linkage to the social context of which it is a part” (p. 22). It is within this theoretical framework that I placed my research as I examined reading comprehension instruction and assessment practices at an elementary school implementing RtI through the knowledge and perception of its stakeholders - the school administrator, the lead teacher, and an upper grade level classroom teacher.

**Dissertation Method**

In order to understand a phenomenon, such as an elementary school’s reading assessment practices, qualitative research methods are appropriate. The focus of my dissertation research was to obtain information about a school’s selection and implementation of reading comprehension assessments by listening and observing key stakeholders who were actively involved in the decision-making. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to obtain specific information about a given phenomenon from the perspective of a particular population. The researcher is able to gain a better understanding through first-hand experience how participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behavior. Therefore, qualitative research affords direct interaction with the individuals being studied in their own context or environment, enabling the researcher to assess the quality of things through words, images, and descriptions (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, artifacts) are preferred in qualitative research; this requires the researcher to review all data, make sense of it and organize it into categories or themes that cut across all sources (Glense, 2011). The researcher develops from these sources a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied by interpreting what is seen, heard and understood. This is done regardless of the
researcher’s background, history, context and prior understanding. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide a thick, rich description of how people experience a given research issue (Berg & Lune, 2012). Participants are able to share their own feelings and thoughts through their own words. To support this exploration, I selected case study as the methodology for my dissertation research.

**Case Study Methodology**

A case study is a close, careful look at a phenomenon that provides detailed information in education where research is lacking by allowing examination of a single person or large groups of people. (Berg & Lune, 2012; Merriam, 1998). This collection of information is to be thorough, systematic, and detailed (Patton, 2002). Case studies have high value because they allow the researcher to uncover the significant characteristics of the phenomenon and the individuals involved with it, which contributes to a deep understanding for a thick description and allows for an in-depth analysis (Berg & Lune, 2012). Stake (1995) proposes that a case study is valuable when “opportunity to learn is of primary importance” (p. 244). Characteristics of case study research as empirical inquiry include: (a) investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, (b) boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and (c) multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 2002). The use of multiple sources of evidence (e.g., interviews, observations, and artifacts/documents) provides substantial data for the case study and triangulation of the data collection. The unique need for case study research comes from the desire to understand a complex social phenomenon.

There are two types of case studies that are reflective of this research study – intrinsic and instrumental (Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case study explores a particular case
to gain a better understanding of it, and an instrumental case study examines a particular case to provide information or insight on issues or the refinement of theory. This study served both intrinsic and instrumental purposes, in that research was conducted to better understand how reading instruction and assessment was delivered in a school implementing RtI, how assessment influenced instructional decisions, and how assessment practices aligned with national standards. As well, given that RtI is a complex federal initiative and the purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand how assessment practices were influenced and determined while implementing RtI, the use of descriptive case study methodology was proven necessary.

**Participant Selection**

Determining the sample size for a research study is a decision made by the researcher, and for qualitative inquiry small samples, even single cases, can be used (Patton, 2002). Further, for a deeper understanding to any research question, fewer participants and repeated periods of time and observation are needed (Glense, 2011), Theory, personal instincts, imagination and judgment are strategies to use when determining a sample size. Merriam (1998) suggests there is not a magic number to have in a study; instead the decision relates to the research questions and what the researcher wants to learn from the study. When determining the number of participants to involve in this research study, I wanted to obtain a richness of data by focusing on just a few participants, but also to include multiple voices to provide for multiple points of view and triangulation of data sources.

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) for this research study. According to Patton (2002), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting
information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research…” (p. 46). While a researcher using a purposeful sample cannot make generalizations from single cases or very small samples, he or she can learn a great deal and in many instances opens the door for a new territory of research to be conducted (Patton, 2002).

The selection of an upper grade level teacher was essential to this case study. One gap in the literature is that upper grade level teachers have not been given a voice in describing RtI assessments practices in previous research, especially in the area of reading comprehension. Thus, I selected a fourth grade classroom teacher as the first participant in this study. The pilot study I conducted in the fall of 2013 played a significant role in my selection of my second participant for this study. One of the findings from the pilot study was the impact and influence of the school administrator in the successful implementation of the RtI framework at this particular elementary school. The teacher participants in the pilot study attributed their knowledge and understanding of RtI to their school administrator’s leadership. Therefore, I determined that her participation in this case study would be vital for gathering in-depth information. A lead teacher was the third participant I selected to add an additional voice for this study. Her involvement provided a needed contrast between the school administrator and upper grade teacher’s perceptions. The lead teacher interacted as an instructional support person for all teachers at the school, and she was often a bridge between administration and teachers. These three educators comprised the three focal participants in this case study.
Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Permission was granted from the university’s Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct my research study at Rolling Hills (See Appendix A). I obtained informed, written consent from each participant at our first scheduled interview (see Appendix B). I also obtained permission from the superintendent of the school district to allow research to be conducted at this school site (see Appendix C). I explained to the participants that their participation in my research was completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also explained that I would use pseudonyms in place of their personal names, the name of the school district and the name of the specific elementary school location. As an added precaution, I changed any other information that might possibly identify my participants or the location where my dissertation research was conducted.

Research Setting

The setting for this research study was Rolling Hills Elementary School (a pseudonym). Rolling Hills Elementary is a rural, public school consisting of Kindergarten through fourth grade classes. The school has approximately 750 students (84% White, 14% Black, 2% Hispanic) with approximately 39 teachers who are all highly qualified. According to federal guidelines, Rolling Hills qualified as a Title I school because 40% of its population qualified for free/reduced lunch with 45% in the lower socioeconomic category. Based on 2013-2014 test results Rolling Hills had an accountability rating of B (or high-performing) elementary school according to annual rankings by the state department of education. The school achieved the classification of B for the past five years. Public schools in this southeastern state are graded with a rating of
A, B, C, D or F based on student proficiency levels on state assessments each year. In the area of fourth grade language arts 1.7% of the students scored minimal, 22.1% scored basic, 45.9% scored proficient, and 30.2% scored advanced.

**Researcher’s Role**

As a researcher, I have a definite role in the research study and my predispositions are a part of the research situation (Glense, 2011). Merriam (1998) views the researcher as being limited because of being human. Mistakes will be made and personal biases will hinder. Thus, “because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry” information about the researcher should be included (Patton, 2002, p. 566). My connection to the study site dates back 10 years ago when my oldest son entered kindergarten. Both of my sons had a wonderful experience during their tenure at this elementary school. The reputation of the elementary school has always been one of academic excellence and because of my experiences with my sons’ education, I agree. The school is in the community where I live so individuals know me, know that I am an educator, and know my children. However, many years have passed since I have been actively involved at this school and some of the individuals I knew have retired or moved to other schools. While this site was definitely one of convenience, I also wanted to study a school that received an accountability rating of B (or high-performing) elementary school according to annual rankings by the state department of education.

As I entered the research site, I remembered my research role as learner, or who was curious to glean new knowledge from each participant (Glense, 2011). I was there to “learn from and with” my participants (Glense, 2011). Therefore, when I entered the field, I was cognizant of my role and place. I knew each participant, but strictly as
educators. It was difficult for me to judge what effect, if any, I had on the research setting or any of the participants. I tried to remain neutral as my knowledge and experience with the RtI framework was deficient in regards to its implementation and inner dealings at this elementary school. The goal was for participants to feel at ease while discussing and sharing their thoughts with me, so I tried to build that camaraderie with each of them at our initial meeting.

**Method of Collecting Data**

In qualitative research, data are fragments of information a researcher must put together (Patton, 2002). For case study research data collection consists of interviewing, observing, and collecting artifacts (Glense, 2011). These methods were used to collect data from the school administrator, lead teacher, and fourth grade teacher for this study. According to Merriam (1998), comprehending the case in its entirety, as well as the concentrated description and analysis characteristic of case study, dictates both breadth and depth of data collection. To this end, multiple data sources were utilized to address the research questions (see Table 3). The interviews were semi-structured in nature as questions emerged during the course of the conversations. Observations of all participants allowed me as a researcher to compare the actuality with what was spoken by the participants during the interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What does assessment for reading comprehension look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?</td>
<td>• Interviews (all participants)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Observations (e.g., when assessments are given, how do they administer them, are they given according to reading ability, are students accommodated)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts (e.g., teacher-created, school and district mandated assessments, sample report card)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?</td>
<td>• Interviews (all participants)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Observations (e.g., reading comprehension instruction and assessment by teacher, assessment during intervention, use of universal screeners and how progress monitoring is conducted, grade level meetings, implementation of RtI)</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Artifacts (e.g., sample universal screener, sample progress monitoring assessment, samples of other types of reading assessments given, RtI documentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?</td>
<td>• Interviews (all participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations (e.g., teacher providing reading comprehension instruction, different media and technology used, meetings conducted with teachers concerning assessment and results analysis, RtI meetings concerning students in Tier II and III – who is attending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, performance assessment examples, agendas and minutes from meetings, personnel attendance record for meetings)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

Qualitative researchers rely on interviewing as the means to find the answers to their perplexing questions. The most common type of interview is the person-to-person encounter, which allows the researcher to directly talk and listen to the participant (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) shares these thoughts about interviewing:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observation data are more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-report data. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (p. 340-341)

Through interviewing not only is the researcher able to ask what has not been seen during observations, but also to probe further into the mind of the participants and their perspectives (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth qualitative interviewing is a key naturalistic research method and provides the researcher the opportunity to gain knowledge by exploring what others experience, feel, and believe (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Three approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviewing are: (a) the informal conversational interview, (b) the general interview guide approach, and (c) the standardized open-ended interview. For this case study I used a general
interview guide approach. Rubin and Rubin, Merriam, and Patton shaped my research approaches, which meant that my interview questions were not stringent or structured, but rather flexible in nature. The interview guide permits the researcher to enter the interview with prepared questions, but also the freedom to explore and probe the participant if a particular question or topic needs further explanation, clarification, or enlightenment (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant during a five-week period of time, and were approximately 30-70 minutes in length. An interview protocol was used as my guide (see Appendix D) and resulted in interviews that were more discussion based, with the guide serving as a prompt for topics of conversation rather than a strict question and answer session. Interview one covered the school’s reading assessments in general and the school’s reading comprehension assessments in particular. Interview two focused on reading assessments in the RtI context, and the impact of assessment on teacher instruction and student learning. The topics of the social and intellectual aspects of literacy in relation to reading assessment and multiple data sources and perspectives for assessment were discussed in Interview three. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer in-depth questions and allowed me to ask any follow up questions for any topic pertaining to the study’s three research questions. Interviews were conducted in the participants’ office or classroom.

Observations

The value of direct observation is that it allows the researcher to experience the phenomenon under investigation personally and intimately (Patton, 2002). Observations give the researcher a firsthand view of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Merriam,
1998). The first step in observational data is to describe the setting of the research study. The setting should be described with details that are factual and accurate (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), there are six advantages to direct observations:

1. The researcher is able to understand and capture the context as people interact.
2. The observer does not rely on prior conceptualizations of the setting, but rather has firsthand experience with the setting and the people in the setting, which permits the researcher to be discovery oriented and inductive (p. 262).
3. The researcher is seeing things that may not be expressed in an interview or displayed in a document.
4. The researcher has the opportunity to learn things the participant could be unwilling to share or reveal in an interview.
5. The researcher can move beyond the perception of the participant and develop a self-perception (p. 264).
6. The researcher’s emotions and impressions become a part of data collection and analysis as reflection is a result of direct observation (p. 264).

A question the researcher must answer before conducting an observation is what type of participant the observer will be while in the research setting. The researcher’s participation may change as the study progresses from nonparticipation to full participation (Patton, 2002). For this research study, I had the role of full observer, which means that I did not actively participate, but rather remained unobtrusive while conducting observations at the school setting. I took notes of how reading assessments were discussed during meetings for instructional decision making and planning, and how reading assessment were administered within the classroom setting by using all of my
senses (Glense, 2011). Observations consisted of faculty meetings, grade level meetings, or RtI-specific meetings led by the administrator and/or the lead teacher. I observed five hours of meetings conducted by the administrator or lead teacher. Observations of the teacher included instruction and interactions in the classroom related to her reading comprehension and assessment practices on a day-to-day basis within the framework of RtI implementation. I conducted 25 hours of observations in Mrs. Monroe’s classroom. A total of 30 hours of observations were conducted in both settings.

Field notes were kept in a notebook and used as my researcher’s journal. My field notes included two types of information, descriptive and reflective. The descriptive part of the field notes detailed the physical setting, the people involved in the interactions observed, the reconstruction of any dialogue, and the behaviors of the participants in the setting (Wolcott, 2005). The reflective part of the field notes described my thoughts and feelings from each observation. Both my descriptive and reflective field notes became a part of my researcher’s reflective journal. During the 5-week data collection period, I observed 14 times during the literacy block of instruction which ranged from two to four hours each visit for a total of 25 hours to determine how assessments were administered (e.g., time of day, accommodations for students, who administers) and what assessments were utilized. An observation protocol served as my guide (see Appendix E).

In addition to descriptive and reflective field notes, I used a checklist during teacher observations to document the frequency of each type of formative assessment utilized by the classroom teacher (see Appendix F). This formative assessment checklist provided the focus I needed as I conducted observations in the classroom to tally the
number and the different types of formative assessments utilized by the classroom teacher.

Artifacts

In order to understand a phenomenon, a researcher may collect artifacts that provide additional insight and information, and shape new directions for observations and interviews (Glense, 2011). Merriam (1998) sees artifacts in qualitative research as another way to retrieve information, as when interviewing or observing. Any artifact related to RtI (e.g., RtI forms, Tier II and Tier III documentation) was collected from all participants as additional data sources. Merriam (1998) states “documents are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 112). Artifacts enable the researcher to uncover meaning, develop understanding, and develop insight pertaining to the research questions (Merriam, 1998).

During the five-week period of data collection, I collected artifacts such as universal screener reports at the school and classroom level, lesson plans, reading assessments, reading handouts, language arts assessments, RtI forms/paperwork, agendas from staff meetings, report cards, and assessment syntheses (see Appendix G). The collection of artifacts served as vital information regarding who uses the artifacts, the purpose of the artifacts and how the artifacts contributed to a better understanding of the reading assessment practices within this elementary school. Artifacts such as teacher-created assessments and school assessments helped to understand the design of the school’s overall assessment plan. Samples of universal screeners and progress monitoring assessments aided in understanding the role of assessments within the RtI framework.
Method of Organizing and Analyzing Data

Organizing the data are extremely important in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) because it is otherwise difficult to make sense of the many pieces of information. The first step in data analysis is creating a practicable system for classifying or coding the data in a research study; without this organized system the world for the qualitative researcher would be chaos and confusion (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the researcher must identify, code, categorize, classify, and label the major patterns in the data. Data analysis is a dynamic and creative process where the researcher reasons, reflects, and theorizes (Merriam, 1998). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) see qualitative data analysis as an explicit and systematic process involving a three-part activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

In case study analysis the first step is to analyze the data collected by the case studies (Patton, 2002). Patton stresses, “The analyst’s first and foremost responsibility consists of doing justice to each individual case. All else depends on that” (p. 449). I used the NVivo qualitative software program for data management and analysis. Case data consisted of all the information from the individual participants, including interviews, observations, artifacts, field notes and researcher journal entries. Once the raw data had been collected and entered into the NVivo program, I began a condensation of the data (Patton, 2002) by grouping important categories together. Coding was one of the principal steps I took during analysis to organize and gain understanding of textual data.

First and Second Cycle Codes and Coding

Coding is analysis (Miles et al., 2014). While some experts believe coding is a technical process, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) believe “coding is deep
reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data’s meaning” (p. 72). Coding allows the researcher to sort and cluster together sections of data related to the research questions or themes and to “retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units” (p. 73). According to Saldaña (2013), codes are words or short phrases that symbolically represent collective, essence-capturing characteristics for data from a research study. Saldaña (2013) divides coding into two major stages: First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. It is important to understand that coding is “not a precise science,” rather it is “primarily an interpretive act” meant to be “the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3-4). Saldaña (2013) demonstrates this process, which I used as a guideline in my analysis technique, following what Saldaña calls a “streamline codes to theory model for qualitative inquiry” (p. 12; see Figure 2).
I recorded and then transcribed all interviews. I also recorded field notes, observation notes, artifact notes as well as reflections in my reflective journal. I entered interviews, journal entries, and checklists into the NVivo software program and applied coding methods. My coding process involved using descriptive and evaluation codes, which led me to group important categories within my data. During my first cycle of coding, I created five main categories based upon my data sources and three research questions. Three of the main categories related to the ILA assessment standards were used as a criterion for the assessment practices at Rolling Hills: (a) Improving
Teaching/Learning, (b) Intellectually/Socially Complex, and (c) Multiple Sources/Perspectives. Summative and formative assessments were the primary assessment types used at Rolling Hills and therefore became my last two categories: (d) Reading Assessment Summative, and (e) Reading Assessment Formative. I created these five categories as nodes in the NVivo program.

In addition to these five categories, I listed subcodes (i.e., subnodes) under each main category as an even deeper method of analysis. I coded all sources of data, marking sections of quotes from each participants in accordance with procedures in the first cycle of coding (see Appendix H). These sections of quotes were highlighted and categorized by the prescribed headings. During this process, I added two additional subcodes, professional development and reading instruction. During each phase of the coding cycle I recorded my changes and thought processes in a journal in NVivo. During my second cycle of coding, I retained the five main categories, but condensed some of my subcodes together to provide more structure and unity. This was based on the number of references per node. If a particular node had fewer than 10 references to it, it was combined with a similar node. For the main category of Formative Assessment I initially began with 17 subcodes, but after my second cycle of coding I condensed these 17 subcodes down to 4. My decision was based on two factors: (a) the number of references NVivo listed based upon my coding of all data sources, and (b) subcodes that were similar in nature to each other and could be collapsed together. All other subcodes for the other four main categories remained intact. At the end of this process I had created five main categories that included 25 subcodes.
I also utilized analytic memo writing (Saldaña, 2013) as a part of the data analysis for this research study to search for patterns and themes in order to help gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges associated with reading assessment practices within the RtI framework for each participant. The purpose of analytic memo writing is to record and reflect on the coding process and provide a narrative of what the researcher is thinking and reflecting in relation to the data collected. Analytic memo writing allowed me to self-report about reading assessment practices in general and in the context of RtI. It was a way for me to have a conversation with myself as a researcher about the data, providing the opportunity to simply write what was going through my mind. Rather than summarizing the data, I reflected and expounded on it, using foundational understanding of best practices in reading comprehension instruction and assessment from my review of the literature to serve as a lens when coding.

**Validity, Reliability, and Delimitations**

No research design is flawless; however, a qualitative researcher wants to provide valid and reliable results that will increase the knowledge base of the reader. Researchers can take steps to increase validity including triangulation, spending extended time in the field, conducting member checks, and examining their own bias (Creswell, 1998 as cited in Glense, 2011; Merriam, 1998). By employing a number of validity strategies, the researcher can enhance internal validity and trustworthiness. Reliability is the examination of the consistency of participants’ responses with the recommendation of documenting procedures and using a research protocol (Merriam, 1998).

To ensure the validity and reliability of a study one must conduct it in an ethical manner. In this study, I developed a protocol for my interviews, observations, and
document collection to ensure I foregrounded participants’ perceptions and voice; not my own thinking. In addition, I listened to all participants’ recordings after transcriptions were complete to verify their words and check for errors. I also shared transcriptions with participants as a member check to verify accuracy of their thinking. These steps added in reliability during the coding process by ensuring I used accurate information.

The major limitations of this study were researcher-as-instrument and my position as both insider and outsider. I paid close attention to these two factors in order to delimit the limitations of the study and ensure the reliability and validity of this case study endeavor. To address the researcher-as-instrument, I asked myself three questions throughout the data collection and data analysis. These questions kept me cognizant of researcher bias toward the phenomenon being investigated:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participant’s descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participant’s actual experience?

2. Is the transcription accurate and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?

To address my position of insider and outsider, I used multiple data collection methods to triangulate data. Patton (2002) states “the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn” (p. 556). I
conducted nine in-depth interviews, conducted approximately 30 hours of observations, and collected numerous documents from each participant. Collecting data from multiple sources allowed me to verify information and helped to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the research as well as test for consistency.

As a way to record my thoughts, feelings, and conclusions I used a reflective journal through the NVivo software program. This reflective journal served as a way for me to record my inner thoughts and reactions to interviews, observations, and general conclusions I had about my case study and the data I collected throughout the five week time period. I used it to refine my role as a researcher and as the means to voice questions to myself that I had about the reading instruction and assessment practices at Rolling Hills. It served as an outlet for my feelings regarding my role as a researcher and also provided guidance when conducting follow-up interviews and observations. This reflective journal was for my use only and not shared with any of the participants.

In the data analysis and writing process, I employed the strategy of using rich, thick description to increase validity. A thick description involves a phenomenon with detailed narratives. Through narrative description, I was able to provide rich, thick descriptions of each participant’s understanding of reading comprehension assessment practices within the RtI framework. When qualitative researchers use thick description, “the capacity to open up the world to the reader…in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance” (Patton, 2002, p. 438).

This research study was based upon the theoretical framework of the social constructivist theory. Within those confines subjectivity plays a significant role.
According to Patton (2002), constructivists accept bias as a pathway deeper into comprehending the human aspects of the world in general as well as whatever specific phenomena they are researching. However, from the social constructivist viewpoint, deeply understanding these cases was more valuable than hypothesizing about generalizations and causes across time and space.

**Chapter Summary**

The methodology described in this Chapter was used to gain understanding of an elementary school’s reading comprehension assessment practices within the framework of RtI. I have explained the research design, from the choice of the research methods to the planning of data collection and analysis. I took precautions to ensure the validity and reliability of the research study, which I explained in detail. Completing a case study of an elementary school implementing RtI enabled me to enter their world as a researcher, observer, and learner, and afforded me the opportunity to share a thick, rich description of the interactions of RtI and reading assessment practices.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school, were influenced and determined while implementing RtI. The research questions guiding this case study were:

1. What does reading assessment look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?

2. What is the relationship between reading instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?

3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?

In this chapter I summarize the initial findings of my research concerning the value administrators place on summative assessments to measure student achievement and performance. I discuss influences on teachers’ reading instruction decisions, including the impact formative and summative data have on those decisions. Next, I share how these different perspectives compare to what the ILA and the NCTE deem best practices as stated in their joint publication, *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing.*
Additionally, I share insight regarding how this school and teacher executed reading instruction and assessment within the framework of implementing Response to Intervention.

**School Setting and Demographics**

Rolling Hills Elementary School (pseudonym) is one of four elementary schools located within a county school system in the Southeast. Rolling Hills at one time was a Kindergarten-12th grade campus. Ten years ago Rolling Hills built a separate campus for the elementary because of its expanding enrollment. Its present location is situated in the middle of farmland countryside. As one participant explained, “Rolling Hills at one time was a small community school, but with an influx of residents moving from the city, the small, family school dynamics have changed” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015). Rolling Hills is a Kindergarten-fourth grade school and is the second largest elementary in the school district. When data for this study were collected, Rolling Hills Elementary School had a total enrollment of approximately 750 students. At Rolling Hills, 84% of students were white, 14% were black and a small percentage was Hispanic. During the 2014-15 school year, Rolling Hills qualified as a Title I school with 40% of students receiving free or reduced price lunch, and 45% of its population is in the lower socioeconomic category. For the past five years, Rolling Hills has been classified as a high-performing school based on its state department’s accountability rating system.

**Participants’ Profiles**

Three participants are the focus of this case study including an administrator, lead teacher, and a fourth grade teacher (see Table 4). For the purpose of this case study all
names used were pseudonyms. The participants in this case study each provided a unique perspective regarding reading instruction and assessment practices at this elementary school. When determining the participants for my research study, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), which allowed selection of information-rich cases for in-depth understanding of reading instruction and assessment practices. The lead teacher and the school administrator provided the administration’s point of view, and the fourth grade teacher provided a teacher’s perspective on the reality of practices enacted in the classroom.

Table 4

List of Educator Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Smith</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>School Administrator</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Wilson</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Lead Teacher</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Monroe</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Fourth grade language arts teacher</td>
<td>28 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three educators were all involved in reading instruction and assessment, though each served in a different capacity at Rolling Hills. While the school administrator and lead teacher made decisions about reading instruction and assessment practices at the school level, the classroom teacher was ultimately responsible for the implementation of said practices. When discussing assessments, the three participants had an understanding of summative assessments and how results from these assessments reflected what was
learned at the end of instruction. On the other hand, formative assessments were never discussed as part of the assessment system at Rolling Hills. When the classroom teacher spoke about assessments she used in her classroom, she never used the words formative assessment to describe them. Nine hours of interviews were conducted with these three participants collectively. I also completed approximately 25 hours of observations in the fourth grade classroom and 5 hours of observations during administrator meetings and RtI intervention time for a total of 30 hours across all types of observations conducted.

**Mrs. Smith – School Administrator**

Mrs. Smith is a white female in her mid-forties, born and raised in the northeast. She made the decision to attend a small private college in the southeastern United States. While at this university, Mrs. Smith met her husband. Both were originally from the North and majoring in education. She chuckled when she was reliving how two people from similar areas who were inspired to be educators ended up so far away from home. They married the summer after they graduated from college and decided together they were willing to move to any area in the United States to pursue their careers. While they applied to numerous school districts across the country, they wanted to serve “where there was a high number of at-risk kids” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). This brought them to Mississippi. Mrs. Smith’s husband was contacted by a middle school principal for a teaching position in a small metropolitan city in Mississippi. Not only did her husband get that job, but also with the help of the middle school principal she was hired as an elementary teacher at a school close to her husband. They have called Mississippi home for over 26 years and “have loved it, just loved it” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015).
Mrs. Smith’s first teaching job was as a third grade elementary teacher in a very low socioeconomic school. After seven years teaching, she became the school’s lead teacher for their Pre-Kindergarten program. By then Mrs. Smith had three small children, a boy and two girls. Mrs. Smith spent some years at home as a full time mother, working in a part-time capacity as a tutor as well as supporting other community services. It wasn’t until her last child was elementary age that Mrs. Smith decided to pursue her Master’s degree in school administration and return to public education. While attending college at night, she provided volunteer services during the day at Rolling Hills Elementary. Mrs. Smith commented, “Getting a job at Rolling Hills was hard. No teachers or assistants ever left. There were no positions available” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). However, the summer she received her Master’s degree a position at Rolling Hills became available.

For the past five years Mrs. Smith has been a school administrator at Rolling Hills Elementary School as primary supervisor to Kindergarten-second grade teachers and overseer of the Response to Intervention framework. Mrs. Smith finds school administration challenging at times. Test scores are the constant reminder of these challenges. The one aspect of her job she enjoys is analyzing test data. Mrs. Smith compared it to solving a complex puzzle. In fact Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Monroe (lead teacher and fourth grade teacher) both called her the “data guru.” The biggest challenge for Mrs. Smith is moving Rolling Hills to the next level from high performing to superior. She stated that education is constantly refining its methods and it seems that different initiatives are happening almost daily at the district and state levels. Yet, she can handle the changes. To Mrs. Smith educating children is a calling, not a job. “The
rewards of working with children are too numerous to name. There is nothing else I would rather do” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015).

**Mrs. Wilson – Lead Teacher**

Mrs. Wilson is a white female in her late 30’s. She has been married for 15 years and has two children, a son who is in third grade and a daughter who is in second grade. Both of her children attend Rolling Hills Elementary School. Mrs. Wilson knew she wanted to be a teacher early in life. She loved being around children and would babysit all the children in her neighborhood. Mrs. Wilson stated, “I kind of had in my mind that I was going to be a teacher from the beginning and never was anything other than that” (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015). Her mom was an elementary assistant teacher for children with special needs and greatly influenced Mrs. Wilson in becoming a part of the teaching profession.

After graduating from college, Mrs. Wilson became engaged and left her small rural hometown to move where her husband grew up. Mrs. Wilson taught special education students in this new environment of a large city school system for three years at the middle and elementary levels. In this city school system she taught a fourth and fifth combined special education class and then a seventh grade class. She transferred to the county school system and became a part of Rolling Hills. Mrs. Wilson has been at Rolling Hills for 12 years. During this time she has taught regular education classes in the third and fourth grades primarily teaching Mathematics and Science. She was always teamed with a teacher who was responsible for the Language Arts instruction. Mrs. Wilson began feeling a “need for a new experience” a couple of years ago and decided that she wanted to complete her Master’s degree in school administration. It was during
this school year that an opening developed for a newly created lead teacher position at Rolling Hills. Mrs. Wilson was thrilled and found the opportunity to make the transition from teacher to school administration satisfying. Mrs. Wilson was moved at the beginning of the current school year to the position of lead teacher. Mrs. Wilson shared:

When I got into it, the more I found out I really enjoy that side of it. So this lead teacher is kind of both worlds. I still get to teach because I am teaching those kids who are in interventions, but I also get the leadership side of it you know. I see it from their [school administration] side and I am also still on the teacher side of it. I help them to see okay this is how the teachers are feeling. This is what is going on. This is what is going on in the classroom. This is how it is going to affect them. They never had this position, so this is good. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

At the time of this case study Mrs. Wilson had only been a lead teacher for one semester and was in the learning stages regarding her job responsibilities and the roles she would have at Rolling Hills. Her primary responsibilities during the time I spent at the school were overseeing school-wide assessments and supervising Tier III of the RtI framework. Mrs. Wilson stated:

Here’s the thing. I am a Math person. I am Math by trade. When I did third and fourth grade and we started departmentalization, I did the Math parts of it. Coming into the lead teacher position and dealing with interventions I’ve learned a lot about reading myself. It has been an eye opening experience. I’ve told the school administration that if I ever went back into the classroom, I would totally
change what I would do, even on the reading end of it. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

Mrs. Wilson was apprehensive about being responsible for the Tier III intervention piece of the RtI framework that concentrates on foundational reading instruction and skills when her teaching background had predominantly been in the subject of Mathematics. She could not rely on her own teaching experiences in reading instruction because of her limited knowledge base.

**Mrs. Monroe – Fourth Grade Teacher**

Mrs. Monroe is a white female in her late 50’s with 28 years of experience in the teaching profession. Twenty-seven of those years have been at Rolling Hills. Family is important to her and her love for children started at an early age. Mrs. Monroe shared:

I just love watching children and observing. I have compassion for children and I have a compassion for children learning so they can have opportunities that many don’t have. My parents grew up with almost no education, so education in our home was extremely important. When I see children that come from my background, I can identify with them. I have compassion for them. I want them to have opportunities that I was afforded because of my education and what a difference it has made. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe reported her mother was instrumental in making sure all of the family received an education and pursued whatever dreams they had. While her mother and father were not formally educated, the expectation was for the rest of her family to attend college and have career aspirations.
Mrs. Monroe’s first teaching experience was at a very low socioeconomic inner
city elementary school teaching third grade. She described an extremely challenging
work environment “that was an eye-opening experience that you will never get through a
book.” After one year, she left when a position at Rolling Hills became available.

Once at Rolling Hills, she taught gifted classes for nine years. According to Mrs.
Monroe, she loved teaching gifted education because of the creative part of the
instruction and structuring the lessons around a unit or theme. She said:

We taught by units and so whatever we did, if we did China, we would do it in
every area. We’d do math. We’d do language. We’d do art. Everything that you
could pull in that connects which is what like Common Core is more like now.

(Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

While Mrs. Monroe loved the challenge of teaching gifted students, she began to feel
burned out and made a change to teaching sixth grade Social Studies. She only taught
sixth grade one year before being asked to make the transition to Rolling Hills’ new
campus. The excitement of being in a brand new school with large classrooms was too
hard to resist. Mrs. Monroe said, “I am really glad I made the move. I love fourth grade. I
think that it has been one of my favorite grades to teach” (Mrs. Monroe, personal
communication, March 20, 2015). For Mrs. Monroe, fourth graders are mature, but still
young enough to love their teacher and school. The signs of rebellion and teenage
mentality have not hit that age group, for which Mrs. Monroe is thankful. Mrs. Monroe
sees her students as being respectful and learning how to be more independent. In her
mind fifth grade was always considered the hardest year before students made the
transition to middle school. Yet, she has begun to wonder if fourth grade is not the
hardest grade in the elementary setting due to so many new grade level expectations. As she believes, “the fourth grade of today is not like the fourth grade when I first started teaching it” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015). While Mrs. Monroe believes in the Common Core curriculum and the need for higher standards, she is not in total agreement of the placement of certain standards at much younger ages.

**Instructional time.** Mrs. Monroe taught two classes of reading/language arts sections, which lasted approximately 90 minutes per period each day. There were 24 students in each class. During the course of my observations, I witnessed the sequence of Mrs. Monroe’s teaching schedule and how certain instructional activities were everyday routine tasks. Mrs. Monroe’s first class was her partner’s homeroom; therefore, this class period began and ended at a specific time each day due to changing classes. Mrs. Monroe began her instruction with language arts, which consisted of grammar and mechanics review. These lessons were skill specific, and during the course of this case study I observed two units being taught – adjectives and adverbs. Specific writing instruction was not conducted during any of my observations in Mrs. Monroe’s classroom. Occasionally she would utilize two separate English textbooks; one that was the current state-adopted resource and another that had been discarded two years previous.

The language arts section of Mrs. Monroe’s literacy block lasted approximately 45 minutes. For the remaining 45 minutes of instructional time she concentrated on reading lessons consisting of vocabulary, comprehension skills review, and novel study instruction. Mrs. Monroe’s novel study instruction was whole class as they read chorally and discussed related activities. She also utilized partner reading during novel instruction. Reading tests were not given at specific times; they were dependent on when a chapter of
the novel was completed. The only test that was given on a specific day was spelling tests, which were administered on Fridays. Like reading tests, language arts tests were not given on specific days, but dependent on when she completed instruction for the particular unit or chapter of study. The Accelerated Reader (AR) program was utilized throughout the school day (i.e. homeroom time, reading time, social studies time). When students completed assignments, they were able to read their AR books and take corresponding quizzes. Mrs. Monroe’s Intervention Central time was conducted after students’ lunch break for 30 minutes each day. This was the assigned time for her grade level. Intervention Central time was when Mrs. Monroe’s grade level remediated students in Tier II and when interventionists provided supplemental help to students in Tier III. Tier II reading instruction was aligned to instruction in the classroom.

**Research Question 1: What Does Reading Assessment Look Like in a School Implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?**

The school used multiple assessments in various ways and for different purposes. Many of the school level assessments had dual roles and served as assessments in the RtI framework as well as for other assessment purposes. All school personnel were cognizant of when school level and district level assessments, as well as state-mandated standardized tests, would be administered. The following sections contain descriptions of the types of assessments (e.g. summative and formative assessments) utilized at Rolling Hills by school administration and the fourth grade teacher.

**Summative Assessments**

Rolling Hills Elementary School utilized five types of summative assessments: Standardized Testing for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), Scholastic Reading
Inventory, Aimsweb Fluency, teacher-created common assessments, and state-mandated standardized tests. Below I share descriptions for each of these assessments and how they were implemented at Rolling Hills.

**STAR reading.** STAR Reading is an assessment of reading comprehension and skills for students in first grade and above. This assessment tracks development in five domains: (a) word knowledge and skills, (b) comprehension strategies and constructing meaning, (c) analyzing literary text, (d) understanding author’s craft, and (e) analyzing argument and evaluating text. All STAR Reading assessments are computer-adaptive tests (CATs), which means the assessment software system continually adjust the difficulty of each student’s test by choosing each test question based on the student’s previous response. Therefore, if the student answers a question correctly, the difficulty level of the next item increases. If the student answers the question incorrectly, the difficulty level decreases.

According to the developers of the STAR Reading assessment, it is used to screen students for their reading achievement levels and to help determine reading levels in order to place students into the AR program. It is also stated by the developers that STAR Reading monitors students’ growth throughout the school year, estimates their understanding of state standards, and predicts their performance on state-mandated standardized tests. The developers state it can help teachers determine their students’ appropriate instructional levels. Each STAR Reading assessment provides a scaled score (SS), which is based on the difficulty of the questions and the number of correct answers. Schools can use this score to compare each student’s performance over time and across grades.
Rolling Hills Elementary School chose to give the STAR Reading test five times during the school year, in August when school started and at the end of each nine-week period. STAR Reading was administered to first graders and above. As Mrs. Smith stated, “That [Star Reading] is our foundational reading skills assessment school-wide, where we have for every single student the same assessment” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). The STAR Reading assessment was Rolling Hills’ core reading assessment.

When analyzing the results, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wilson made the decision to use the parameters set by the designers of the STAR Reading assessment. Mrs. Wilson said:

What we are using more than anything else this year is a percentile rank. That is a national percentile rank of where they should be and according to STAR 40th percentile and higher is proficient in that grade level. So when they come to us in TST [teacher support team] if they are below that 40th percentile that is [what] we start looking at moving them from Tier I to either Tier II or Tier III and that is where we are hoping the State KAS decides. We are hoping that it is not below 40th [percentile] because that is what STAR is telling us is proficient. Of course, that changes each nine weeks because you know your scale score is going to go up with the percentile. They still have to show growth. That percentile rank is what we hope is going to stay 40th. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

This statement was made by Mrs. Wilson during a second grade monthly Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meeting, conducted by Mrs. Smith to discuss STAR
Reading assessment results. The school administration was uneasy about not knowing definitively what the target score should be.

The STAR Reading assessment was given during each grade levels’ computer time. Rolling Hills had one computer lab that served all of its students, staffed by an assistant teacher who was responsible for the administration of the STAR Reading assessment, in addition to other job responsibilities. During my time at Rolling Hills I observed the computer lab assistant as she administered the STAR Reading assessment to a group of first and fourth graders. First graders were tested for approximately 22 minutes, and fourth graders for approximately 35 minutes. Mrs. Wilson described the assessment as having:

A lot of cloze passages where they are having to pick the word that goes in the blank. They have passages or sentences they read where they are having to find out what a word means based on context clues or they are asking them comprehension questions. It is that vocabulary and comprehension, not recall but the higher comprehension questions. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

I witnessed the type of questions the students had to answer. Most passages at the fourth grade level were one paragraph in length with two or three questions per paragraph. The questions for first graders required choosing the correct vocabulary using context clues to determine correct word usage. A paragraph consisted of two to three sentences. Once a student was finished with the assessment they read their own AR book or chose one from the bins of leveled AR books on the shelf in the computer lab.
**Scholastic reading inventory.** The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is a research-based adaptive assessment for students in Kindergarten and above that evaluates a student’s ability to read and comprehend written material. It measures a student’s achievement and growth on the Lexile Framework for Reading, a text complexity measure and readability formula. SRI determines how well students understand literary and expository texts of varying degrees of difficulty and focuses on the skills the student uses when studying written material from various content areas. These skills include identifying details in a passage, identifying cause-effect relationships, drawing conclusions, sequencing events, and making comparison as well as generalizations. SRI passages are derived from authentic texts, such as best-selling literature, curriculum texts, and familiar periodicals reflecting real world media.

SRI is also a computer-adaptive (CAT) reading assessment, which allows the software to continually adjust the difficulty of passages based on students’ responses. According to Scholastic, the SRI allows teachers to chart the course of a student’s education to inform instruction, interpret growth, and match each student’s text using the Lexile Framework for Reading. The Lexile level provided for each student enables teachers to offer reading materials at the appropriate reading level and allow students to be properly placed in accurate instructional groupings. At Rolling Hills, the SRI was used with students in second-fourth grades only. Unlike the STAR Reading assessment with its five data points, the SRI was given three times during the year; the early fall, winter, and late spring.

**Aimsweb fluency.** Aimsweb Fluency is a universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management system designed by Pearson, Inc. to support RtI and
tiered instruction, which can be administered to students in Kindergarten-eighth grade. The intention of the assessment system is to measure and monitor the effects of any instructional program. Students read graded passages aloud for one minute and a score is calculated based on the number of words read correctly per minute. Three separate passages are read and combined for an overall score. Over 30 grade level passages are available, which allows teachers to use this assessment for progress monitoring purposes as well.

Aimsweb Fluency was only administered in the lower grades at Rolling Hills Elementary School. Though the school used Aimsweb Fluency as a key assessment for kindergarten through second grade students, it is important to note school administration decided fluency did not need to be assessed at the upper grades. However, Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Smith questioned their decision about not assessing students’ fluency rate in the upper grades. Mrs. Wilson commented:

We don’t use the fluency as much in third and fourth grade. We are trying to change that because we feel like that needs to come back into it. We’ve kind of let it go. It does need to be a part of the assessment. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015)

Several years ago Aimsweb was Rolling Hills’ main assessment tool and was used at every grade level to assess students’ fluency. The school administration decided to drop this assessment piece for students in third and fourth grades, but my participants did not shared the reasoning for this decision.

**Teacher-created common assessments.** Teachers at Rolling Hills were responsible for creating their own assessments within their grade level to determine
student mastery of reading standards. Mrs. Smith referred to these evaluations as common assessments. The school administration, with the assistance of teachers, designated specific standards from the Common Core framework as essential skills. They viewed these essential skills as core expectations for all students. Mrs. Smith stated:

> From the standards, what are the essential skills at a minimum that we are going to guarantee that before you leave this grade you have to be able to do this or you are not going to survive the next grade. Map that out and what it looks like so I have for example, Kindergarten, first and second grade. This is what you have to do for Kindergarten at a minimum, first grade and second grade at a minimum. Then also chart it out so it is side-by-side Kindergarten, first and second [grade], so that I can know what fluency looks like [across grades]. Here is all the fluency things. How it all progresses. Here is the comprehension. Here is the writing part. Together as a group, as a PLC by grade level, they [teachers] come up with common assessments for those essential skills … to determine who has got that. Who doesn’t? (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Mrs. Smith stated these essential skills were divided up by nine-week periods and teachers knew what students had mastered at any given time during the school year. The visual mapping of the essential skills enabled the school administration and teachers to see the progression of expected student understanding by grade level.

**State-mandated standardized tests.** At the time of this case study, pilot assessments were being administered that were developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). These assessments were based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Two separate tests were given – a
performance-based assessment and an end-of-year assessment. Students in third and fourth grades were required to take these assessments via the computer. These assessments were timed tests measuring students’ reading and writing abilities. Both assessments required multiple days of testing.

Rolling Hills had given one state-mandated assessment at the time of this study. It was a performance assessment via the computer and their first experience with assessments of this nature. Mrs. Wilson stated, “We were ready for anything. The students handled it really well. The adults were the ones nervous” (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015). According to Mrs. Smith, the assessments required more writing from the students due to the structure of the assessment. She explained:

We have our PBA test, which is a performance-based test for PARCC [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers] that we give. We’ve just given the English/Language Arts that has your reading component. We gave that right before spring break. We spent five days on that. That was our third and fourth graders. There was so much writing. That is required by the state and we will turn around and give Math this week. Then we have the third grade gate test [Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment] that is required by the state that we will give to our third graders at the end of April. Then we have our end of year test that we will give in May for our third and fourth graders. It will be a multiple choice test, but done on the computer. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015)

In previous years, state assessments consisted of a standardized exam given in a paper/pencil format, and students answered only multiple-choice questions. This had
been the state’s curriculum test for many years, used to evaluate the state curriculum framework in reading and language arts. During the past two years, the state department began phasing out these old assessments and implemented new assessments developed by Pearson, Inc. for the PARCC consortium based on the CCSS. These new assessments were administered for the first time during the second semester of the school year I conducted this study at Rolling Hills. During this new assessment, students tested via the computer multiple days over various subjects, for approximately six hours of testing per student. The first phase required students to provide responses to open-ended questions and was given in early March. The second phase was completely multiple-choice with only two or three open-ended questions and administered in late April and early May. Even though the test administration was over a period of several months, Rolling Hills would receive one reading score for each student.

During the first week of this study, Mrs. Monroe (fourth grade teacher) served as test administrator for the third grade reading assessments. According to Mrs. Monroe, teachers were not permitted to serve as test administrators for students in their own grade level. These particular assessments were performance based and completed on the computer, requiring students to type a response frequently. Mrs. Monroe shared the next state assessments would be given at the end of the year. When asked about the reading and language portion of the PARCC test, Mrs. Monroe replied, “I am really in the dark. We don’t know what to expect” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015). Mrs. Monroe stated teachers in the tested grades would know more at the end of the year when all assessments were completed. The week after this case study was concluded the
state legislation decided to withdraw from the PARCC consortia and develop a new assessment system for the next school year.

**Assessment and Response to Intervention**

The IDEA in 2004 generated a new initiative – RtI. RtI targets reading problems early in students’ academic life by providing a means to identify difficulties and prescribe interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Instead of relying on severe discrepancies between achievement and intellectual ability, RtI provides a different method to identify students who would benefit from special education services. As well, RtI can deliver additional assistance or early intervention for a student at risk of school failure (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). Within the RtI framework, universal screeners are used as this means of identification. The RtI model allows teachers to move away from the practice of waiting for a student to fail, to one of failing to wait when a student is struggling (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The majority of states across the country have implemented or are in the process of adopting RtI, and many individual schools have taken action into their own hands by implementing RtI prior to required deadlines (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster & Saunders, 2009).

Three of the summative assessments used at Rolling Hills Elementary School were identified as universal screeners: STAR Reading, SRI, and the Aimsweb Fluency assessment. Each screener provided information regarding grade and classroom level reading achievement. District and state officials at times dictated decisions concerning which universal screener would be administered, and at other times the decision was made at the school level. The school administration team, consisting of the principal,
assistant principal, lead teacher, and at times the counselor, disaggregated assessment results, which the individual grade level, classroom teacher and student examined.

**STAR reading assessment.** The STAR Reading assessment served as the universal screener for the RtI framework. If a student scored below the 40th percentile on the STAR Reading assessment, interventions were provided first in Tier II of the RtI framework, and continued in Tier III if the student’s universal screening results showed no improvement or regression. At the Tier III level of the RtI framework, the STAR Reading assessment also served as the progress-monitoring tool. Each Friday students in Tier III were evaluated using the STAR Reading assessment. Mrs. Wilson explained the reasoning for using this assessment in this capacity:

> Everybody takes the STAR Reading test on Friday even if they are a reading fluency child or a comprehension child. Technically the STAR Reading is looking more at the comprehension side than the fluency. Here’s our reasoning. We have to take that third grade reading test from the state and it looks a lot like the STAR Reading test. Mrs. Smith and I talked about the fact that it would be a good thing for them to get that weekly practice because those are the kids we are worried about. Those are the kids we are scared might not pass the test. So our second graders are going ahead and practicing that every week. Our third graders are practicing that every week. Now fourth grade doesn’t have to take it, but we still feel like that’s going to help them for the state test, making them a more fluent reader and we have seen growth with it. Now we’re using it with our first graders too. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015)
Mrs. Wilson classified the students in Tier III as either a reading fluency or a reading comprehension student depending on the student’s area of weakness and intervention remediation. Since students in the third grade were required to pass a state reading exit test at the end of the year, the school administration required students at any grade level in Tier III to be progress monitored using the STAR Reading test as a form of practice and gauge of students’ performance level. The results of the STAR Reading assessment for progress monitoring were shared with teachers during the Teacher Support Team (TST) meetings each week held with Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Wilson, and the classroom teacher. Each tier student had a folder where documentation of all universal screening results were recorded and filed.

_Scholastic reading inventory_. When the school district mandated STAR Reading as the main universal screener for Kindergarten-eighth grade students, Rolling Hills had to make a decision – continue administering the SRI or drop it as one of their universal screeners. Mrs. Smith explained:

A joint decision was made between all of us [school administration]. However, we also got input from the teachers in their Professional Learning Communities. Part of our decision making [was based on] the last couple of years. This is my fifth year since I have been here. The district has used three different universal screeners and so that’s kind of its own story of a journey, but we were very nervous about having to change again. So when it was not particularly clear exactly which way we were going, our decision here was we were going to do SRI because our teachers have worked so hard and finally gotten used to that. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015)
Mrs. Smith knew the teachers needed stability with a universal screener because the district had been inconsistent. It was important to Mrs. Smith that all teachers were knowledgeable of the universal screener being used so they had a thorough understanding of what the data from the SRI report was implying in order to inform their instructional decision-making. SRI was kept as a second universal screener to meet these needs.

**Aimsweb fluency.** Rolling Hills only gave the Aimsweb Fluency assessment to students in kindergarten and first grade as part of the universal screening process. At one time all grades tracked a student’s fluency rate by using Aimsweb Fluency; however, Rolling Hills followed the district’s decision to stop assessing fluency as part of a universal screener for second grade and above. The Aimsweb Fluency assessment was given three times a year at fall, winter, and spring benchmarks. Mrs. Smith described the measurement for kindergarten as being, “letters identification, letter sounds, nonsense words and phonemic segmentation on the reading end of it.” Then for first grade she stated, “It is words per minute on first grade passages. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). The teachers wanted a way to track each student’s fluency rate in first grade. Unlike the STAR Reading, the Aimsweb Fluency assessment provided data to track each student’s fluency rate based on how many words were read in one minute. Students who consistently had low fluency rates were referred for Tier II and Tier III intervention.

**Administrator responsibilities.** As lead teacher, Mrs. Wilson had two main responsibilities – school assessments of any kind and RtI Tier III implementation. As Mrs. Wilson stated, “School-wide, universals. We have them going on every other month. Big screeners every other month, [or] every third month depending on how it
falls” (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015). Mrs. Wilson was ultimately responsible for ensuring all students were tested with each universal screener, and provided each grade level with the testing schedule for each assessment. In addition to orchestrating the administration of all universal screeners Mrs. Wilson was responsible for overseeing Intervention Central, which was what Rolling Hills called the part of RtI that dealt with Tier III interventions. She had a dual role; provide instruction for the students in Tier III and supervise the interventionists who assisted in providing Tier III instruction. Mrs. Wilson would also meet with classroom teachers to discuss each student’s Tier III intervention plan. She stated:

I’m the one that writes their [Tier III] plan. During that meeting if it is an initial we will talk about some ideas for activities. I kinda tell them what we do. I ask the teacher if that sounds like what that child needs. I have had a few who’ve said they have that part, but they need this piece so we change it. With our second-fourth graders you really see it because of smaller numbers. I can pull them just me by myself, work with that child and work with whatever needs to be done. We set that up with the teacher at that initial TST meeting and then progress monitoring is shared with them during the TST reviews. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015)

Mrs. Wilson kept records on each Tier III student and tracked their universal screenings and progress monitoring data. She would discuss with teachers not only the assessment results, but also the intervention activities. As administrator, Mrs. Smith would attend TST meetings with Mrs. Wilson and the classroom teacher. She would facilitate discussion concerning the students’ strength and weaknesses and future plans of
action to address needs. At the Tier II level, Mrs. Smith would attend grade level meetings to discuss the needs of students in Tier II.

Teacher responsibilities. At Rolling Hills if a student struggled in the area of reading, the teacher was responsible for providing the initial remediation in Tier II. Mrs. Smith explained:

The teacher talks to her team. If they are having issues, then there is the conversation and so it may be, “Oh, I had that same situation. Here’s what I tried and it worked great.” They will try that and so it might be you get ideas to continue to solve it in the context of Tier II. They definitely get ideas. They are doing it from their PLC [Professional Learning Communities] meetings. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Each grade level had the responsibility of providing interventions to students in Tier II. At the fourth grade level, Mrs. Monroe’s responsibility in RtI was providing enrichment instruction for students who scored advanced on universal screeners. Other teachers on her team provided the Tier II instruction for reading remediation. In my discussions with Mrs. Monroe, she stated there was little collaboration about the specifics of RtI instruction during their Intervention Central time for Tier II. Each teacher determined what he or she would teach and how. For example, as the enrichment teacher Mrs. Monroe decided to conduct a unit on insects and developed different activities centered on that theme. Teacher input was not gathered from anyone in the grade level concerning instructional activities.
Formative Assessments

To collect data about the types of formative assessments observed and their uses, I developed a checklist for formative assessments based on best practices identified in reading instruction literature. I used this checklist during my observation to identify the types of formative assessments Mrs. Monroe utilized during reading instruction, and how often these assessments were implemented. My checklist contained 11 possible formative assessments that Mrs. Monroe might use while teaching (see Appendix F). I observed 25 hours in Mrs. Monroe’s classroom as she instructed, and during each observation I witnessed her using some type of formative assessment. I tallied how many times Mrs. Monroe used a specific formative assessment and what behavior she demonstrated. Mrs. Monroe relied on four main formative assessments during her two-hour reading instruction block: (1) discussion and questioning, (2) graphic organizers/handouts, (3) teacher observation, and (4) choral response. Below I share descriptions of these four types of formative assessment used by Mrs. Monroe.

Discussion and questioning. There are many ways teachers can facilitate classroom discussion as a reading response to assess students understanding of content read. Classroom discussion can assess students’ understanding and activate students’ background knowledge, as well as build knowledge while developing higher-level thinking skills. Discussion allows students to develop a deeper understanding, and at the same time supports identification and discarding of erroneous information (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Doherty, 2003). By activating students’ background knowledge, they are able to become learning resources for one another (Slavin, Hurley, & Chamberlain,
By listening, teachers can assess students’ knowledge and facilitate connections between known and new ideas.

Questioning serves as a foundation for good discussion. When discussion is guided by strong, well-developed questions, students are afforded the opportunity for deeper thinking. This in turn helps teachers to gain insight into the depth and breadth of students’ understanding. Classroom dialogue holds the potential to expand students’ learning, and these types of questions engender strong dialogue. Questions that explore critical issues and support the development of student understanding are essential; they are the only questions worth asking (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003). Therefore, teachers must be knowledgeable of the type of questions to ask, as well as how best to ask questions to generate lively discussion that engages students in critical thinking.

Mrs. Monroe used discussion and questioning in various ways during instruction. She used questioning to stimulate discussion related to stories students were reading, asking questions such as why, what and how to elicit literal and inferential responses using information found in the text. She also asked students to make text to self, text to text, and text to world connections, and to make comparisons to better understand differences and similarities between story elements. Mrs. Monroe asked students to analyze story elements as well, including comparing multiple characters within and across stories to identify similarities and difference, and to determine why characters were motivated to act in certain ways. Mrs. Monroe also used questioning and discussion with vocabulary, spelling, writing, and grammar instruction.
**Graphic organizers.** Graphic organizers are visual models of knowledge that structure information by grouping important aspects together (Bromley, DeVitis & Modlo, 1999). Teachers use graphic organizers to help students engage in rigorous thinking, organize complex ideas, and scaffold their interactions with texts. These visual models help students to isolate and analyze the main ideas of a topic or documents. Graphic organizers highlight key concepts and vocabulary, which aids students in critical and creative thinking (Bromley et al., 1999). A few of the common graphic organizers used are: Venn diagram, KWL chart, cause-effect chart, and compare/contrast map.

Mrs. Monroe used several different reproducible forms that served as graphic organizers for information. The following were graphic organizers observed being used by students: character charts, in which students created webs depicting characters’ actions, thinking, and feelings; t-charts where students distinguish between two characters’ actions; and Venn diagrams, in which students compared and contrasted characters in a story or across multiple stories. Graphic designs were also used to collect information on various story elements, to map understanding for new vocabulary, and to organize thinking for writing.

**Teacher observation.** A teacher can gather valuable information about students’ abilities by watching them. Through observation, teachers can determine what students have learned and what specific material or skills require additional instruction. Teachers can observe students in different group settings or during whole class instruction. There are various methods teachers can use to document observations such as anecdotal notecards, or notebooks and checklists. The main goal during teacher observation is to collect data to adjust instruction in meeting students’ instructional needs.
Mrs. Monroe used teacher observation to monitor her students’ understanding throughout class. She observed students while they were reading, writing, and discussing text. She also observed students completing word work and writing. Mrs. Monroe provided answers to students’ questions and ongoing feedback while students worked, affording guidance at the time of need.

**Choral response.** Choral response is when students are asked to orally respond to a specific reading or to a set of questions to give the teacher an indication of their thinking and increase students’ engagement. Students respond in unison by repeating the information and answering verbally, usually during whole group instruction. Many times teachers use choral response with content that is difficult.

Mrs. Monroe used choral response as a way to observe students for a purpose while they read aloud in unison. She would instigate the choral reading of a passage, stopping during reading in the middle of a paragraph and listening intently while students continued to read. Mrs. Monroe listened to students, identifying those who were experiencing difficulties with word recognition, prosody, and intonation by observing choral response. She provided feedback to the group if she heard students reading without expression, demonstrating proper voice and tone and reminding students to use punctuation as clues while reading. Mrs. Monroe also used choral response during vocabulary instruction in a “my turn, your turn” type of response as she read the vocabulary word and students repeated it in unison.

**Redundancy of Assessment Data**

There was redundancy in the assessments used by the school, as well as the purposes various assessments were used. For example, the SRI in some ways measured
the same reading skills as the STAR Reading. When explaining what SRI evaluated, Mrs. Smith stated:

In Grades 2-4 the Scholastic Reading Inventory is pretty much all inferencing. It is short passages that they read and answer questions [about], but it is never a detailed kind of thing. The questions are inferencing largely. It is just comprehension. It is not straight out. There are hardly any questions [that require] straight out details where you don’t back up and find it. You’ve got to be thinking. It is a higher level of comprehension, but not the super long passages. You know, just basic reading passages. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015).

Yet, SRI does not assess vocabulary skills like the STAR Reading test. Instead it focuses on assessment of all types of comprehension skills, such as drawing conclusions, main idea, cause/effect, predicting and inferencing. Additionally, STAR Reading might have the answer to a question verbatim in the passage, but questions on the SRI assessment require a higher level of understanding from the student.

Another example of overlap in information gleaned from assessments was the use of teacher created common assessments, in addition to other summative assessments used as screeners. Teachers created common assessments partially as a means to understand nuances in the more global assessment information provided by STAR Reading and SRI. These screeners only provided general information about students’ reading abilities (e.g., fluency and reading level). Data did not provide teachers with information to explain how or why students were struggling. General information provided through these screeners could only serve as a warning signal for teachers to know students were experiencing
issues with reading. Score reports from the STAR Early Literacy and STAR Reading assessments presented an overall score, but did not provide information broken down by domains such as phonics, vocabulary, fluency, or reading comprehension. Mrs. Wilson stated:

The STAR deals more with comprehension. So that is where we kind of get into the comprehension side of things. As far as just phonics, just vocabulary, it is all part of that STAR Reading. It is not individualized so that you can say this is just phonics, this is just comprehension. It is all mixed together. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

Mrs. Smith further stated, “You know the STAR Reading assesses more things like a bunch of reading skills; inferencing, comprehension, using text features. So it goes through a variety of things” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). The STAR Reading test gave these school leaders an overall picture of a student’s reading capabilities. Since the universal screeners did not disaggregate data and allow teachers to identify specific skills students were struggling with, common assessments were developed for essential skills and information from common assessments was more definitive. School staff also stated common assessment data provided feedback about the effectiveness of instruction for those skills.

Assessment data from one screener were also used to confirm and/or contradict data from another screener. Once teachers had the results from each universal screener, they recorded the information for each assessment in a table. The teachers met in grade level meetings and discussed how many students were in each competency area; minimal,
basic, proficient, or advanced. When the assessment information was not consistent, Mrs. Monroe questioned the quality and effectiveness of her instructional delivery.

Rolling Hills utilized various assessments to determine its students’ abilities to read and comprehend. Two types of assessments were analyzed – summative and formative. Five different summative assessments were used at the school level and four formative assessments were used in the classroom. For the RtI framework, Rolling Hills used the STAR Reading assessment as its main universal screener and for progress monitoring student in the tier process. Some of the assessments given were redundant in nature as school staff sought to confirm information from data sources. The majority of assessment results provided basic information concerning students’ reading capabilities rather than identifying specific areas of deficiency and need.

**Research Question 2: What Is the Relationship Between Reading Instruction and Assessment in a School Implementing RtI?**

Reading assessments were the driving force for decision-making at Rolling Hills Elementary. In the following sections I describe ways assessment data were used to track student progress, and ways assessment data were used to inform instruction. Within those sections summative and formative assessments are detailed in relation to reading instruction. There were discrepancies in how teachers used assessment data and these details are provided. Several additional influences such as RtI, CCSS, and standardized testing also impacted decisions made at Rolling Hills’ regarding reading instruction and assessment. The effects of these influences are explained.
Assessment Data Were Used to Track Student Progress

The school administrator was instrumental in using assessment data to track student progress. She created a data wall for each grade level in order for teachers to be aware of student progress based on selected assessment data at all times during the school year. Tracking student data also provided evidence to parents when concerns developed about mastery of standards and classroom instruction.

Creating a school data wall. Administration met with teachers to track students’ strengths and weaknesses using selected data. Summative assessment results were recorded on a data wall created by the school administration. Mrs. Smith was instrumental in its creation at Rolling Hills, and she described it “as a work in progress.” Developed during the second nine weeks of school, the data wall was actually large pieces of tri-colored (green, yellow, red) paper laminated together for each grade. The colors represented different proficiency levels; green was advanced and proficient, yellow was basic, and red was minimal.

During my first interview with Mrs. Smith, she went to her closet and unfolded one of the grade level charts. It happened to be Kindergarten. Velcro attached small cards containing all kinds of student information to the chart. Each card contained a student’s summative assessment results and any other pertinent information. The chart covered a large portion of Mrs. Smith’s office floor. She illustrated the use of this chart with Kindergarten, describing their process:

This is Kindergarten, so it is Early Literacy. What was their score in September, November, January, and then we will fill in March and April. So we can watch. At a glance I can know which kid started in green, yellow or red. Then if there are
any notes we need to make about a kid, you know it might be behavior, it might be a medical situation, it might be a needed action plan for dyslexia, it might be severe ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder]. Whatever other notes we need to make about a kid we’ll put here for the notes so that we always know. It [the card] tells if they [the student] have an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] or are they an ELL [English Limited Learner]. Are they a speech student? What tier are they in? Are they in Tier I, II, or III [for RtI]? Then we plotted them on here according to where they were at. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015).

All summative assessment results were recorded on each student’s card as a means of tracking student growth and performance. Mrs. Smith spoke of how the process of charting information was more important than the actual chart. She stated:

I loved the process to go through with each grade. For example, this next week, we are going to give the STAR Early Literacy again. I will pull these cards off because they are on Velcro. We will pull them all off. I will give them to each teacher. They will fill in the score of their kid. We adults are like kids. We do better if it is an active thing where we have to put it on here. It will be that reminder. Did they grow? Did they not? Why? We will put them back on here [the chart]. It will be interesting. My hope is to use these also at the end of the year to be instrumental tools for class placement for next year. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015)

Mrs. Wilson explained the purpose of charting all the universal screening data were to try and get teachers to understand that students in the grade were everyone’s
responsibility. The school administration used this activity to communicate that each teacher was not responsible only for his or her homeroom class. According to Mrs. Wilson, teachers struggled to understand and interpret the score reports from all the assessments, and felt uncomfortable having their teammates view their students’ results. Both Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Smith described the process of creating and using the data wall as “a journey.” According to these two administrators, teachers were apprehensive about letting others see assessment results. However, they stated that each time the data wall was used and reviewed, the discussion became more open and comfortable for staff. When asked if everyone was on board, Mrs. Smith shared the majority of teachers were willing, but there were still one or two teachers in each grade who resisted the change.

Mrs. Smith’s intentions were to use the data charts during the summer months to make decisions for next year’s class groupings. She described the method of determining students’ class placement as “an evolving thing.” In the past the counselor had designed all teacher classes and schedules. Mrs. Smith knew the students’ academic strengths and weaknesses as well as their personal background information because of supervising RtI. She wanted to take a more active role in generating class rolls, so she created a program that allowed her to enter all student data and design classroom rolls based on assessments. She said, “It is an incredible jigsaw puzzle. Trying to get to informed decisions about where kids are at and creating even kinds of classes” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015). The software program allowed Mrs. Smith to record all student assessment information so she could create heterogeneous groups across classes to ensure mixed ability levels in every class.
**Addressing parent concerns.** Tracking student progress across multiple types of assessments was useful to school staff when parents questioned whether teachers were correctly assessing student performance. Ms. Monroe described one interaction with a parent regarding decisions made based on multiple sources of evidence used to track a student. The parent complained about the scores her child received not only in the classroom, but also on the STAR Reading assessment. The parent blamed the child’s teachers for the student’s poor performance. A conference was held with the parent, Mrs. Monroe, her partner and Mrs. Smith to discuss the situation.

When Mrs. Smith printed the student’s history on the STAR Reading assessments, the scores were consistent with grades received for the current school year. Mrs. Monroe stated:

> Our grades reflected more so what the screenings were than what they [parents] had been given in the past. It’s a good testing water. If there’s a big discrepancy between what they [students] are doing and there is consistency in that screenings through the years or through my year, then you could go back. If there is consistency there and there is a discrepancy between my classroom grades and what they are showing on that [the assessment], then I need to go back and see if I’m not teaching or figure out what it is. If my grades are too high, I may not be giving the right skills or giving the right depth. It is just a good way to see how to measure if you are doing a good job. That is the way I look at. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Smith confirmed that Mrs. Monroe and her partner’s grades were consistent with the STAR Reading assessments. While STAR Reading did not disaggregate the score into
particular reading components or skills as provide on the school report card, Mrs. Monroe was able to determine alignment with areas graded in the classroom. She commented, “I don’t have a way to break down if they are weak in vocabulary, reading comprehension, or fluency. But I can gauge for growth” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015). Mrs. Monroe relied heavily on the STAR Reading assessment when determining student success and her own effectiveness.

Assessment Data Were Used By Teachers to Inform Instruction

Teachers used both summative and formative assessment data to inform reading instruction. At the school level five summative assessments were utilized, and Mrs. Monroe relied on the data from three of those assessments when planning for instruction. In addition to these three summative assessments, Mrs. Monroe used four formative assessments in her classroom to inform her understanding of students’ knowledge when instructing, and to plan for future instruction; discussion and questioning, graphic organizers, teacher observations, and choral response. A description of how Mrs. Monroe used each type of assessment is detailed. Lastly, Mrs. Monroe’s actions are explained when assessment information from summative and formative assessments did not concur.

Influences of summative data. Teachers used three types of summative assessments to inform their decisions about instruction: (a) STAR Reading, (b) SRI, and (c) teacher-created assessments. Below I address these three assessments, sharing how Mrs. Monroe used this data to inform decisions about instruction.

**STAR Reading assessment.** The STAR Reading assessment was given three times prior to my conversations with Mrs. Monroe. Her students were scheduled to test a fourth time in the following week during their computer time. As we sat talking, Mrs.
Monroe spoke about what she would receive once her students had been assessed. She explained:

It will be color coded like this chart, but it will be all the information color coded. This is the STAR. This is my recent STAR and when I get my new report I compare it to the last nine weeks to see if there is growth and if they [students] have made progress or if they have not. This particular group is my partner’s group and I noticed that there is less growth there. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe team-taught with a teacher next door and was responsible for the language arts and social studies instruction for both groups, while her partner was responsible for mathematics and science. The report Mrs. Monroe shared had the results from both classes, though she stated her partner’s group had not experienced as much growth as her own class. She further stated:

This is color coded according to the percentile. This was our range. This was our school in particular, our group. We color code red as minimal. That is the 0-25 percentile. Basic is 26-50%. Proficient is 51-85% and 86-100% is advanced. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe recorded the results for each student on a table she created as a way to track her students from each assessment period to the next. She stated her grade level sat down with Mrs. Smith to discuss the cutoff score for the STAR Reading assessment and decided to use the program’s recommended cut score, the 40th percentile rank and above, as the mark for student success. Before Mrs. Monroe spoke with her grade level about the
STAR Reading results, she analyzed how her students performed in relation to themselves.

Next, Mrs. Monroe met with the fourth grade teachers to discuss the summative assessment results during their PLC time. The STAR Reading assessment determined how students were grouped for RtI remediation and intervention. She stated:

What we do is we take our STAR report. We sit down and take these scores and we determine who needs remedial help. If they are in Tier III, they automatically go to Intervention Central. If they make minimal on a state test, they automatically go at the first of the year. Until they improve, they stay there. If they make low, like if they are in the red on these reports, they will be put on a Tier II. If they don’t improve, they go to Tier III. So that’s what we look at. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

According to Mrs. Monroe, the fourth grade team made the determination at the end of each administration of the STAR Reading assessment on how to divide students for Intervention Central. Intervention Central was a 30-minute block in which each grade provided interventions, and Mrs. Monroe was responsible for the enrichment group during this block of time (students who scored advanced on the screener). Other students were assigned to different teachers, depending on identified student needs. Two teachers provided remediation in the area of reading. One teacher provided what Mrs. Monroe described as “proficient” instruction. The students in these groups changed each nine weeks based on STAR Reading assessment results. Teachers strategized together to determine the types of interventions they used and if the intervention they provided was successful. If a student continued scoring below level, the teachers recommended they be
moved to Tier III and seen by Mrs. Wilson and her interventionists during their Intervention Central time.

*Scholastic Reading Inventory.* While Mrs. Monroe invested much of her time analyzing the STAR Reading assessment, she found merit in using the SRI assessment data as well. Mrs. Monroe stated that the SRI provided that additional piece of information for students’ reading abilities. The SRI was also color coded, which “made it easy for me to glance at my classes to see who is in the bottom” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015). The SRI report provided a Lexile level for each student assessed. Mrs. Monroe said she had some knowledge about Lexile levels, but did not utilize the level in her decision-making. She stated that since most books in the library still used the AR system for reading level classification, the Lexile wasn’t beneficial to her students.

Mrs. Monroe compared the results of the SRI to the results of her STAR Reading assessment. Since SRI reported students according to proficiency levels, she was able to visualize which students were in each group according to the color-coded system. SRI followed the same system as STAR with green representing advanced and proficient, yellow as basic and red as minimal. She compared results from the STAR Reading and SRI assessments by proficiency levels to determine which students would be recommended for Tier II remediation. According to Mrs. Monroe, she rarely found a discrepancy between the two reports; however, if there was a discrepancy she looked at the student’s grades to make a determination.

*Teacher-created common assessments.* Mrs. Monroe used teacher-created common assessments when teaching reading and language arts. During my hours
observing her in the classroom, I witnessed Mrs. Monroe administering several assessments for a variety of areas, including reading, spelling, and grammar. Mrs. Monroe developed each assessment because she viewed tests from the textbook as inadequate when comparing those assessments to what her students would be required to complete on a state standardized assessment. According to Mrs. Monroe, in the past all her tests were multiple-choice, mirroring all the other assessments given at the school and state level. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Mrs. Monroe changed the makeup of her tests to include more open-ended and written response style questions. She explained her test writing process:

What I do is I look at resources, and I’d like to say I am smart enough to type up some great questions, but I just am not. What I do is I use my resources. Like this [one] has literature circle questions in the back. I will read those and then with that, print off whatever the questions are in there and may take the idea of the question and then word it differently so it sounds more like how they will be tested using words from the framework or standards that might be included in questions. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015)

The assessments Mrs. Monroe created required students to justify and evaluate their answers. She wanted her assessments to match the rigor and style of the summative assessments her students would be required to take, especially those that were state-mandated. The questions on her assessments asked the students to justify their answers or provide evidence from the text.

While summative data were utilized to make decisions about remediation and student placement in the tier process of RtI, I did not see evidence that anyone on the
instructional team supplemented that data by using formative types of assessment. School administration’s decision-making was dependent on the results of summative assessments only, and in school-wide or grade level meetings teachers did not talk about formative assessments or the impact using them might have on decisions about instruction.

**Influences of formative data.** While Mrs. Monroe complied in most areas with what the school administration expected of her in relation to summative assessments and data use, she did prefer to use formative assessments as a means to check student understanding during instruction. These formative assessments primarily consisted of the use of discussion and questioning, graphic organizers, teacher observation, and choral response. When assessing student understanding and progress for mastery of standards on a daily basis, these four formative assessments provided the needed information for Mrs. Monroe. Data from these assessment practices influenced Mrs. Monroe’s reading instruction, as well as providing information regarding its effectiveness. She used various formative assessments throughout her daily instruction to not only guide current instruction, but also to make judgments about the need to reteach information or if students had mastered content to the extent she felt confident to move forward to new instruction.

**Discussion and questioning.** Of the four formative assessments, Mrs. Monroe used discussion and questioning the majority of the time. The days that I observed, Mrs. Monroe’s literacy instruction centered on the novel *Frindle* (Clements, 2001) during my observation in her classroom, and it was during the whole class read aloud of the chapters that Mrs. Monroe incorporated most of her discussion and questioning. To stimulate discussion of the story Mrs. Monroe would ask questions such as why, what, or how?
During one particular lesson Mrs. Monroe made a comparison between one of the main characters (a teacher) and herself. Mrs. Monroe facilitated a discussion regarding how she and this character were alike and different. The students gave descriptions of the two ladies in their physical appearances and their actions. Mrs. Monroe would ask why questions in relation to the actions the character performed. Many times her first question led to further questioning. One example was her comment that the little boy Nick in *Frindle* reminded her of Dennis the Menace. Her leading question was what does it mean to be a menace? After discussion of the word’s meaning, she asked the students how the main character in *Frindle* was a menace, as well as to provide evidence from the text to support their answer. Occasionally Mrs. Monroe would allow students to discuss aspects of the novel with a partner. Students would arrange their chairs side by side and talk, and then discuss again with the whole class.

Additionally, Mrs. Monroe used questioning and discussion when teaching the vocabulary words for each chapter. In one particular instance, Mrs. Monroe brought a ring she had received from her grandmother to demonstrate the word cameo. In the previous day’s lesson she had asked how many students knew what a cameo was. No hands were raised. The next day Mrs. Monroe had the ring and they discussed not only the meaning of the word cameo, but also the details of how she received this special gift from her grandmother. Various students spoke about how they have received special gifts from their grandparents as well.

Reading instruction was not the only period of time Mrs. Monroe incorporated discussion and questioning into a lesson. When reviewing language skills such as editing sentences or paragraphs, Mrs. Monroe asked questions such as why particular words were
capitalized or certain punctuation marks were appropriate. These questions guided a class discussion on the application of mechanics used in writing. Likewise, during spelling instruction, Mrs. Monroe asked questions related to spelling rules, including why vowels have certain sounds in a word. Again, discussion would ensue as the class gave explanations, and often further questions and discussion resulted. Students were not given grades for participation in class discussion. Therefore, Mrs. Monroe used certain techniques, which helped facilitate all students participating in classroom discussions.

Two behaviors Mrs. Monroe demonstrated when asking questions were giving students adequate thinking time and calling on random students to answer. If a student did not know the answer, Mrs. Monroe did not immediately call on another student. She would wait until the student provided an answer, and if the student still had not answered after being given the wait time, Mrs. Monroe would provide information and then ask the question again. Another tactic she used when questioning students was calling on them randomly to answer. Mrs. Monroe used popsicle sticks with students’ names on them. She pulled the stick from a tin can, called on the student whose name she had drawn, and then stated the question. The students never knew when their name would be drawn from the container, so students were engaged and interacting to be ready. During the 90 minutes Mrs. Monroe had for reading instruction, discussion and questioning were used continuously.

*Graphic organizers.* Mrs. Monroe used several different graphic organizers during her reading lessons, all in reproducible form. Mrs. Monroe had located these graphic organizers while researching instructional topics on the Internet to find resources to aid her in teaching the novel. After Mrs. Monroe and the students read chapter one, she
focused on the main character Nick and facilitated the creation of a web of Nick’s feelings, sayings, actions, and thoughts. Students completed the web by working with a partner and used text from the novel as evidence.

In a later chapter, Mrs. Monroe assigned a t-chart that asked students to distinguish between two characters’ thought patterns. She allowed students to work in groups of four to determine which character, the teacher or the parent, they believed made the right decision based on their actions. Before finishing the novel, Mrs. Monroe used a timeline for teaching cause and effect relationships. Mrs. Monroe modeled the first cause/effect event and then students completed the timeline with a partner. The timeline covered the cause/effect relationships throughout the novel. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Monroe used a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two main characters. The Venn diagram allowed the students to show how the characters evolved throughout the novel, and students provided details from the novel to support their answers. Mrs. Monroe indicated she wanted the specific page number of where they found the answer. Students worked individually to complete the activity.

On Fridays of each week, Mrs. Monroe had the students collect their graphic organizers and staple them together. During each of my observations, students completed an average of two to three handouts during the language arts block of time. She never gave direct instruction on how to complete the graphic organizers or specifics concerning the type of graphic organizers being used, and the students never asked Mrs. Monroe questions about the graphic organizers. Any time Mrs. Monroe used a graphic organizer, she walked around and monitored her students, providing individualized instruction and
support as needed for the task assigned. This directed me to the third formative assessment she used – teacher observation.

**Teacher observation.** Mrs. Monroe monitored her students’ learning and work habits through teacher observation. When she completed her instruction and students began their textbook assignment, handout, or activity, she walked around the room and monitored each student. Mrs. Monroe’s teacher observations were conducted as students were reading, writing, or discussing. As she went from group to group or student to student, Mrs. Monroe was available to offer feedback, assistance, or answer any questions. During reading instruction, I observed Mrs. Monroe as she assigned the students to write a summary of their day’s reading. This was a routine assignment she completed with both classes she taught. It did not matter the length of reading they did during class time; they were required to write a summary. Chapter 12 of the novel was particularly long and she divided the chapter into smaller sections, requiring students to write summaries for each section. Mrs. Monroe gave her students time to write before going from student to student and reading their summaries. She provided feedback on things like sentence structure and sentence meaning, or asked questions if she did not fully understand what the students had written.

Summary writing was an assignment I observed each time during my visits to Mrs. Monroe’s classroom. When students completed reading handouts or an assignment from a textbook, Mrs. Monroe checked as many individual students’ work as she could before reviewing work as a class. It was during these monitoring moments when Mrs. Monroe told students if their work was acceptable, or if they needed to correct mistakes. Many of the handouts she used during reading instruction required students to write
detailed responses in paragraphs. Mrs. Monroe told the students when they finished to raise their hands and she would check their writing so she could read their responses and provided feedback to them verbally.

**Choral response.** As stated earlier, Mrs. Monroe was teaching reading from a novel study. Each student had his or her own personal copy of the novel, which Mrs. Monroe provided. During my observation periods, Mrs. Monroe and the students read from the novel. She always initiated the day’s reading in unison with students, once discussion of the previous day’s reading was completed. Mrs. Monroe stopped her reading during the middle of a paragraph or selection and the students continued reading the passage in unison until the end. This shared reading I witnessed happened automatically and without prodding from Mrs. Monroe. She stopped reading aloud and the students read chorally at varying intervals. While students read in unison, she would observe the class. If a student was not reading with the rest of the students, Mrs. Monroe moved from where she was standing to that particular student’s desk without addressing the student verbally. In general, increased proximity encouraged the student to participate, and on the few occasions when a student did not begin to participate, Mrs. Monroe would demonstrate this same nonverbal behavior of lingering at the desk before moving again around the classroom.

During one observation, Mrs. Monroe stopped the students’ reading because they failed to read the words with expression. She read the sentence aloud and demonstrated the proper voice tone, reminding students about reading when authors used various types of punctuation such as an exclamation point. Mrs. Monroe then had the class read the sentence again. Another example of Mrs. Monroe using choral response was during
vocabulary instruction. She provided new vocabulary words when beginning a new chapter in the novel study. One activity involved a my turn, your turn response with Mrs. Monroe saying the vocabulary word and the students repeating it. Choral response was a formative assessment that was used throughout novel study instruction.

**Conflicting assessment data.** Teachers questioned assessment data validity and the quality of their own instruction when formative data results contradicted summative data. For instance, Mrs. Monroe shared she used STAR Reading assessment data when evaluating not only her students’ progress, but also the effectiveness of her own instruction. She stated:

I have a student now or two students, one in each class in particular, that their grades in the classroom were showing that they should be proficient or above. But the grades on the screening were showing that they were basic and minimal. So that big of [a] discrepancy means I need to check and see is it that way across the board, the whole class or is that one isolated or two isolated instances. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015).

Mrs. Monroe believed the universal screener results were a true indication of what her students could and could not do. She trusted those results rather than having confidence in her own data from the classroom, particularly when those types of data conflicted with each other. Mrs. Monroe further stated:

So then I am going to look and see if I am not teaching [with the correct rigor]. Am I too hard? Am I not teaching in-depth. There is something wrong. I try to look and analyze, “Am I not challenging enough? What is going on with that?” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015).
If discrepancies were noted when Mrs. Monroe analyzed student data, her first thought was that she was doing something wrong instructionally. She felt her teaching was causing the students to perform low on these assessments. She never discussed other factors, such as the assessment tools themselves, being problematic.

Discrepancies in How Teachers Used Assessment Data

Teachers were expected to track students’ strengths and weaknesses using selected assessments as outlined previously, but all teachers did not conform to administration’s stated expectations. Likewise, administration was inconsistent in the way they worked with individual teachers and across grade level teams when stating expectations about how data would be used, as well as in follow up for those expectations.

Use of common assessment scores. Administration spoke of assessing students using common assessments created by teachers at each grade level based on essential skills; however, the teachers in the fourth grade did not follow this practice. While Mrs. Monroe was aware of the essential skills, her grade ceased writing common assessments based on them in the first nine weeks of school. Mrs. Monroe stated at the beginning of the year her grade level team wrote assessments together, but soon experienced problems. Teachers and assistants employed at Rolling Hills began to use the teacher created tests to ensure their own biological children were successful. While the tests were not secure like state assessments, Mrs. Monroe said having staff use tests for their own children in this manner (e.g., to ensure success) defeated the purpose of administering common assessments. This factor, plus disagreements between grade level teachers regarding the content that should be assessed, resulted in the fourth grade’s failure to develop common
assessments. The fourth grade teachers made the decision that each teacher would be responsible individually for assessing essential skills in his or her classroom. Consequently, according to Mrs. Monroe no teacher in her grade level administered common assessments during the time I observed for this study, including Mrs. Monroe.

**Use of assessments for grading.** Another disagreement between teachers regarded the use of assessment for grading purposes. Some teachers used assessments for grading, while others did not agree with this practice. According to Mrs. Smith, one area of contention was using common assessments for a grade. Grade levels were consistent with how common assessment were scored, but were inconsistent with how scores were used. Some teachers viewed common assessments as practice tests that should not be calculated in a student’s reading average, while others used the score as a test grade when calculating reading grades for report cards. Grading decisions varied across and within grade levels, with the majority of third and fourth grade teachers using common assessment scores when calculating grades, versus kindergarten, first and second grade teachers who used these assessments for practice only. Upper grade teachers stated students would not take these assessments seriously and do their best if scores were not counting towards a grade.

AR scores was calculated as part of the student’s reading grade in many grade levels as well. A student’s grade level determined how the AR grade was calculated. For students in second-fourth grades, two grades were given; one for the percentage a student made toward his or her goal, and another for the comprehension average of tests taken. Mrs. Wilson explained:
They get a grade on both their point goal. If they meet 100% of their goal, they get a 100 in the gradebook. Nothing higher than a 100. If they met 50% of their goal, they get that and then they also get the comprehension part according to what they make on their tests. If they had an 85 comprehension average, they would get a grade on that. They get two grades per nine weeks with AR. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015)

Grading practices within AR were controversial according to Mrs. Smith:

At this point right now, we do it differently at first and second grade than we do in third and fourth grade because there was such a difference of opinion on that point [whether scores should be used as grades]. I think we do need to get to a point as a school [where] we do such and such. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

At the conclusion of this research study, the AR grading issue had not been resolved. Administration tabled the issue until the summer, when the school leadership team was expected to consider it again after receiving input from each grade level team. The goal was to start the next school year with a consistent grading system for the use of AR data school-wide.

It was clear whether to use common assessment and AR scores for grading was a major area of contention between teachers themselves, and between teachers and administration at Rolling Hills. Teachers agreed that grades could be used to both assess students’ performance, as well as to motivate students; what should be used when grading and how heavily it should be weighted in a grade were the crux of the contention. Teachers agreed universal screener data should only be used to better understand
students’ learning abilities, but the use of common assessment scores and AR data for grading were both highly contentious. Some teachers used AR data as a part of their grading system, whereas other teachers used AR data solely for motivational purposes as a part of their reading incentive program. Again, upper grades teachers tended to be the ones who believed strongly that scores had to be used if students were going to take the assessments seriously. If students were not graded, teachers contended students would either not participate at all or they would not bother to perform to their potential.

**Differing administration expectations in practice.** Though administration stated expectations regarding the way teachers should use assessment data were the same school-wide, I observed these expectations differed across grade levels. When describing reading instruction in the classroom, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wilson separated teachers into two groups: one group was labeled as the non-tested grades, consisting of Kindergarten-second grade; the other group was labeled as the tested grades, which were third and fourth grades. School administration directives differed for these two groups. As Mrs. Wilson explained:

> She [Mrs. Smith] tries not to tell them exactly what to do because they are the tested areas and she wants them to have the freedom to teach how they need to, to get them ready for the test. It is just a different ballgame. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015).

Teachers in the upper grades had the freedom to make instructional decisions for their students in the classroom. The lower grade teachers were directed by the school administration in their expectations for reading instruction. Inconsistencies between stated expectations and how different teachers and grade level teams were actually treated
may have contributed to confusion and created some issues of nonconformity at Rolling Hills.

**Additional Influences on Reading Instruction Beyond School Assessment**

Teachers’ reading instruction decisions were heavily influenced by mandated standardized tests, as well as state and national assessment policies and standards. The school administration’s reading instruction expectations consisted of teachers using the National Reading Panel’s five domains of reading (i.e. phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension) as their reading instruction foundation. Yet, teachers extended this limited view of reading instruction to include the use of former literacy programs they valued, and to ensure they covered everything outlined in the CCSS.

**Standardized testing.** While state standardized tests were only administered in the second semester at Rolling Hills, teachers’ minds were constantly reflecting on their administration and results. During this particular school year at Rolling Hills standardized testing was completely new. Teachers had received very little information or direction regarding these PARCC assessments.

During my third interview with Mrs. Monroe, she shared that a copy of the practice test for the PARCC state-mandated assessment had been discovered. A fellow teacher on her grade team found the test while scanning the PARCC website. Mrs. Monroe shared:

I don’t know who to be angry with, the district, the state or my own school administrators. Nothing was shared with us about what this test will be like. How
do they expect us to prepare students with test questions when we don’t know anything? (Mrs. Monroe, April 17, 2015)

Based on the construction of the practice test, Mrs. Monroe stated the test was more focused on reading, unlike their old assessment that was divided into sections for vocabulary, reading, grammar, and writing. She further stated that no part of the test contained questions related to language skills; the questions she had seen focused primarily on reading comprehension only. Mrs. Monroe shared she was anxious for her students because of the test makeup and the format of the test questions. She had not prepared them for an exam in this format, or one that was focused on reading comprehension primarily. She wanted at the minimum an awareness of the expectations from these new assessments so she could properly design instruction that would support students being able to perform to their greatest potential when sharing their knowledge.

Mrs. Monroe felt she’d inappropriately decided to focus on language arts skills because she was influenced by the content in the previous state-mandated assessment. Had she realized the content focus for the new assessment was different, Mrs. Monroe stated she would have adjusted her instruction to emphasize the essential skills aligned with the content in the new assessment. Mrs. Monroe shared if she’d had this information it would have influenced her decisions regarding instruction; in particular, she would have included a stronger emphasis on reading skills and she would have used question formats that provide students with opportunities to practice sharing their knowledge in a different way.

**Assessment policies and legislation.** Certain assessment policies and state legislation affected how Rolling Hills designed their assessment system. The
requirements from outside sources impacted not only the school’s instructional practices, but also the types of assessments given and how often those assessments were administered. At times decisions were made at the district or state level and were beyond Rolling Hills’ control.

During this school year STAR Early Literacy was conducted differently. In the past Rolling Hills used a different universal screener for kindergarteners. Mrs. Smith explained:

This is actually our first year to do it this way because the state [department of education] has mandated the STAR Early Literacy be given to kindergarteners at the beginning and the end of the year. We didn’t want just two data points for these students so we do it three times for our school. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015)

The state department of education required schools with kindergarten students to assess only two times a year, but Mrs. Smith wanted to assess Rolling Hills’ kindergarten students the same number of times the school assessed all the other grades. She made the decision to add three additional test administrations throughout the school year with kindergarten for a total of five times because she felt consistency between grades was important. The data from those additional assessments were only available to the school and not reported to the state.

Kindergarten was not the only grade required by the state department to assess reading abilities. During the current year all students in third grade were given an end of year reading exit test. The assessment used for this purpose was STAR Reading, and third graders were given three opportunities to pass in compliance with state requirements. The
first test administration was in May, followed by two retesting administrations during the summer. At the time of this case study, the state department had not released what the cutoff scores would be for passing or failing. Mrs. Wilson stated, “We don’t know what the state department is going to set for third grade” (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015). Once again little direction or information had been given to school administration and teachers about how to prepare students for these assessments. Yet, students in the third grade were expected to pass in order to be promoted to the fourth grade.

**National reading panel.** The five pillars of reading instruction (i.e. phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension) recommended by the National Reading Panel (NRP) were the focus given by the school administration for reading instruction at Rolling Hills. Administration’s expectation was teachers would use these five components of reading to design reading lessons. Teachers in the lower grades were to focus on all five components, but teachers in the upper grades would focus on fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Mrs. Smith stated:

> What we are trying to get towards is starting with the standards and being sure that we’re okay; here is what they need to learn. We are real clear about this is what they need to learn, and then how are we going to make sure they learn it. How are we going to find if they have learned it or not, and to really focus on the five areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension? (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Mrs. Smith followed the state department’s framework for what should be included in the literacy timeframe as the format for Rolling Hills’ literacy block instruction. Teachers
were expected to allow 30 minutes for phonics instruction, 30 minutes for reading skills instruction, and 60 minutes for center instructions based on NRP’s five components of reading. She further stated, “To me the biggest part is covering all those five areas plus writing and making sure that we minimize whole group and maximize small group and center kind of stuff. That is what we are shooting for.” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015). The upper grades were expected to allot 90 minutes in their schedule for literacy instruction. Yet, in my discussions with Mrs. Monroe, she never mentioned NRP and the five pillars of reading. She used the CCSS as her guide to determine what type of instruction would be included during her literacy block.

*Curriculum standards.* Rolling Hills used the CCSS as their learning goals for reading instruction. Two years before research was conducted for this study the state department of education required only teachers in Kindergarten-second grade to teach from the CCSS. One year later the upper grade teachers were added to the requirement. At the time of this case study, Rolling Hills was in their second year of full implementation of the CCSS. The state department of education mandated all teachers in Kindergarten-eighth grade teach solely from these national standards by the year this study was conducted.

Mrs. Monroe’s instructional framework was the CCSS. When asked how she determined her reading objectives in relation to her literacy teaching timeframe, Mrs. Monroe stated she was cognizant of the school’s pacing guide, but she did not use it as her sole instructional source. She explained:

I have looked at it and it’s a hit and miss. I think I start out that way and then I probably have veered off especially this last nine weeks. I go back and look and
see. I try to go through my framework and find what I have taught, mark it and what I need to reteach or work more on, and then what I haven’t taught. We gauge that. We have 10 essential skills. Every grade has their 10 essential skills and those were placed by nine weeks too. You just go back and look or what I do is go back and see what I’ve taught, what I need to teach, and what I need to reteach.

(Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015).

Mrs. Monroe used the pacing guide and the identified essential skills it included as one indicator of what she should be teaching during a nine-week period, but she stated she looked at CCSS and determined if the pacing guide was aligned with CCSS expectations as well. She tracked her teaching of the common core standards and recorded the date of instruction. She stated she knew which standards she would later reteach based on her students’ performance on assigned work.

**Pacing guides and grade level planning.** Mrs. Smith’s focus began with the teaching of the standards and the essential skills each grade level determined were most important. A pacing guide for each grade was provided by the school district for teachers to follow as a timeline for teaching the Common Core standards. Mrs. Smith used the district pacing guide as a reference. As a way to focus the teachers’ instruction, Mrs. Smith would meet with grade level teams and determine what specific skills would be taught and when. She described:

*We work off of those district pacing guides and for ourselves say okay like here it says do these during the third 9 weeks. Then we are putting it in a calendar for January, February and March. Each skill, where exactly which week or weeks it was going to get covered. The way we are doing it is by a literal calendar. Like I
give them a calendar for January, February and March. For example, for the third nine weeks they would put the skills in there. Sometimes a skill is going to be a multi-week thing depending on what it is, like a comprehension skill, for example main idea. They may cover it over two weeks so they will take what they cover there and spread it out as needed. They will insert their language arts there as well so that they know together collectively this is what we are going to do in this grade level. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Lesson plans were to mirror what was agreed upon and specific skills written on the monthly calendar were to be covered during the specified time frame. Mrs. Smith said lesson plans were written together by grade level during PLC time. “It might be they plan it all together, but it may be one person is assigned to do the reading. One is assigned the math as far as actually writing it up and putting it in to submission” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015). If teachers were developing lesson plans on sequencing, for example, each teacher would bring a different learning activity or some new idea they wanted to share during their PLC meeting. Collaborating together, the grade level would write the final plan. Mrs. Smith explained at times the meetings were two-fold. She pointed out:

It is this major sharing together of here are ways to get kids to be sure that they learn it, and then together they will decide on a common way to assess it. I am talking about assessing it at the end. Together they have a common assessment. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Lesson plans for reading were written together as a grade level. The team had a general lesson plan that was submitted weekly by one teacher for everyone who taught reading
and language arts. One of the PLC meetings during the week was designated for lesson planning and writing. Mrs. Monroe explained:

Some like to do their own thing and I do too, but I think we can still do the same skills and do your own thing. One may veer off, but we still go over what we’re doing and still have the discussion. That is all you can do. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015)

She further explained that the fourth grade team started the school year planning and writing lessons together, but as the semester progressed some teachers deviated and worked individually.

Even though Mrs. Monroe planned with her team, she would rewrite the grade level plans for herself. She stated:

What I normally do is type up my own, not that I am doing different. I am doing what I say in the group, but I find if I don’t type my own, I do not really know what I am teaching. It gives me a structure and I have learned it the hard way. If I don’t type my own lesson plans, I just need to know what I am doing and I can remember it rather than have to pick up that paper and refer back to it. I have it in my head. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 1, 2015)

Rather than follow the group lesson plan, Mrs. Monroe retyped the lesson plans each time to adjust for her personal teaching style simply for her own understanding and format of the lesson plan. Her lesson plan contained more details and reminders for specific learning objectives. During my interviews with Mrs. Monroe and the school administration, assessment results were not discussed in relation to designing lesson plans and determining instructional strategies and activities.
Adopted literacy programs. Success For All (SFA) is a whole-school reform model that includes reading, writing, and oral language development for students in Kindergarten-eighth grade. Classroom reading instruction is delivered in 90-minute blocks of time each day to students grouped by reading ability. Since the discontinuation of this reading program at Rolling Hills, teachers in all grades use basal readers as their primary instructional tool for reading. Some teachers, like Mrs. Monroe, use novel studies as well.

Success For All. Mrs. Wilson shared teachers in the upper grades adhered to a school program they implemented several years ago called Success For All (SFA). This structured program provided detailed reading lessons based on a five-day implementation, whether a novel study or basal program was utilized. Mrs. Wilson described:

I see so much now even though we are not doing SFA reading any more. A lot of the teachers still cling to that model. They still cling to introduce the story on the first day, talk about the vocabulary words, read the first half of the story, do some questions on the first half of the story and that is their version of comprehension. Then on the second day do the rest of the story, work on comprehension questions, review it and take a test. A lot of teachers still get that basal book. They do it all week long. They pick apart the story and then the kids kind of spit back the information as their comprehension test at the end of the week. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015)
According to Mrs. Wilson, the teachers still adhered to this model as the way to provide reading instruction and seldom would branch out to different methods of teaching. She further clarified:

They feel like [they need to] not only follow the basal, but follow it in order. Like I can’t even go out of order. I’ve got to go in order of those stories and I think that it was that SFA mindset. That’s the way they did it then and they just continue it.

(Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 31, 2015).

When asked why teachers were attached to SFA, Mrs. Wilson replied teachers were comfortable with it because they were trained how to use the program and knew the lesson requirements for each day throughout the week’s instruction. This program provided the specific reading instruction and assessments teachers were to use when teaching their basal stories. If a teacher chose to use a novel study, there were sample lesson plans provided for any novel as well. What is notable is that when teachers followed the SFA model while the program was in effect, assessment information had little to do with instructional design or practices. Using assessment to guide instruction was not a part of the model, which may contribute to teachers’ difficulty now in using assessment to inform instruction.

**Accelerated Reader.** The Accelerated Reader is a computer managed reading program. This program is for all students in Kindergarten-12th grade and helps to monitor students’ comprehension of independently read books. The students choose an Accelerated Reader book based upon their reading level. After the student reads the book, he or she takes a short multiple choice question test on the computer. The computer scores the test and awards points to the student based on their performance.
The AR program was Rolling Hills’ central way to promote and encourage reading for its students, as well as to assess students’ content knowledge of reading material. The AR program was used in every grade level for the majority of the school year at Rolling Hills except for Kindergarten. Fourth grade students immediately began using AR, once their initial STAR Reading assessments were completed at the beginning of the school year. Based upon the results from the STAR reading assessment, each student’s range of reading levels was determined. Mrs. Smith explained that the STAR Reading assessment informed teachers concerning the level of books a student should read and the AR goal each student should strive for by the end of the nine-week period. Mrs. Smith stated the software informed the students about how close they were to reaching this goal; the program flashed reminders to the student each time an AR test had been completed.

Mrs. Monroe utilized AR during her instruction throughout each day, not just during the reading block. The only day of the week when she had a set time for AR was on Friday. Twenty-five minutes were devoted for students to leisurely read their AR books during that Friday time. On the other days of the week students were allowed to read their AR book during homeroom time before changing classes, when classwork was completed, or after completing a test. AR Reading assessment data were used to determine the AR reading level for each student. Mrs. Monroe stated:

They take the STAR and that test levels them. They work for nine weeks on whatever goal. There is a chart that tells you the points according to their goal and the amount of minutes they use. We choose 25 minutes a day. So we base that on
nine weeks and we put the points in the computer. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Students were required to choose books to read based on their assigned reading level. This range allowed them to read books slightly below to slightly above their score on the STAR Reading assessment.

An issue shared regarding the AR program was the type of books students should be required to read. Mrs. Smith stated that upper grade teachers wanted students to read only chapter books according to their reading level, and felt picture books should be read only by second graders and below, even if the picture book was in the student’s reading range. Mrs. Smith said teachers in third and fourth grades stated they based this conclusion on the rigor of state assessments. Students in the upper grades must be able to read grade level material that requires in-depth and advanced thinking for state assessments; thus, these teachers believed all practice should be completed within these parameters. Not all teachers shared this opinion. Mrs. Smith said some teachers voiced certain picture books required deep thinking and should be permitted; it depended on the particular picture book. Mrs. Smith shared her thoughts:

We were saying across the board we’ve got to really get back to motivation. For us we want this to be, to develop a love of reading. The AR program. It is great in that it does let them [students] read at their level. There are so many really good parts about it. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Mrs. Monroe stated in her professional opinion students in the fourth grade should be expected to read only chapter books on their reading level, even if the student’s reading level was low. According to Mrs. Monroe, chapter books were available at any level. She
said students would not achieve reading growth if they were reading books that didn’t challenge them appropriately. Mrs. Monroe viewed that as enabling a student to fail. This issue regarding AR book selection was not resolved at the time this study was conducted, and Mrs. Smith shared she planned to gather input from each grade level and make a final decision before the next school year started.

In fourth grade, students received two grades each nine week period based on the AR books they read; one grade was calculated on the student’s comprehension average, and the second grade was based on the number of points the student was required to earn during that 9 week period. A student’s AR point goal was based upon the results from the STAR Reading assessment. Mrs. Monroe said:

Whatever their correct average is and their percent. If I have a three point book and I make a 100, I will get all three points. That goes toward their goal. If they had the three point book and made 80, they may not get but two points. That goes in the gradebook. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe believed it was imperative she monitor her students’ AR progress. Not only was she monitoring their comprehension grade for percentage of correctly answered questions, but also observing to verify the student was reading their prescribed book levels. If the student was not reading, no points were being accumulated. Since all library books at Rolling Hills were identified by point level, students were able to find out how many points they would receive for reading a particular book as well as their comprehension grade. The AR assessments provided Mrs. Monroe with weekly data regarding her students’ reading comprehension progress. Mrs. Monroe stated she typically gave 20 grades during a 9-week period. She shared the AR celebration at the
end of the 9-week period pushed the students to reach their AR goal. Mrs. Monroe voiced her opinion about AR stating, “It is very differentiated. That’s probably the best. I keep saying that’s the best program in that it tells every child their level and they work in their level” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015).

At Rolling Hills, the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and reading assessment while implementing RtI revealed summative assessments were the driving force in school decision-making. Assessment results were used to track students’ progress and inform teachers of their instructional effectiveness. Yet, the accumulation of assessment results had little effect on teacher instruction as teachers were influenced by factors outside of the assessment system. These factors, such as state standardized testing and state and national standards, played a greater role in teachers’ reading instruction design. Discrepancies were also found at Rolling Hills between school administration’s expectations about the relationship between assessment and reading instruction, and teachers’ actual instructional and assessment practices. Grade level practices were not the same across grades, with division between tested and non-tested teachers.

**Research Question 3: In What Ways Are Reading Comprehension Assessment Practices in a School Implementing RtI Consistent or Inconsistent with ILA Assessment Guidelines That Focus on Multiple Dimensions of Literacy, New Literacies and Using Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning?**

The ILA (2010) in conjunction with the NCTE researched and developed standards to guide literacy educators as they design instruction and assess students’ reading abilities. According to the ILA, these assessment standards are the guidelines by which literacy teachers should develop and model assessment practices. For this case study, I selected three of the ILA’s 11 assessment standards as a way to measure and
compare Rolling Hills’ assessment practices to ILA’s criteria. I selected these three focal standards because of their concentration on student instruction and assessment. In addition to having an understanding of a school’s assessment practices and its relationship with reading instruction, another item was of interest; Rolling Hills’ consistency to these standards. When analyzing the three ILA standards, each standard was unpacked into subparts for an even greater inspection of the school’s assessment practices based on ILA standards. It was through this lens I observed and now describe Rolling Hills’ consistencies or inconsistencies with these three ILA assessment standards.

**Standard Three: Improving Teaching and Learning**

The primary purpose of assessment according to standard three is for teachers to improve their teaching and increase student learning. According to the ILA, assessment in a school setting has many purposes such as diagnosing difficulties, keeping track of learning, and evaluating teaching. I will describe these three aspects of standard three in relation to Rolling Hills.

**Diagnosing difficulties.** Rolling Hills identified students who didn’t score well on universal screeners for tier placement within the RtI framework. The administration and fourth grade teacher used universal screener results to determine students’ reading levels. If performance on universal screeners or state mandated assessments were low, students were automatically placed in the tier process. Students who scored minimal on a state assessment were automatically placed in Tier III. According to Mrs. Monroe, the fourth grade team relied on the two main universal screeners, STAR Reading and SRI, for information to determine which students were in need of remediation. They would meet together as a grade level and analyze the results of those two assessments and make
student placement determinations. At Rolling Hills, Intervention Central was the name of the physical space where students were provided Tier III interventions, and team time was when each grade level provided Tier II interventions. The designated 30-minute block of time was strictly for providing additional assistance. The results from the screeners determined student placement in the tier process throughout the school year.

Mrs. Smith stated:

> Whoever takes the screener and fails it, we get those interventions all in place.
> Then they are clearly progress monitored along the way to see if gaps are closing.
> What’s happening? You are already doing stuff to address it. You made need to add in something else to determine their problem. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Students were moved in and out of Tier II and III based on universal screeners’ results. If at any time a student was demonstrating academic success and had no need for additional assistance, the student would return to Tier I for whole group instruction.

**Keeping track of learning.** Rolling Hills used their assessment data as a way to track their students’ learning as well. Whether meeting with school administration or in grade level teams, the expected discussion was not only analyzing the data, but also strategizing what instruction to provide for struggling students. Mrs. Smith viewed PLC time in each grade level as an avenue for them to monitor student growth and learning by reviewing assessment reports. She stated:

> In PLCs you answer these four questions: What do we want to be sure that they learn? How are we going to be sure they learn it? How are we going to know if they learned it? What are we going to do for the kids who already got it? What are
we going to do for the kids that don’t get it? Those are the four questions that should be the crux of the PLC meetings. Then we go over here. RtI is the response to that. If they didn’t get it, what are we going to do about it? How are we going to know? We progress monitor. It is just that whole keeping track of kids and being very individualized and it’s very focused on the learning. It is not about what we teach and how cool something is. The purpose is what are they going to learn and what are we doing to be sure they learn whatever it is. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe described how she and her team organized all their assessment results to monitor student learning. She said:

I think everybody keeps theirs, most everybody, keeps theirs in a book. We have got to keep the data all together and organized and as I said before what we do as a team, we work with our partners and we look at our scores and group. Then we bring all data and our team comes together and brings our groupings together and we write that out and type it up. We try to get a copy to Mrs. Smith. We write down who is doing what and who is what group. We make a copy for all of the team members. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe had a table that contained each student’s STAR Reading assessments, SRI, and grades in reading by the nine-week period. Each grade member was able to quickly scan the chart to see his or her weakest students academically. Mrs. Wilson also spoke of the data table teachers used to list student screener results and monitor growth. She shared:
Each individual teacher, they have their own data sheet and they put their STAR Reading score on that per child each nine weeks. They put their SRI score on there per child each nine weeks. They put their reading average grade for the nine weeks on that. So they have those three pieces per each child and they do it every nine weeks and they take that information at their PLCs and talk about their individual children and they take that not only at the end of each nine weeks, but almost weekly because they are supposed to each week talk about Tier I, Tier II, Tier III, RtI, how they are addressing that. They use that sheet for the data for that meeting. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

From my observations and interviews, it appeared that Rolling Hills collected vast amounts of assessment data, used the data to track students, but did not utilize the data they collected to inform reading instruction or change instructional practices. The assessment data did not change teachers’ instruction; hence, teachers continued utilizing the same teaching practices before and after assessments were given.

**Evaluating teaching.** According to the ILA, analyzing assessment results should lead to improved teaching. Mrs. Monroe used her assessment results as one of the ways to evaluate her instruction with her students. The assessment results served as her own report card in some ways. Mrs. Monroe believed the process of breaking down each student’s results was beneficial. She believed it allowed her to see the students’ weaknesses, as well as her own instructional deficits. Mrs. Monroe shared:

If you will take it and break it down to see where weaknesses are, it helps you to see your weakness, their weakness and where you need to teach more and maybe what you need to spend less time on. I use it to gauge. I look at those scores at the
end of the time period after they are taken and kinda compare to what I am doing in the classroom. Okay, what are their grades in the classroom and if they are not somewhat similar then I feel like it is a discrepancy. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, March 20, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe would analyze the summative assessment results and compare it to the students’ grades in her classes. If there was a big discrepancy between the two, she first looked at her teaching to determine if she was being too hard or not detailed enough. Had she taught the reading skill thoroughly was a question she asked herself constantly. It was a gauge of her effectiveness as a teacher. For example, Mrs. Monroe’s reading assessments covered many skills such as main idea, cause/effect, and multiple meaning words. She used her reading assessments from the novel study to determine if her students comprehended what they were reading, exhibiting a thorough understanding of the material read.

**Standard Five: Intellectually and Socially Complex Nature of Reading and Writing**

Standard five bridges the ever-changing literacy experiences students have in their school, home, and community environments. ILA views literacy as complex and always evolving. The literacy patterns students demonstrate are reflective of the intellectual and social nature of the society at the time. The expectation for this standard is student assessment should include the use of various digital and media methods to collect information on student performance; student assessment should infuse the use of new literacies through student performance assessments. At Rolling Hills limited technology access and teachers’ proficiency using technology prevented the development of assessments of this quality and design.
**New literacies.** At the school level, Rolling Hills’ assessment practices using different technologies were limited to computer programs designated for use in the RtI framework. The only means of providing literacy instruction and assessment via technology was through various software programs at specific grade levels to assess students’ progress with tier remediation. In the RtI framework, students identified as needing remediation were provided assistance through additional computer practice. Mrs. Smith discussed two computer applications, Reading Eggs and Reading Express, which were utilized in the lower grades as supplemental resources. She described:

For reading comprehension, we have a program called Reading Eggs and Reading Express. We have it right now in Kindergarten, first and second grades. We’ve largely used it in Kindergarten and first grade for the “learn to read” part. That is what the Reading Eggs part is about. The Reading Express starts comprehension and it starts in second grade and builds up. The students are on their level and they progress as they are on there. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, April 14, 2015)

Reading Eggs includes phonics-based instruction, and literal comprehension skills are the focus in Reading Express. Only students in the tier process utilized the two computer software programs.

In the upper grades, two different computer software programs were used as part of remediation in the tier process. Mrs. Wilson described:

Lexia is a web-based program on reading skills and what it does is you get the child on the computer to take a placement test. It puts them on a grade level placement. From that point on, it builds and it deals with everything in reading. It
deals with comprehension, with phonics, with fluency, with vocabulary. It is all
built in and it goes at their pace. If they are messing up, it takes them a step back.
So it’s very friendly to the kids. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, April 15, 2015)

Students in third and fourth grades used the Lexia program during their Intervention
Central time. The only other student group who had access to Lexia was a transition class
in first grade. These students were not retained in Kindergarten, but lacked some of the
prerequisite skills needed in first grade. Mrs. Smith grouped these 12 students with the
hopes of providing more individualized instruction in a small group setting. The
transitional first grade teacher had each student assigned to the Lexia program. Moby
Max was the other computer software program available for third and fourth grades.
Mainly used for math remediation, it also had a component for reading comprehension.
Mrs. Smith stated Moby Max was given to teachers as part of their Tier II remediation
and not for whole group instruction. She said:

This is more of an intervention kind of thing for the reading component that they
have. It has a strong component on there of passages and questions or reading in
context. Like a passage or a sentence or two and what word would fit in there.
That kind of thing. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, April 14, 2015)

In addition to the computer software programs used in RtI, teachers used technology in
their classrooms for instruction. Mrs. Smith stated all teachers at Rolling Hills have a
Promethean, laptop, Elmo or Mimio, and multiple computers in the classroom. Class sets
of laptops and Chromebooks were available for teachers to check out for whole class
research or as an additional center.
In the classroom, Mrs. Monroe was equipped with an Elmo, Promethean board, a laptop, five computers, and four Chromebooks. Mrs. Monroe used the Elmo and Promethean board daily for instructional delivery. I observed Mrs. Monroe using the Elmo as a way to project readings, edit paragraphs, and display sections of chapters from their novel study. She commented:

I use my Promethean board and for a lot of writing. You can do flip charts. I was working on for research enrichment in Team Time and we did a KWL, What I know, What I want to know, What I learned. We did that and then we took what they wanted to know and as a whole determined five most important questions that we were going to research. I put that on a flip chart so I can keep putting that back up. I do that a good bit with some skills. Not as much as I would like to, but I use it primarily for things like that. Also we were doing an ant story in reading and you can pull up stuff. The Internet is full of anything, almost any subject you want. You can research. You can Google it and find something on YouTube and show that to go along with it. There’s your video if you are doing fiction and your nonfiction. You can usually find a video to go with it too. I use it that way. (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 17, 2015)

Only one of the computers was operational during my observations. The single computer was used for AR testing and for research. During homeroom time before classes changed, four students used the Moby Max program on the Chromebooks two to three times a week. I did not see technology being integrated into instruction at the level expected by this ILA assessment standard during my time in Mrs. Monroe’s classroom. I saw no evidence of students using new literacies to enhance their learning. The primary
technological tool used was the Promethean board by Mrs. Monroe as a visual support for instruction and review.

**School, home, and culture connections.** Rolling Hills interaction with the home and greater community was limited in relation to ILA expectations in standard five. Communication regarding student instruction and assessment were primarily provided through written communication. Mrs. Smith stated a few teachers involved different technologies when communicating with parents. She explained:

Newsletters have been sent at the school level. This year there has not been as much. We ask the teachers to communicate regularly with parents. The form that takes varies teacher to teacher. Some have set up a website like the Shutterfly site. Parents can log on or write their stuff. Some choose to send their little paper with a note every week. That’s what I mean. It varies. There is always that communication in one form or another that the teacher does home regularly. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, April 14, 2015)

Two teachers at Rolling Hills utilized the Internet service Shutterfly. These teachers were able to take photos of their students at various activities and post the pictures with messages for parents to view. At no cost to parents, the only requirement was to setup a username and password. In addition to Shutterfly, some teachers chose to use their cell phones as a means of communication. Parents in these teachers’ classrooms provided a cell phone number and the teacher created a group text message service as a way to communicate important dates or assignments. Like Shutterfly, only a few teachers used this as a means of communicating with parents.
Mrs. Monroe’s method of communication to parents was via a class newsletter. She would send parent communications as needed, but she didn’t provide this on a weekly basis. According to Mrs. Monroe, she sent newsletters home to parents every two to three months. ILA views the home and community a vital link to literacy development since literacy is social and rarely a cognitive act done alone. In ILA’s guidelines, instruction and assessment should be highly interactive with cultural and home environments, and are influential to student learning and motivation. Rolling Hills connection to the home and community in communicating reading instruction and assessment was sporadic with teachers.

**Standard Eight: Multiple Perspectives and Sources of Data**

The ILA reports assessments are an important source of data concerning a student’s background knowledge. Standard eight addresses the need for an assessment tool to be trustworthy and free of bias due to its role in a student’s educational development. Since perfect assessments do not exist, educators should depend on multiple sources of data in their decision-making regarding students’ educational pathways. In addition to utilizing different sources, different educators’ point of views should be consulted. These diverse viewpoints provide different perspectives in making informed decisions for the student. At Rolling Hills, students were assessed with multiple sources of data, but were limited to the perspectives of classroom teachers and school administration.

**Multiple perspectives.** Two groups of people had a significant role in analyzing assessment results – school administration and classroom teachers. Universal screener results were analyzed and disaggregated after each assessment cycle. Mrs. Wilson shared:
Teachers and administrators look at that a lot. We break that apart. We talk about it. Pretty much teachers and school administrators would be the biggest and a few of our assistants when they share reports with parents. As far as analyzing, I would say the teachers and Mrs. Smith. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, April 15, 2015)

Mrs. Monroe acknowledged her role in analyzing assessment results. She stated, “I look at them and my partner and I will look at our classes together when we get the results back” (Mrs. Monroe, personal communication, April 17, 2015). It was during PLC meetings that grade level teams met and discussed assessment results, which were kept in binders by date for the teachers’ reference. At the school administration level Mrs. Smith shared who were the key individuals in data analysis. She said, “I usually do most of it because of the different roles that I do. Then the next step is in the PLCs and in examining it by grade level” (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, April 14, 2015). Mrs. Smith shared at times other individuals were consulted, such as the district test coordinator or a social worker. However, these individuals were located at the district office and served as a reference in extreme situations. According to ILA, multiple perspectives include teachers from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. This perspective allows different interpretations of a student’s literacy development. Seeking various perspectives was not a part of Rolling Hills’ assessment process.

**Multiple sources of data.** ILA states multiple sources of data should be utilized concerning student academic decision-making, including teacher observation and different assessment instruments. At no time should a single source of information determine a student’s knowledge level or educational placement. For the school level,
Rolling Hills required multiple sources of data in relation to their universal screeners.

Mrs. Smith stated:

I have loved it because it is great to have two pieces of data to compare and see.
You know, each [STAR Reading, SRI] assesses just a bit differently. It gives you a better picture of a kid whenever you can look at the two together. Then in second grade the additional piece we use is Aimsweb Fluency, so then we get that words per minute. Again we have two measures to look at and compare. That’s every kid periodically throughout the year so that data are there. (Mrs. Smith, personal communication, March 17, 2015)

Mrs. Wilson spoke about how she and Mrs. Smith discussed together the different universal screeners and their plan of action for the school. She said:

We have those two assessments [STAR Reading and SRI] that we use together and Mrs. Smith is really good about not using one assessment to determine. We use both and if we see if one is really an outlier we will come back and retest or we’ll have TST and talk about what is going on. (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, March 16, 2015)

At the classroom level, Mrs. Monroe had summative assessments of STAR Reading, SRI, and state tests she reviewed in relation to her student performance. In addition to these universal screeners, she utilized multiple formative assessments. Her use of discussion, questioning, graphic organizers/handouts, teacher observation, and choral reading were sources of data and provided feedback on student understanding. During my observations of her classroom, she used those formative assessments to determine if more discussion, questioning or instruction was needed. The students’ verbal responses and
written work were assessments of their learning that Mrs. Monroe relied on heavily before, during and after instructional sequences.

Rolling Hills assessment practices were compared to what the International Literacy Association deemed as appropriate assessment guidelines. Three ILA standards were used in relation to Rolling Hills’ assessment system for determination of consistency or inconsistencies to the recommendations of ILA. It was found that Rolling Hills’ assessment system was not consistent to any large degree at improving teaching and learning, preparing students socially and intellectual with new and changing literacies or using multiple sources of data and perspectives to have a greater understanding of assessment results; practices that ILA views as essential to obtaining higher student achievement.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the findings of my dissertation study. Of importance are the participant profiles and the findings related to each research question. For research question one, summative and formative assessments were described as well as assessments in the RtI framework. For research question two, ways assessment data were used to track student progress and inform teacher instruction were explained. In relation to research question two are the discrepancies between administration’s expectations and how teachers used assessment, exploring this complex, complicated relationship between assessment and instruction. Additionally, influences on reading instruction beyond school assessments were discussed. For research question three, consistencies and inconsistencies were discussed in how assessment practices at Rolling Hills compared to ILA’s assessment standards, three, five, and eight. In Chapter Five, I present a discussion
of these findings, potential implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through discussion with and observation of three participants at an elementary school, as well as collection and analysis of artifacts, I hoped to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school, were enacted in a school implementing RtI. The research questions guiding this case study were:

1. What does reading comprehension assessment look like in a school implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)?

2. What is the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in a school implementing RtI?

3. In what ways are reading comprehension assessment practices in a school implementing RtI consistent or inconsistent with ILA assessment guidelines that focus on multiple dimensions of literacy, new literacies and using assessment to improve teaching and learning?

In order to establish these research questions within the context of reading instruction and reading assessment practices, I reviewed relevant literature for reading comprehension instruction and assessment that I identified as the “Complexities of Reading Instruction” and the “Complexities of Reading Assessment.” Within these sections I discussed and identified what leading researchers stated were best practices for
each. Additionally, I examined assessment practices in relation to three of ILA’s assessment standards to determine Rolling Hills’ consistencies or inconsistencies with these specific standards. I also discussed the RtI framework and its role within effective reading instruction and assessment. Lastly, I studied educators’ perceptions of elements they believed supported successful implementation of the RtI framework and four themes emerged: collaboration, professional development, understanding assessment, and school leadership.

In this last chapter, I provide a connection between previous research and this study’s findings, followed by a discussion of the potential implications from this study for reading assessment practices within an elementary school. I finish with a discussion of the limitations of this research study, including suggestions for future directions in research. This chapter is organized in the following sections: (a) Discussion, (b) Conclusion, (c) Implications for Practice, and (d) Limitations and Opportunities for Research.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this case study was to more deeply understand the assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school were utilized in a fourth grade classroom in a school implementing RtI. The data suggest that while administrators and the classroom teacher valued reading assessments, particularly summative assessments, there were differences in the expectations administrators held regarding assessment practices and the actuality of those practices enacted by the classroom teacher. Here I discuss those differences in terms of the three ILA standards that were the focus of this study and the influence of RtI on reading assessments.
ILA Standards

When comparing Rolling Hills’ reading comprehension and assessment practices to what ILA had voiced as effective standards of assessment, this elementary school did not completely meet the expectations for any of the three standards discussed. Rolling Hills assessment practices were inconsistent with what ILA viewed as effective assessment practices for literacy instruction.

Tracking student progress. While the case could be stated for standard three that Rolling Hills was tracking students to improve teaching and learning, the specific components of the standard (e.g., diagnosing reading and writing difficulties, evaluating teaching, and reporting to others) were inadequately covered by the assessment practices at Rolling Hills. During my discussions with Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wilson, they never spoke of the assessments at Rolling Hills as a form of grading teacher performance, but rather as an informational resource to identify students who were not at appropriate grade level proficiencies. Mrs. Monroe, the fourth grade teacher, used assessment data as a way to inform her of each student’s reading growth and progress, as well as for her own teaching effectiveness. Yet, the school administration never used assessment data to evaluate teachers’ performance; it was simply a way to track student progress.

According to Cooper (1997), if a school or teacher wants an accurate determination of student learning and teacher effectiveness, assessments should be given and given frequently. Rolling Hills is an example of this tenet in practice to the extent that this elementary school gave several assessments throughout the entire year, including the use of a universal screener, the primary tool administrators identified for use as part of the school’s assessment system. Nonetheless, while Rolling Hills collected assessment
data from several sources, they failed to use the data collected to inform program change or strengthen instructional practice. For example, the data wall created by the school administrator provided the means for the school administration and the classroom teachers to keep track of students’ reading performance, determine intervention eligibility for Tier II, Tier III, or special education testing, as well as to evaluate students’ behavioral and health needs. Their focus centered on identifying the students struggling in their reading abilities; yet, the discussion never went to the next level to identify specific ways to improve teaching and learning to better meet the needs of these students. Thus, standard three’s ultimate goal of improved teaching and learning was not actually met, since the knowledge of students’ strengths and weaknesses based on data didn’t influence instructional changes for teachers and impact instructional delivery in the classroom.

At Rolling Hills the administration did not use assessment data to determine or to evaluate instruction. Mrs. Smith expected teachers to base their design for reading instruction on the National Reading Panel’s (NRP) five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension), in alignment with NRP recommendations and findings from research (e.g., Hughes and Dexter, 2011). In opposition, other literacy researchers and professionals regard this thinking as narrow and outdated in relation to what teachers should use as their main instruction, particularly in this era of national standards. The school administrator did expect teachers to instruct students on an agreed 10 essential skills per grade level taken from the CCSS, in addition to the five components of reading suggested by the NRP.
However, her expectations for instruction did not embrace new concepts or the complete CCSS, as well as other practices literacy experts viewed as worthy to utilize.

As a way to assess the different areas of reading, Mrs. Smith required all grade levels to create common assessments to assess specific groups of standards taught during a nine-week period. These common assessments were to be written and agreed upon by the teachers in each grade level as an indicator of standard mastery and direction for teacher instruction. Stiggins and Dufour (2009) describe common assessments as a form of formative assessment, positing that adjustments in instruction can be made based on common assessments before summative assessments such as state-mandated tests are given.

Mrs. Monroe was aware of her students’ performance on each of the universal screeners and discussed these results with her teammate as well as with her grade level team. In alignment with findings from Black, Wilson, and Yao (2011), Rolling Hills’ teachers determined the effectiveness of their teaching based on summative results. Mrs. Monroe stated she compared these universal screeners to her students’ grades to monitor if she was teaching at a rigorous and appropriate level, tracking her own students in addition to the school administration’s tracking with the data wall. This was a redundant and time-consuming process for not only Mrs. Monroe, but also other grade level teachers. Not only were these teachers being required to track students through the school administration’s data wall, the teachers themselves also tracked students by documenting every student’s performance on a table spreadsheet. The teachers were simply recording assessment data for each student again.
In addition to the summative assessments given throughout the school year at Rolling Hills, formative assessments were used in the classroom daily. This study confirms previous research (Alexander, 2008; Guskey, 2003; Stiggins & Dufour, 2009) concerning the importance and value of teachers using various formative assessments in the classroom. Mrs. Monroe never spoke of the formative assessments she used or the impact they had on improving teaching and learning. Yet, she utilized some type of formative assessment during every observation I made in her classroom. Black and Wiliam (2009) posit formative assessments are most effective when conducted during learning and while learning rather than at the end of learning. Mrs. Monroe followed this line of theory; however, the unfortunate revelation was the administration did not. The administration concentrated solely on summative assessments with no expectation for teachers to use formative assessments in their classroom to inform them of instructional strengths and weaknesses. If Mrs. Monroe had not utilized her four main formative assessments, she would have been unaware of any of her students’ reading abilities on a daily basis because summative assessments were only given at specific times of the year (i.e. end of each nine week period, end of school year).

It is through various formative assessments that a classroom teacher truly knows students’ growth throughout the school year and their reading strengths and weaknesses. Yet, Mrs. Monroe judged her instructional delivery by results from summative assessment data, doubting the information she gleaned from formative assessment results when they did not align with summative data for her students. If scores from universal screeners or state-mandated assessment taken by her students were low, Mrs. Monroe assumed her instructional delivery was at fault or lacking the depth and rigor needed
regardless of what the formative data she collected during instruction indicated. No other factors were considered to explain the discrepancy in summative and formative data results when they didn’t align, and it didn’t occur to Mrs. Monroe to question the validity of the summative data she received and to believe instead the daily and weekly formative assessment results. She instead questioned her own abilities for both her instruction and her ability to create and administer formative assessments successfully.

In addition, at the school level Rolling Hills never considered the value of formative assessments and the effects they might have on reading comprehension instruction. The school administration only valued summative assessments in their decision-making for the school as a whole and expected the teachers to utilize that data only to make decisions regarding instruction. In grade level or school-wide meetings guided by administrators and the lead teacher, formative data were never discussed and teachers were not encouraged in any way to use any means beyond analysis of the summative data they received to make decisions about instruction or needed remediation. Classroom teachers at Rolling Hills could learn specific information regarding their students’ reading abilities if school administration encouraged teachers to use both formative and summative assessments and provided teachers with professional development to learn best practices associated with the use of multiple types of assessments to make decisions for the classroom.

**Technology effects on assessments.** Reading comprehension instruction and assessment practices at Rolling Hills were not aligned to current technology and literacy instruction methodology. Outside of school, students are exposed to and are capable of doing advanced applications in their digital world. At Rolling Hills, the teachers were not
equipped with the resources or the knowledge to effectively implement ILA’s standard five due to the lack of professional development related to new literacies and performance-based assessments. Rolling Hills’ students were being assessed with PARCC’s performance assessments, but neither students nor teachers were utilizing performance assessments of any type (i.e. portfolios, research projects) at the school or classroom level during the time I spent in the school. This lack of consistency with this standard is most alarming as the digital world in which we live is ever changing at incredible rates. Students at Rolling Hills were not being instructed nor assessed with the same expectations inherent in CCSS, supporting students’ readiness for college and careers.

At the school level, assessments or instruction delivered by utilizing broader media mediums was at a minimum. ILA standard five recommends that assessments in today’s schools must recognize and mirror the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles school, home and society have in literacy development. Snow et al. (2005) stressed the importance of teachers having an in-depth understanding of the intricacies and complexities of literacy. In addition to this in-depth understanding, teachers need to be knowledgeable of the broader media culture. However, Mrs. Smith stated that only teachers she deemed as needing professional development in the area of reading attended any type of additional workshops or seminars. At Rolling Hills little professional development was provided to help teachers increase their use of technological tools and new media literacies for either instruction or assessment. Instead, Rolling Hills only utilized technology to aid with student
remediation or for annual state mandated standardized testing. Rolling Hills was not equipped to provide all students with some type of technological device, but every classroom had technology available. While the type of assessments students took were changing, it appeared that Rolling Hills was making insufficient preparations in the form of instruction, professional development, or technology to enhance student learning in this new digital age of literacy. No professional development had been provided for the teachers at Rolling Hills to utilize various media for instruction or assessment.

Like the school level for ILA’s standard five, Mrs. Monroe’s use of technology for assessment and instruction was minimal. The only type of assessment given via the computer in Mrs. Monroe’s classroom involved students taking an AR test once they finished reading their library book. At times students were able to use the computer for research purposes. The extent of Mrs. Monroe’s use of technology was strictly teacher-oriented and for displaying information. It is my belief while she had various technological devices at her disposal; she lacked sufficient training in how to utilize them effectively for instruction. Therefore, no device was used at the upmost potential. It is likely Mrs. Monroe’s students were exposed to a broader media culture outside of Rolling Hills than within their classroom.

**Grading practices.** ILA recommends a descriptive style of reporting a student’s abilities from assessments, which is in sharp contrast to a letter or number style system. Within ILA’s standard five is the recommendation that letter or number grading as a form of assessing reading would be unacceptable, given the complexity of the reading tasks involved. Rolling Hills’ students were graded based on the evaluative lettering system of
A, B, C, D or F. Grades for reading were based upon tests, class assignments, and the AR program.

There was much confusion concerning the grading policies of the AR program, and division between the lower and upper grades in holding the students accountable for reading fiction and nonfiction books. Lower grade teachers wanted to use the AR program more for motivation of reading, and upper grade teachers wanted to use it as a form of accountability for students’ reading requirements. Even in the area of performance assessments, Rolling Hills had a narrow view for both its instruction and assessment. The school administration and Mrs. Monroe discussed at a minimum level the use of performance assessments, such as portfolios and research projects. While Mrs. Monroe did research projects, it was only for students in the enrichment group in Response to Intervention (RtI). Portfolios were not kept for any student. Rolling Hills limited their performance assessments to the form of state-mandated PARCC assessments given during the second semester of the school year, which are not reflective of true performance assessments.

**Lack of various stakeholders’ voices.** As the ILA standards assert, there is no perfect assessment system. However, assessment systems limit bias and give voice to diverse stakeholders when they make use of multiple sources of data from multiple perspectives. Rolling Hills did not fully meet the requirements of assessment standard eight according to ILA’s guidelines. Rolling Hills also failed to be consistent with standard eight concerning the use of multiple sources of data and multiple perspectives.

Rolling Hills had a very narrow spectrum of assessments and input from stakeholders. While Mrs. Monroe conducted formative assessments in the classroom,
only summative assessments were sanctioned and utilized for any type of planning and decision-making at the school and classroom level. As well, while Rolling Hills had other personnel (e.g., counselor, speech pathologists, special education teachers) who could provide beneficial insight when discussing assessment results and possible student interventions, only three individuals were involved in this school’s process – the school administrator, the lead teacher, and the classroom teacher. The fact additional input was not solicited is also alarming when it was clear that other qualified stakeholders’ insights and perspectives (e.g., counselor, librarian, special education teachers) were present and would have proven beneficial.

The ILA advises different perspectives to provide various backgrounds and cultures, enabling assessments to be fair and impartial. Research findings also indicate the importance of including all stakeholders as a part of the student study team. For example, Robins and Antrim (2012) found librarians were valuable resources and were actively involved in decision making for student progress by providing instructional support and suggestions for resources. Swanson et al. (2012) stated that special education teachers provided a unique perspective due to their knowledge in differentiated instruction. Unfortunately, Rolling Hills’ limitation to only involve the school administration and the classroom teacher prevented other school personnel voices being considered, such as the counselor, librarian, speech pathologists, and special education teachers. Mrs. Monroe did not seek multiple perspectives about assessment data independently either; instead, she consulted only her grade level or one teammate. Therefore, neither the school nor the classroom were consistent with ILA’s
recommendation of using diverse perspectives to have a greater depth of understanding of the data that various stakeholders can afford.

**The Influence of RtI on Reading Assessments**

The RtI framework and all of its requirements was an integral part of Rolling Hills’ day-to-day instructional and assessment system. The school administration ensured all students were assessed using a universal screener. Based on these results, students received remediation either through a classroom teacher or an interventionist. Teachers met weekly to discuss intervention plans and strategize instructional strategies based on individual student needs. Students were progress monitored in Tier II and Tier III for progress determination. The school administrator was a key factor in RtI implementation at Rolling Hills by taking a prominent leadership role in its implementation. Through Mrs. Smith’s guidance, everyone involved in the RtI framework was focused on instructing students in the tier process with the goal of having each student reading on grade level, or providing for specialized instruction for the student outside the regular classroom.

**RtI implementation and tracking students.** It was through the RtI framework that Rolling Hills monitored students who were struggling in the area of reading. Rolling Hills weighed heavily on summative assessment results gleaned from RtI required universal screeners, to the exclusion of other types of assessments such as teacher’s formative assessments. The use of these universal screeners and data from state mandated standardized testing influenced Rolling Hills’ decision-making, and Harlen (2012) warns that such reliance on certain types of summative assessments could adversely affect teachers’ instruction and students’ range of knowledge and performance.
Classroom teachers at Rolling Hills were responsible for Tier II interventions for any student not performing at grade level based upon universal screener results. Each team in the grade level had some type of role in the RtI framework. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) view Tier II instruction and progress monitoring as critical parts of the RtI process and prefer weekly monitoring of students at that level. While Mrs. Monroe did not directly instruct students in need of intervention, she did have one or two students in the tier process. It was during intervention time that remediation was given to improve reading comprehension skills and enhance students’ reading fluency. The teachers in the fourth grade failed to collaborate together concerning the students’ specific needs and how to address those needs at the Tier II level. While each teacher had a specific role within the Intervention Central timeframe, they were each left to their own devices concerning how to assist each student. Teachers in this grade level did not plan instruction together for any subject, nor for the instruction during Intervention Central. It appeared this grade level was simply going through the motions of implementing RtI at the Tier II level.

**RtI implementation and staff roles.** Mrs. Monroe’s role in RtI was limited to instructing the students assigned to the enrichment group at her grade level. The fourth grade teachers determined who on their team would serve as interventionists, proficient teachers, and enrichment teachers. I clearly understood why Mrs. Monroe was chosen as the enrichment teacher due to her teaching experience with gifted education students. It was during this Intervention Central time that I witnessed students in the enrichment group utilizing technology in their research studies. Students were able to use a web browser to locate information, which is an example of what ILA’s suggests in standard
five for literacy development in this digital age. Unfortunately, this is the only time I witnessed technology integration and the infusion of new literacies during instruction.

Interventionists at the school level were responsible for providing Tier III interventions for students who consistently did not improve or make growth according to universal screener cut scores. While Mrs. Wilson was in charge of working with teachers who had students in Tier III, Mrs. Smith was an active participant by providing leadership and focus for meetings and discussion of students’ growth. Allington (2009) stated that effective reading intervention instruction consists of several elements that when implemented together can provide more than a year’s reading growth for a student. Several of the eight factors in Allington’s (2009) research, such as a student intervention plan, small group or one-on-one tutoring, and matching reader and text level, were part of Rolling Hills’ RtI framework. Each student had an individualized intervention plan that was updated and modified after each assessment session. Mrs. Wilson used a software program to track students’ interventions and progress. She worked with the classroom teachers to provide appropriate interventions based on the student’s reading capabilities and level. Mrs. Wilson discussed with the classroom teachers the specific reading problems students were experiencing in order to know how to address the issue.

The major concern I observed for students in Tier III at Rolling Hills was they received instruction either one-on-one or in a small group of five students or less by paraprofessionals. Allington (2009) found that interventions provided by paraprofessionals afforded very little to no gains in reading growth for struggling students. Yet at Rolling Hills, teacher assistants provided the majority of intervention instruction. While Mrs. Wilson did provide some intervention instruction, classroom
assistants that had been pulled from first grade classrooms conducted the majority of remedial instruction. These classroom assistants would follow Mrs. Wilson’s instructions regarding what type of instruction should be delivered to each student. These assistants were also responsible for progress monitoring every student in Tier III and Mrs. Wilson was responsible for sharing the results with the classroom teachers. Again the data collected from the students’ progress monitoring assessments were merely shared and not discussed in-depth to explore next steps or instructional strategies that would be benefit students and possibly support growth.

**RtI implementation’s influence on reading instruction and assessment.** In order to gain an understanding of the connections between the RtI framework and reading instruction and assessment, it was important to understand the perceptions of the people who were involved in the implementation of assessment within the framework. In a synthesis of research studies examining the perception of educators concerning RtI, several stakeholders’ perspectives have been investigated with the majority consisting of general and special education teachers (Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011; Sanger et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2012). Many who write about the RtI framework stress the importance of collaboration, professional development, understanding of assessment, and school leadership. It is within these four themes I will discuss connections with RtI research, and the possible influence of RtI implementation on reading assessment choices at Rolling Hills Elementary School.

**Collaboration.** In a study by Bean and Lillenstein (2012) the role of collaboration was a vital piece in the RtI implementation. One of their findings concerned school personnel working toward one common goal; increased student achievement. The
researchers described a change in the school atmosphere to one of “our kids” rather than “my kids.” At Rolling Hills, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wilson used those exact words. They wanted classroom teachers to consider all students as their own. Mrs. Smith believed a grade level could not move forward unless all grade levels teachers were working toward that common goal. While Mrs. Smith described it as “a journey” or work in progress at Rolling Hills, she was still leading classroom teachers to her ultimate goal; teachers working cooperatively for instructional and assessment purposes. According to Mrs. Wilson, the use of the data wall that Mrs. Smith created opened the discussion between teachers about the “my kids” versus “your kids” mentality.

However, in my time with Mrs. Monroe I saw a disconnection within the fourth grade team. One teacher refused to cooperate with the group and followed her own agenda and plan. According to Mrs. Monroe, her grade level concentrated on how students were performing. While the expectation was they would plan lessons together, the exact details varied from teacher to teacher. Therefore, while they analyzed the assessment results from the different assessments given, the impact on the entire grade to create an atmosphere of working together concerning the assessments results regarding instruction failed to materialize.

**Professional development.** One of the top barriers in effectively implementing RtI is providing professional development for teachers and school personnel. Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) found when little to no professional development was provided regarding the different components of RtI and reading intervention, teachers expressed dissatisfaction. Dulaney (2012) explained that teachers need to have on-going professional development with training concentrated on effective instructional strategies.
and intervention if the majority of students are going to be successful with the general education curriculum. The only area of consistent professional development conducted at Rolling Hills concerned RtI. Mrs. Smith provided professional development each year regarding the RtI framework. Mrs. Monroe stated that at the beginning of the year administration provided information and a binder for every teacher to serve as a resource guide. Yet, that wasn’t Mrs. Smith’s only professional development workshop; she regularly met with grade level teams to provide additional information she received throughout the school year regarding RtI. During my observation, the majority of these sessions focused on the data wall and visually where students were at academically at the specific time. A small amount of time was allotted for discussion of how to move students forward to reach proficiency and advanced levels.

While it was not voiced as a concern, I would think it would be critical not only to provide professional development concerning the RtI framework, but also to provide staff with professional development on instructionally sound interventions and literacy instruction. This type of professional development was not offered at Rolling Hills.

**Understanding assessment.** If students are going to progress in their reading achievement, identifying those students who are academically deficient and in need of intervention is essential for the success (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Rolling Hills used assessment data from its universal screeners as the means to provide teachers with information on student performance. It was during grade level PLC meetings that teachers had the opportunity to communicate their students’ needs and deficiencies. Greenfield et al. (2010) found teachers better informed about the progress and ability level of their students through RtI. This was still a work in progress at Rolling Hills.
While classroom teachers as a whole were monitoring students’ reading progress on some aspects of literacy both closely and strategically, some Rolling Hills’ teachers did not have a thorough understanding of assessment results and reports. For these reasons, Mrs. Smith and the teachers made the decision to keep certain universal screeners rather than abandon them when the district or state no longer required their use. Teachers were at ease with those screeners and had a complete understanding of the results. Mrs. Smith stated the district office had required several different universal screeners over the years, and the need for stability was important to her. For the past three years a different universal screener had been administered, so when the decision was made to keep SRI and Aimsweb Fluency, teachers were not required to learn how to interpret a new assessment tool while abandoning what they’d previously relied on. Mrs. Smith believed the confidence teachers had in certain screeners made it easier for them to adjust to changes from the district or state level. However, this meant that the teachers spent a great deal of time assessing a narrow band of literacy practices rather than all components of reading.

**School leadership.** The perceptions of teachers and other school personnel is that school leadership is a major factor in the implementation of RtI (Carey, 2012; Dulaney, 2012; Shepard & Salembier, 2011). At Rolling Hills Mrs. Smith guided the practices of assessment and instruction. As the “data guru” she analyzed the results of assessments and wanted the classroom teachers to embrace the importance of understanding data and using it to inform decision-making. That was why the data wall was so important to Mrs. Smith. It provided the focus on student achievement and progress she was attempting to instill with staff. Mellard et al. (2012) described that effective school administrators in
RtI implementation have an active role in the process and clearly convey their expectations to all stakeholders. Mrs. Smith wanted her classroom teachers to be knowledgeable of all students’ performance on any summative assessment, as well as having a knowledge of their students’ physical and emotional well-being. The card for the data wall contained all student information as teachers strategized together in analyzing students’ strengths and weaknesses and at times defining ways to meet students’ needs. I understand why Mrs. Smith had the reputation of “data guru” since her focus with the teachers at Rolling Hills consisted of analyzing their different summative data results.

Conclusion

This case study is based on the social constructivist theoretical framework. Guba and Lincoln (in Patton, 2002) stated that the social constructivist can only understand a phenomena within the context in which they are studied, and that knowledge is a social and cultural experience (Vygotsky, 1978). Further, Vygotsky (1978) informed us that we obtain our own knowledge based on our experiences. I submit, it was my interaction with a school administrator, lead teacher, and fourth grade teacher that enabled me to draw several conclusions about the relationship between reading comprehension instruction and assessment in an elementary school, and how implementation of RtI may have influenced their thinking.

First, while research has been conducted on the perspectives of school personnel in relation to RtI implementation (Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011; Sanger et al., 2012; Sansosti, et al., 2011; Swanson et al., 2012), a case study of this nature has not been completed about a school’s reading instruction and assessment practices while implementing RtI,
particularly in the upper grades at an elementary school. This study expressed that while the school administration, lead teacher, and classroom teacher all shared some of the same procedural knowledge and understanding, there were variances between administrative expectations and the actual implementation of reading instruction and assessment in the fourth grade classroom. While an administrator may have certain expectations and guidelines for teachers to follow, no administrator can be in a teacher’s classroom every minute of the school day. Therefore, the administrator never fully knows if the teacher is implementing said expectations.

Second, this study supports Wiliam’s (2011) theory that an integration of instruction with assessment has the capability to yield greater student engagement and increased student learning. Wiliam (2011) further explains that assessment is the single greatest factor in improving instruction. At Rolling Hills the school administration and teachers were using assessment data to make instructional decisions. While the school and classroom levels may have differed in their expectations and approaches, the goal was the same; increased student achievement. At the school level, summative assessment results were used specifically for the RtI framework and grouping students for instruction. The assessment results determined the makeup of teachers’ homeroom rolls and which students were placed in the tier process, and at which stage. At the classroom level, assessment data were derived from two assessment sources; summative and formative. The classroom teacher used her summative assessment data to also group children for instruction and determination of Tier II placement. In addition, her formative assessment data were the driving force behind her daily classroom instruction, re-teaching, monitoring of student progression and student mastery of standards.
Second, the requirements with RtI assessments influenced the assessment practices at Rolling Hills. This elementary school was missing the true intentions of the RtI initiative and policy. When the RtI legislation was enacted, the focus was to not allow students to struggle in the area of reading year after year, but provide procedural safeguards for students early in their academic life to prevent academic failure. The educators at Rolling Hills became lost in the assessment processes of RtI that they never fully reached the goal of the initiative. Their concentration involved the results of the universal screeners and progress monitoring with intervention instruction being left at the wayside. While the implementation of RtI made the school administrators and teachers more cognizant of the students who were struggling academically, the intention of providing academic assistance and assisting those identified students in reaching proficient and advanced in reading never reached fruition.

Third, many factors influenced Rolling Hills’ reading instructional practices which in turn affected their reading assessment practices. (see Figure 3).
In addition to the federal initiative of RtI, school administrators and teachers had other influences impacting their instructional decisions for reading instruction, and in turn affecting Rolling Hills’ assessment practices. School administrators and teachers had to address expectations not only at the federal level, but also at state and district levels as well. Both the school administration and classroom teachers were required to teach specific standards (i.e. CCSS) and at specific times (i.e. pacing guides). Teachers also found solace in reading programs that were structured in nature and provided day-to-day lesson formats. Standardized testing and summative assessments affected Rolling Hills’ assessment practices to the point that it was these results that directed school
administration and teachers decision-making. All of the factors aforementioned left their mark on Rolling Hills.

**Implications for Practice**

Since limited information about an elementary school’s reading comprehension instruction and assessment practices while implementing RtI is available, future research is needed. Research involving teachers and their use of formative assessments while implementing RtI would prove to be beneficial to educational researchers, school and district administration, and to classroom teachers. Black and Wiliam (2009) proposed that in order to effectively implement formative assessments, the student-teacher role must transform to the use of assessment while learning and for learning, rather than at the end of learning. This line of research could impact instructional practices not only in the areas of reading instruction, but mathematics, science and social studies. School leaders and classroom teachers’ concentration would focus on the creation and use of strong formative assessments on a daily in the classroom, rather than the sporadic summative assessments administered during the school year. Formative assessments used during instruction and learning would provide school administration and classroom teachers a broader spectrum of assessment data to analyze and use when making decisions.

The lack of knowledge regarding new literacies and its instruction and assessment was alarming at Rolling Hills. According to the ILA, assessment must reflect literacy in its complexity and evolving nature. At Rolling Hills the school administration was not preparing its teachers or students for the competencies involving web browsers, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds, and so forth. Failure to provide this type of instruction and assessment is detrimental to students and limits students’ future opportunities. Future
studies on schools at any level that are effectively implementing these practices is needed and warranted in order for other classroom teachers to be knowledgeable in new literacies instruction that works.

Rolling Hills limited the types of multiple data sources it used in instructional and assessment decision-making. Hamilton et al. (2009) in their What Works Clearinghouse publication, “Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making,” recommends teachers and schools make data a part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement through the use of multiple data sources from a wide range of assessment tools. They posit teachers should use these multiple assessments as a way to develop hypotheses concerning strategies to improve student learning. Teachers’ triangulation of the data sources would enable them to make hypotheses about their instructional and curricular for student learning improvement.

A moral to this story on reading assessment and instruction is the importance of spending time and energy engaged in things that will best support students’ continued growth and ultimately their success in meeting curricular standards and objectives. School staff expended a vast amount of energy to collect and analyze summative assessment data that unfortunately were not used to better understand how to meet the needs of struggling students at Rolling Hills Elementary School. An overabundance of time and effort was used to analyze and track data from universal screeners, but school staff didn’t contemplate how this information might be used to better understand how or why students were struggling. The focus was solely on identifying students who were experiencing issues with reading, but summative assessments used didn’t provide the detailed information teachers needed to know how to combat students’ learning
difficulties. Teachers weren’t given enough information from data being tracked to appropriately make adjustments to instruction; they primarily were given information to group students by reading level. To provide another layer of information, teachers created summative common assessments and they used formative assessments on a daily basis during instruction. It was information gleaned from these assessments that teachers used to guide instruction, if they used assessment data to inform their instruction at all.

**Limitations and Opportunities for Future Study**

This case study was limited to three participants at Rolling Hills for a period of five weeks. While much information was gleaned from these participants through interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts, more could be learned over a longer period of time with a larger participant group. This study was also conducted during the last nine weeks of the school year when state-mandated assessments were being administered. Thus, teacher instruction could be indicative of those assessment constraints. Future research should be conducted throughout an entire school year for a more in-depth data analysis over time. Another limitation was the three participants were from a rural county school system in the Southeastern United States representing one elementary school. These results may not be reflective of other elementary schools’ reading instruction and assessment practices. Future researchers should consider sampling beyond one school district, which may allow for a more representative sample. Comparison studies would be beneficial for added validity, including rural, urban and suburban contexts. Future research of this nature is essential and should be continued because the implementation gap between what we think we are doing and what we are doing is important to understand.
Final Thoughts

As the researcher, there were certain aspects of this case study I needed and wanted to become a part of my subconscious. As an educator, I was a school administrator for 19 wonderful years and during those years I saw great teaching, good teaching and even bad teaching. During this study, it was extremely difficult to walk into an elementary school and not see its strengths and weaknesses; to keep my mind open and to remain objective. For example, while I sat observing Mrs. Monroe in her classroom I caught myself acting like her principal and sitting in her classroom conducting an evaluation. I counted how many students were off-task and their level of engagement. I evaluated how she conducted her lessons as far as providing an introduction, lesson content, and conclusion. I observed her classroom management skills. Another example of this struggle was when I spoke with Mrs. Smith, which at times I found even more difficult to remain objective. I saw myself in her. I too was a data person, but I realized that analyzing the data were only a small piece of the jigsaw puzzle for having an exemplary reading instruction program. It was difficult for me not to tell her do this and don’t do that, sharing my expertise from one administrator to another.

Then I realized critiquing Ms. Monroe and Mrs. Smith in this manner was not my job, nor was it my task at hand. I was a qualitative researcher, an observer, and an outsider who felt like I was on the inside. I was not an evaluator sent to judge Rolling Hills, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Wilson, nor Mrs. Monroe. Years of administrative habits are hard to control, much less subdue, but through my reflective journal I was able to write about these thoughts and then close off that part of myself as much as possible. I endeavored to give voice to my participants by accurately and thoroughly sharing their perspective by
valuing their words. My goal through this research study was to hopefully gain insight into reading instruction and assessment to help fellow administrators and teachers as they lead the youth of today into a future that is full of possibilities and endless literacy experiences. There is no greater reward as an educator than to see a student read and comprehend proficiently. If this study in some small way aids in that cause for one student, then it has been worth conducting.
REFERENCES


Marston, D. (2003, December). *Comments on three papers addressing the question: How many tiers are needed within RtI to achieve acceptable prevention outcomes and to achieve acceptable patterns of LD identification?* Paper presented at the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium, Kansas City, MO.


APPENDIX A

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Sandy Davidson <sh11@msstate.edu>

Study 15-081: A Case Study of an Elementary School's Reading Assessment Practices While Implementing Response to Intervention

nmorse@orc.msstate.edu <nmorse@orc.msstate.edu> Fri, Mar 13, 2015 at 2:52 PM
To: sh11@msstate.edu
Cc: nmorse@orc.msstate.edu, mka143@msstate.edu

Protocol Title: A Case Study of an Elementary School's Reading Assessment Practices While Implementing Response to Intervention

Protocol Number: 15-081

Principal Investigator: Ms. Sandy Davidson

Date of Determination: 3/13/2015

Qualifying Exempt Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Attachments: Stamped informed consent in separate email

Dear Ms. Davidson:

The Human Research Protection Program has determined the above referenced project exempt from IRB review.

Please note the following:

- Retain a copy of this correspondence for your records.

- An approval stamp is required on all informed consents. You must use the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

- Only the MSU staff and students named on the application are approved as MSU investigators and/or key personnel for this study.

- The approved study will expire on 3/31/2016, which was the completion date indicated on your application. If additional time is needed, submit a continuation request. (SOP 01-07 Continuing Review of Approved Applications)

- Any modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the HRPP prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project.

- Per university requirement, all research-related records (e.g. application materials, letters of support, signed consent forms, etc.) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least 3 years after the research has ended.
• It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under the Mississippi State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #FWA00000203. All forms and procedures can be found on the HRPP website: www orc msstate edu.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at nmorse@orc msstate edu or call 662-323-5220.

Finally, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on the HRPP approval process. Please take a few minutes to complete our survey at https://www surveymonkey com s/MMX3PP.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse, CIP
IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Dr. Kathleen Alley (Advisor)
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS
Title of Research Study: A Case Study of an Elementary School's Reading Assessment Practices While Implementing Response to Intervention (RtI)

Study Site: West Lauderdale Elementary School

Researchers: Sandy Davidson, Mississippi State University

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to more deeply understand how assessment practices, specifically for reading comprehension at an elementary school, are influenced and determined while implementing RtI.

Procedures

If you participate in this study, you will be involved in semi-structured interviews about reading assessment practices at your school. Each participants’ conversations will be digitally recorded for the purpose of further analysis. Observations will be conducted in the classroom or during meetings. Observational notes will be taken of participants during these activities. Any identifying personal or individual school or district information will not be used in the reporting process. Any identifying personal or individual school or district information will be destroyed after the study is complete. Participants will be involved in the research study for a five week period of time – March 16-April 17, 2015.

Risks or Discomforts

The researcher does not anticipate any risks or discomforts for the participants.

Benefits

The benefits to the participants from the research may be gaining knowledge about reading assessment practices.

Incentive to participate

The participants will receive no monetary payment for being part of the research study.

Confidentiality

All records and data will be maintained on a password-protected computer. Participants' names will be removed.

Please note that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law. Research information may be shared with the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).
Questions
If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Sandy Davidson at 601-527-5987 or Dr. Kathleen Alley at 662-325-2587.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, express concerns or complaints, request information, or offer input, please feel free to contact the MSU Research Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-3994, by e-mail at info@research.msstate.edu, or on the web at http://orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects/participant/.

Voluntary Participation
Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date ___________

Investigator Signature __________________________ Date ___________
APPENDIX C

SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION LETTER
March 2, 2015

[Redacted State University
IRB Committee
P.O. Box 6223]

To Whom It May Concern:

Sandy Davidson and her dissertation committee have my permission to conduct a research project at [Redacted School]. The purpose of this project is to gather information from teachers and their administrator regarding their reading assessment practices within the framework of RTI, specifically for reading comprehension, and the impact of these practices on students’ reading achievement.

Please let me know if I can be further assistance.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Superintendent
Schools]
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Research Topics and Sample Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Getting to know each participant

Sample Questions:

- Tell me about yourself – life experiences, family, children
- Tell me about your education as a child
- Tell me about your college experience and why you became an educator
- What has been your work experience (other jobs besides education)?
- What have been your educational experiences (i.e. as a teacher, administrator)?

Design of School’s Reading Assessments

Sample Questions:

- How does the school determine what to assess?
- How often are reading assessments given?
- Is there a timeframe for reading instruction before assessing?
- What reading skills are assessed?
- What are the test formats? (paper/pencil, computer, both)
- Who administers these assessments?
- Are they aligned with each grade?
- Are they aligned to state standards?
- How are results analyzed?
- Are reading assessments part of a student’s Reading/L. Arts grade?
- What type of professional development is given for faculty in the area of reading assessments? (how to design a test, how to analyze results)

RtI Assessments in Reading

Sample Questions:

- What universal screener is given? How often is it given?
- Is tier determination based on the universal screener?
- What criteria are used to determine who is in each tier of RtI?
- How/Do teachers in each grade progress monitor students in each tier?
- Who conducts the universal screener and progress monitoring if done?
- How often are student assessments given in the framework of RtI?
- Are assessment results analyzed and if so how? By whom?
- What are teachers’ next steps after reading assessments are given?
- What type of professional development is given for faculty concerning RtI assessments in reading?
Design of Reading Comprehension Assessments

Sample Questions:

- How are reading comprehension skills assessed? (all skills at one time or each individually)
- How often are reading comprehension skills assessed?
- What is done for students showing nonmastery of reading comprehension skills?
- What are the criteria for student proficiency in reading comprehension?
- Are reading comprehension assessments aligned from grade to grade?
- Are students’ grades determined by their performance on reading assessments? If so, what percentage of a student’s reading grade is based on reading comprehension?
- How does this school assess reading comprehension within the RtI framework?

Impact of Assessment on Teacher Instruction and Student Learning

Sample Questions:

- How do teachers change their instructional strategies/methods based on assessment results?
- In what ways are teachers held accountability for their students’ assessment results?
- What academic strategies are implemented for students demonstrating below level performance?
- Do teachers differentiate their instruction based on assessment results and if so, how?

Social and Intellectual Aspects of Reading Assessment

Sample Questions:

- What types of media/technology are used for reading instruction?
- How do you assess instruction that integrates media/technology incorporating new literacies?
- Do you use any media/technology when assessing reading comprehension? If so, what is used?
- What types of performance assessments are given in relation to reading and reading comprehension?
- What types of new literacy assessments are used in the context of RtI assessments?

Multiple Data Sources for Assessment
Sample Questions:

- Who school personnel are involved in RtI reading assessment meetings and reading assessment meetings?
- How are parents informed of assessment results?
APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
Focus Questions:

- How reading assessments are administered
- How reading comprehension assessments are administered
- Time of day assessments are given
- How students are grouped during assessments
- Are students accommodated (written, oral, location, environment, length, individual/group)
- How universal screener is given
- How progress monitoring is completed
- How teacher provides reading comprehension instruction
- How teacher provides reading intervention
- Are assessments given during reading intervention time
- Attendance of personnel in meetings
- Discussion during meetings
- Teachers use of different media and technology, for both instruction and assessment
APPENDIX F

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Formative Assessment</th>
<th>How many times observed during reading instruction block</th>
<th>Teacher Behaviors/Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short quizzes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology (ex. clickers, use of computer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations (ex. PowerPoint, book reports, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Think Pair Share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Group Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reflection/Self-Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

ARTIFACTS
1. Describe the character ‘Nick’ using information from the text.

2. Describe ‘Mrs. Granger’ using the text to support your description.

3. Compare and contrast Mrs. Granger to Nick’s third and fourth grade teachers.
   Compare

   Contrast

4. Explain the term “thought grenade” as used on page 15 in the third paragraph.

5. On page 21, in the last two paragraphs, Nick “had an idea and it brought a grin to his face”. Explain his idea and tell if his idea worked (Chapter 5).

6. Name the six people who took the oath that Nick wrote.

7. On page 40, Mrs. Granger had a talk with Nick. Tell how Nick was feeling, giving evidence from the text.
8. Infer what Nick and his secret agents “whispered into the ear of every fifth grader”.

9. Did Mrs. Granger like Nick’s new word “frindle”? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

10. (Text to Self) Think about Nick’s character in the first 8 chapters. Write an essay that tells about Nick’s feelings towards (1) school, (2) learning, and (3) teachers. Explain why you think (4) he created a new word and (5) is continuing to use it.
4th GRADE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

FIRST 9 WEEKS

4L1f Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons. (On-going skill)

4L2a Use correct capitalization. (On-going skill)

4L.1b Form and use the progressive verb tenses. (e.g. I was walking; I am walking; I will walk)

4.RL.3 I can use specific details from a text to describe a character, setting, or an event.

SECOND 9 WEEKS

4L1e Form and use prepositional phrases.

4L1a Use relative pronouns (who, whose, whom, which, that) and relative adverbs (where, when, why).

4L2c Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence.

4RL2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text. (On-going skill)

THIRD 9 WEEKS

4L5c Demonstrate understanding of words by relating them to their opposites (antonyms), and to words with similar but not identical meanings (synonyms).

4W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

4.RL.6 Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic.

FOURTH 9 WEEKS

4RIT5 Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

4W1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
Group Lesson Plan

Story of the Week: *How Tia Lola Came to Stay*
Reading Skill: Cause and Effect
Language Arts Skill: Writing Complete Sentences (Complete Subjects and Complete Predicates)
Spelling Skill: Blends

Daily: Daily Language Review, Non-Fiction Passage

**Monday**
TTW introduce the spelling words. TLW complete practice pg. 24.
TTW review the 4 types of sentences. TLW complete practice pg. 7-8.
TTW introduce vocabulary words for the week using context cards. TLW create a study sheet.
TLW listen to the story on CD paying attention to how the vocabulary words are being used in the text.
TTW questions students after to ensure an understanding.

**Tuesday**
TLW complete spelling practice pg. 25.
TLW complete Language Arts practice pg. 9-10.
TLW review vocabulary words for the week.
TTW introduce the reading skill, cause and effect.
TLW practice identifying cause and effect while partner reading the weekly story.

**Wednesday**
TLW complete spelling practice pg. 26.
TLW complete language arts practice pg. 11-12.
TLW review vocabulary words for the week.
TLW UNRAAVEL “A Land of Opportunities” identifying the causes and effects.

**Thursday**
TLW complete spelling practice pg. 27.
TLW complete language arts practice pg. 13-14.
TLW review vocabulary words for the week.
TLW UNRAAVEL “An American Tradition” identifying the causes and effects.

**Friday**
TLW complete a spelling assessment.
TLW practice writing the four types of sentences identifying the complete subjects and complete predicates in each sentence.
TLW practice the reading skill, cause and effect, by matching “cause” cards with the correct “effect” card.
**Group Lesson Plan**

**Story of the Week:** How Tia Lola Came to Stay

**Reading Skill:** Cause and Effect

**Language Arts Skill:** Writing Complete Sentences (Complete Subjects and Complete Predicates)

**Spelling Skill:** Blends

**Daily:** Daily Language Review, Non-Fiction Passage

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## Tier 2 Documentation

**Student**

**Grade**

**Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Initial Exam Date:</th>
<th>1st Review Date:</th>
<th>2nd Review Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Grades - List % number</td>
<td>Read:</td>
<td>Read:</td>
<td>Read:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math:</td>
<td>Math:</td>
<td>Math:</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAR - (Grades K-4)</td>
<td>List Grade Equiv.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aimsweb (Grades K &amp; 1)</td>
<td>List assessment name with score and target numbers (con continue through SRI and SMI spaces)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRI (Grades 2-4)</td>
<td>List test score and level (adv, prof, basic, below bas)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMI (Grades 3-4)</td>
<td>List quantile score and level (adv, prof, basic, below bas)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MCT2 (Grade 4)</td>
<td>List score and level</td>
<td>L.A.:</td>
<td>Math:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech?, QUEST? Title?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List any additional services student receives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>List total # days absent and/or tardy. Note whether excused or unexcused.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office Discipline Referrals</td>
<td>List how many and describe behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Comments</td>
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Progress Monitoring:
Comment on observations from graph.

XXXX
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Area</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Intervention Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List essential skill in reading, math, or behavior</td>
<td>State in measurable terms.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Monitor</th>
<th>Parent Notification</th>
<th>Intervention Start Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell what will be used (must be done 1x/week)</td>
<td>(administration will do this)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1st Review Date (note date–approx. 5 weeks after start):

Decision:

- [ ] No progress made according to data. Refer to Tier 3
- [ ] Some progress is evident, but student has not yet met goal. Continue Tier 2
  - [ ] Continue with same intervention
  - [ ] Change intervention (document change in description of intervention section above)
- [ ] Progress made. Student met goal. Tier 2 intervention is terminated. Student goes to Tier 1.

2nd Review Date (note date – approx. 10 weeks after start date):

Decision:

- [ ] Goal has still not been met. Refer to Tier 3.
- [ ] Goal has been met. Tier 2 intervention is terminated. Student goes to Tier 1.
- [ ] Goal has been met, but student needs to begin intervention for another unmastered essential skill.
  - Begin with new Tier 2 form.

Target Area

List essential skill in reading, math, or behavior

Goal

State in measurable terms.

Intervention Description

Progress Monitor

Tell what will be used (must be done 1x/week)

Parent Notification

(administration will do this)

Intervention Start Date
APPENDIX H

FIRST CYCLE OF CODING
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving Teaching/Learning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT/L – Keeping track of learning</td>
<td>IT/L – KTL</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT/L – Diagnosing difficulties</td>
<td>IT/L – DD</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT/L – Eligibility for programs</td>
<td>IT/L – ELP</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT/L – Evaluating programs</td>
<td>IT/L – EVP</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT/L – Evaluating teaching</td>
<td>IT/L – EVT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT/L – Reporting to others</td>
<td>IT/L – RO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually/Socially Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>I/S – New literacies</td>
<td>I/S – NL</td>
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<td>I/S - Multimodal</td>
<td>I/S – MM</td>
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<tr>
<td>I/S - Connections</td>
<td>I/S – C</td>
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<tr>
<td>I/S – Social Content</td>
<td>I/S – SC</td>
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<td>I/S – Assessments that Accommodate</td>
<td>I/S – AA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<tr>
<td>M – Sources/Indicators</td>
<td>M – SI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M – Perspectives</td>
<td>M – P</td>
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<td>Reading Assessment Summative</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAS – STAR Reading</td>
<td>RAS – STARR</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAS – Scholastic Reading Inventory</td>
<td>RAS – SRI</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAS – Aimsweb Fluency</td>
<td>RAS – AF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS – Accelerated Reader Tests</td>
<td>RAS - AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS – Teacher Created Tests</td>
<td>RAS - TCT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Assessments Formative</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Discussion</td>
<td>RAF – D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF – Questioning</td>
<td>RAF – Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF – Teacher Observation</td>
<td>RAF – TO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF – Graphic Organizers</td>
<td>RAF – GO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF – Short Quizzes</td>
<td>RAF - SQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Cooperative Groups</td>
<td>RAF – CG</td>
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<td>RAF – Dry Erase Boards</td>
<td>RAF – DEB</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Think Pair Share</td>
<td>RAF – TPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF - Summarizing</td>
<td>RAF – S</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Choral Response</td>
<td>RAF – CR</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Project-Based Learning</td>
<td>RAF – PBL</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Quick Writes</td>
<td>RAF - QR</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF – Student Conferencing</td>
<td>RAF – SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF - Games</td>
<td>RAF – G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF –Worksheets, Various Types</td>
<td>RAF - W</td>
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</tbody>
</table>