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REFORMING READING INSTRUCTION IN MISSISSIPPI THROUGH DEMONSTRATION CLASSES: BARKSDALE LITERACY TEACHERS' FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

By

Deborah Duncan Owens

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

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2007

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DEMONSTRATION CLASSES: BARKSDALE LITERACY

TEACHERS' FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

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Mississippi's low rate of literacy has been the focus of concern for educators and policy makers for many years. At the same time the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Health, 2000) was attempting to resolve the issue of which methods were most effective in teaching children to read by conducting a meta-analysis of reading research, Mississippi was developing a reform model, the Mississippi Reading Reform Model (MRRM), to raise the reading achievement of its students. In 2000 James Barksdale, founder of Netscape, donated one hundred million dollars to Mississippi and founded the Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) in order to assist in the implementation of the MRRM and, ultimately, raise the literacy rates in Mississippi.

In 2006 BRI initiated a reading reform model in the form of demonstration classrooms. Core reading instruction for kindergarten and first grade students at-risk for reading failure in the demonstration classrooms was provided by the Barksdale Literacy Teachers (BLTs). Reading interventions were provided for kindergarten through third

grade students in the demonstration classrooms by the BLTs and an Intervention Specialist (IS). Reading methods and strategies promoted by the NRP formed the basis of instruction in the demonstration classrooms.

The subject of this qualitative study is the experiences of 12 BLTs as they implemented demonstration classrooms across Mississippi. The researcher investigated the BLTs' personal experiences as they worked with students, predominantly African Americans and from low-socioeconomic communities. The Read Well program was used in the classrooms as a means of ensuring the use of NRP promoted methods. Research findings reveal the problems associated with teaching struggling readers who are also living with the effects of poverty. BLTs described their use of a scripted commercial program and problems the program posed for their students as speakers of African American Vernacular English.

DEDICATION

In appreciation for their love, patience and encouragement, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my children, Cody, Brooke, and Jonathan. For their limitless love and support, I would like to thank my parents, Gus and Faye Duncan, and dedicate this dissertation to them as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earning my Ph.D. has been a journey that has become an integral part of my life and, while I'm glad to be rounding the bend to completion, and ready to begin a new adventure, I'll always remember these past few years as the time when I truly discovered my life's work. I want to thank Dr. Dwight Hare for serving as a beacon of light, allowing me to travel slowly when I was weary and run when I was able. As I begin my career in higher education, I hope to follow his example as an advisor and mentor. I also want to thank my committee members for their guidance and generosity of spirit: Dr. Nancy Verhoek-Miller, Dr. Kay Brocato, Dr. Margaret Pope, and Dr. Monica Riley.

I want to acknowledge James Barksdale's commitment to improving the literacy rates in Mississippi and the work of the Barksdale Reading Institute. Undoubtedly, there are many children who have benefited from the contributions of the Barksdale Reading Institute. My work with the institute has been invaluable in helping me to hone my skills as a literacy teacher. I am proud, too, to have worked with some of the best teachers I have ever known, and I want to thank them for sharing their experiences and stories with me.

My inspiration has always been the children I have taught. From them I've learned that teaching is an art, a skill, and a reciprocal relationship. I am a richer person for every child I've ever had the privilege of teaching.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The final years of the 20th century were pivotal in the field of education in the United States. Since the early 1980s, with the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), public education has been portrayed as a failure, unable to produce adults prepared to compete globally. What ensued has been a flurry of research, continual reform initiatives, often contentious debate, and an industry built around efforts to improve education (Borman, Cookson, Sadovnick, & Spade, 1996). From the AMERICA 2000 initiative and GOALS 2000: Educate America Act to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the National Reading Panel (NRP) report (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, 2004), federal efforts to reform public education have driven curriculum and pedagogy and have been a cause for celebration for some and consternation for others. Meanwhile, Mississippi has launched its own efforts to reform public education, a sometimes daunting task in a state that has long struggled to overcome a legacy of extreme efforts to maintain a separate but equal dual education system and dismally low literacy rates. The central focus of this study is the effort of philanthropist James Barksdale to affect reading reform in Mississippi through a one hundred million dollar donation and the establishment of the Barksdale Reading Institute.

Mississippi's Efforts to Maintain Segregated Schools

Nowhere was the scrutiny of public education felt more acutely than Mississippi which has always struggled at the bottom of any lists ranking states by educational measures (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2005). Mississippi's struggle with federal scrutiny and intervention in its educational system has been a constant refrain since the 1950s. Educational quality, however, hasn't always been the primary focus of the state's dissention with federal government intervention. For the majority of the second half of the twentieth century, the disparities in Mississippi have revolved around issues of race, equality, and equity. While the focus has shifted to educational achievement, many of the discrepancies that have long plagued the state's poor and minority students still exist (Curry, 1995; Dittmer, 1994; McMillan, 1971; Orfeild & Eaton, 1996; Patterson, 2001).

Even before the pivotal Brown vs. Board of Education decision was rendered by the U. S. Supreme Court May, 1954, Mississippi had launched an organized, consolidated effort to circumvent federal intervention into its public school system. Organized by a Leflore County plantation manager in the fall of 1953, the Citizen's Council was organized to address the concerns of white Mississippians who believed federally mandated desegregation of public schools would radically change their southern way of life and promote the mongrelization of its citizens (McMillan, 1971). The influence of the Citizen's Council spread and it would be difficult to underestimate its ability to coalesce a wave of resistance that reached the highest governmental offices in

Mississippi. Senator James O. Eastland, in a speech on the floor of the U. S. Senate on May 27th, 1954, declared,

> Mr. President, it is the law of nature, it is the law of God, that every race has both the right and the duty to perpetuate itself. All free men have the right to associate exclusively with members of their own race, free from governmental interference, if they so desire. Free men have the right to send their children to the schools of their own choosing, free from governmental interference and to build their own culture, free from governmental interference. (Brady, 1954, pp. 47-48)

For the next 20 years, Mississippi, along with other southern states launched an offense against school desegregation under the mantle of state's rights that, in effect placed all educational focus on segregating white and black students (Bolton, 2005). This era of resistance was disastrous for the state. Issues of school desegregation became entangled with issues of voter registration and the ensuing flurry of violence and racial hatred has plagued Mississippi ever since. From the 1955 murder of Emmett Till to the state's violent reaction to the college students who came to the state in Freedom Summer of 1964 to register voters, the state placed itself at the forefront of national attention in its resistance to integration. It can be argued that Mississippi's inability to overcome many of its equity issues, including educational discrepancies and achievement gap, is directly linked to its legacy of institutionalized racism.

Evidence of state sanctioned racism can be seen in the following:

- In November, 1954, the Mississippi State Constitution was amended following a general election to raise registration qualifications, requiring the reading, writing, and accurate interpretation of any section of the Mississippi Constitution (Johnston, 1990).

- Endorsement of the Citizen's Council for a Mississippi Constitutional Amendment to authorize the state legislature to abolish public schools in the event that the federal government attempted to enforce Brown vs. Board of Education and desegregate Mississippi public schools (McMillan, 1971).
- The establishment of a Legal Education Advisory Committee (LEAC) by the Mississippi Legislature in 1954, with its goals of, among other things, repeal the compulsory attendance law, punish those who participated in "agitation suits" to end segregation, and create a state authority for the maintenance of segregation (Johnston, 1990).
- The signing of the Southern Manifesto by 19 U. S. Senators and 81 U. S. Representatives (including all respective Mississippi Congressmen) which declared the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision an abuse of judicial power, commended the efforts of states to resist forced integration by any lawful means, and declared the signers' intentions to bring about a reversal of the decision (Klarman, 2004).
- The enactment of "choice plans" in the mid-1960s in many Mississippi school districts as a means of appeasing federal government officials and circumventing desegregation mandates, with the implied understanding that white families would not choose to send their children to black schools, and black families would not choose to send their children to white schools. What followed, for the 2% of the black families that decided to send their children to white schools was often violent and destructive reactions such as the having their homes shot at (Curry,

1995), the cancellation of credit, loss of jobs, and eviction from homes (Dittmer, 1994).

- The withdrawal of 25% of all white Mississippi school children from public schools in 1969 when faced with enforced desegregation (following the U. S. Supreme Court's Alexander vs. The Holmes County Board of Education decision) and the establishment of segregation academies across the state (Patterson, 2001).
- The use of state taxes from 1969 – mid 1970s to pay the tuition of white children to attend all-white private schools (Curry, 1995)
- Following the U. S. Supreme Court's Milliken vs. Bradley decision in 1974, which facilitated white flight as a means of maintaining segregated urban school districts, Mississippi's school districts, with a number of exceptions, increasingly became more segregated through white flight (Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

Henig, Hula, Orr, and Pedescleaux (1999), in examining the role of race in education reform, stated:

> In focusing on the role of race, we join others who have argued that Americans have been either too quick to declare that racial problems are an historical artifact of rapidly diminishing relevance to contemporary life or too timid to address openly an issue they realize to be potent, painful, and potentially divisive. In our research, we have encountered numerous instances in which the behavior of local stakeholders has been affected by fears, suspicions, expectations, loyalties, tactics, and habits related to race. (pp. 6-7)

Therefore, any study that examines educational reform warrants an examination, too, of the social context within which the reform takes place.

"Thank God for Mississippi:" Mississippi's Low Literacy Rates

Probably the most critical educational issue faced by Mississippi in the twenty first century has been its low literacy rates. The predictability of Mississippi's place at the bottom of lists ranking the 50 states in order of various attributes, including literacy rates and reading achievement (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2006), has lead other states to declare, "Thank God for Mississippi," the state which keeps them from being at the bottom of the list. According to the U. S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NCES, 2005) only 18% of Mississippi's public school fourth graders were able to read at a proficient level or better. Mississippi also ranked at the bottom of the list of U.S. states in reading achievement.

In a study of adult literacy in the U.S., the National Institute for Literacy (2003) found that Mississippi ranked last among the 50 states. Defining literacy as the ability to comprehend and use written information, the National Institute for Literacy found that nearly every third adult in Mississippi is either completely or functionally illiterate – unable to complete an application form for a Social Security card, or accurately read a label on a medicine bottle.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (2001) conducted a study designed to facilitate an estimation of dropout rates within the state. According to this study, 26.0% of all Mississippi students leave school before completion. Thirty percent of all males and 29.6% of all black students are estimated to become dropouts (MDE, 2001). Superintendent of Mississippi schools, Hank Bounds, announced in November, 2006, that the state's dropout rate was continuing to rise, with 26.6% of Mississippi students who begin 9th grade dropping out before graduation (Hayden, 2006b). One

school district was reported as having the worst dropout rate, with more than 60% of its students who begin 9th grade dropping out before receiving a diploma.

In 1980 Mississippi was the last state without a mandatory public kindergarten system or a compulsory school attendance law. Its teachers were among the poorest paid in the country and it had no system for monitoring the quality of its schools (Nash & Taggart, 2006).

National Focus on Education Reform and Mississippi's Education Reform Act of 1982

The era of near-hysteria surrounding issues of school desegregation that permeated Mississippi began to subside during the late 1970s and 1980s as the national focus was shifting to the perceived failure of public education across the nation. In 1980 Ronald Reagan ran for president using education issues as part of his conservative platform, calling for such things as prayer in school, vouchers for private school tuition, tuition tax credits, and the abolition of the U. S. Department of Education (Graham, 2005). Terrell Bell, Secretary of the Department of Education during the Reagan administration, in what he thought was most likely his final task with the soon to be abolished DOE, established the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), which would produce the report *A Nation at Risk*. The report is often cited as confirmatory evidence of the dismal state of public education, and has stood through the years as an indictment of the U.S.'s educational system' inability to produce citizens able to complete in a global market (Graham, 2005).

During this same time, Mississippi was poised to reform its education system through state government. William Winter, elected governor in 1980, was intent on

addressing the deficits that existed in Mississippi's public school and, through the state legislature, created a special education study commission, chaired by Tupelo businessman, Jack Reed. Reed documented that Mississippi was the last state without mandatory public kindergartens and the last state without a compulsory school attendance law. Additionally, Mississippi teachers were among the poorest paid in the country and the state had no way of measuring the performance of its schools (Nash & Taggart, 2006). Within 2 years, and with considerable effort, Governor Winter brought about unprecedented education reform in Mississippi with the Education Reform Act of 1982 (Mullins, 1986). With the Education Reform Act of 1982, Mississippi finally had mandated statewide kindergartens, placed teaching assistants in K-3 classrooms, reinstated the compulsory attendance law, provided teacher pay raises, created the first accreditation system for public schools, created a training program for school administrators, and established guidelines for a state lay board of education (Mullins, 1986; Nash & Taggart, 2006). Therefore, on the eve of the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), Mississippi was already in the process of confronting the state's educational deficits.

Over the next two decades the federal government targeted educational accountability through initiatives such as President George H. W. Bush's AMERICA 2000 initiative, and President William Clinton's GOALS 2000: Educate America Act (U. S. Department of Education, 1995). Mississippi, likewise, embarked on efforts to improve its schools through accountability initiatives. During the mid 1980s, Mississippi implemented a district level Performance-Based Accreditation System, which was further revised to provide accreditation information at the school level in 2000. The federal No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed into law in January, 2002 (United States Department of Education, 2002), which further solidified accountability and accreditation systems as a mainstay in education, both at the state and the federal level. Both the state and federal accountability systems were dependent on standardized testing to measure educational quality. However, NCLB represented a high-stakes approach to educational accountability. With the ultimate goal of closing the achievement gap between minority and majority groups of students in the United States, NCLB requires stronger accountability for results. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a measure of student improvement, quickly became a part of the lexicon of the educational community. NCLB requires schools to demonstrate AYP for all students, in all subgroups of race, gender, or economic status, or face federal sanctions. If a school fails to demonstrate AYP after five years, it may face "dramatic changes to the way the school is run" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1).

The convergence of NCLB and the NRP report has significantly altered reading instruction and reading research in the United States. The effects of NCLB and the NRP have been far-reaching and, as Mississippi moved forward in its own educational reform efforts, they have driven much of the policies and practice since 2000. Therefore, when another significant educational event occurred in Mississippi in 2000, it converged with these other two initiatives and has become, in many ways inextricable from them.

In 2000, Sally and Jim Barksdale donated one hundred million dollars to Mississippi, establishing the Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI), for the purpose of improving literacy within the state (Hayden, 2000a). This donation was lauded by Governor Ronnie Musgrove, whose wife was a former elementary reading teacher, and

Former Governor William Winter, who was responsible for the Education Reform Act of 1982. According to Winter, the Barksdale's investment "staggers the imagination of someone who has long wondered how we were ever going to be competitive in Mississippi" (Hayden, 2000a, p. 1).

The Barksdale Reading Institute

You can't begin an investigation of the Barksdale Reading Institute without describing its origins with James Barksdale and the role of his brother, Claiborne Barksdale. The rationale for the founding of BRI has its origins in the 1960s at the University of Mississippi. While James Meredith was completing a Bachelor of Arts degree from the university in 1962, James Barksdale was earning a Bachelor of Business Administration degree (University of Mississippi, 2006). James W. Silver (1963), former Professor of History at the University of Mississippi, chronicled the events that surrounded James Meredith's enrollment at the university in his book *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. Meredith's attempt to desegregate Ole Miss created a storm of protest. When an injunction to prevent Meredith's admission to the university on September 20, 1962, failed, Mississippi Governor Barnett had himself appointed as registrar of the University of Mississippi in order to reject Meredith's application. When that effort failed, and Meredith arrived on the University of Mississippi campus under the protection of federal marshals, a violent riot ensued. This state sanctioned racism that James Barksdale witnessed as a young man in college made a lasting impression on him. Upon graduation from the University of Mississippi, Barksdale left his home state, in part to escape the racism that permeated almost every aspect of life in Mississippi during the

1960s, and for 40 years, pursued a successful and lucrative career in business, telecommunications, and technology (personal communication, September, 2006). After retiring and selling his business, Netscape, he established the Barksdale Foundation. Jim Barksdale and his late wife, Sally, endowed the University of Mississippi with the funding to establish an Honor's College in 1997. According to Barksdale, this endeavor was so successful and rewarding that he and his wife decided to become more involved in education in their home state. What ensued was the creation of the Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) with the grand mission of improving literacy rates in Mississippi. The Barksdales donated $100 million dollars to the state of Mississippi in 1999, under the management of BRI with the intention of providing funding for schools with large populations of children at risk for reading failure.

Barksdale Reading Institute – Getting Started

On March 9, 2000, a newly appointed board of directors for BRI met in Jackson at the Mississippi State Department of Education (MDE). Dr. Richard Thompson, state Superintendent of Education and Dr. Jim Chambless, dean of the University of Mississippi School of Education served as co-chairs of the board. Other board members included Dr. Rowan Taylor, president of the State Board of Education; Rosemary Wolfe, a West Tallahatchie elementary school teacher; Tina Scholtes, a Starkville elementary school teacher; Capucine Torrey Robinson, principal of the Davis Magnet School in Jackson; Susan Barksdale Howarth (James Barksdale's daughter); Sally Wilcox of Madison, vice president of Baptist Health Systems; Dr. Andrew Mullins, executive assistant to the chancellor at the University of Mississippi; and Bill McHenry, assistant

commissioner for academic affairs at the State Board of Institutions of Higher Learning (University New Service, 2000). Former Mississippi Superintendent of Education, Dr. Richard Boyd was serving as the interim director of BRI (Hayden, 2000b).

Headquartered at University of Mississippi's School of Education, BRI began its work by awarding grants to colleges of education at Alcorn State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi Valley State University, the Mississippi University for Women, and the University of Southern Mississippi. These grants were used to fund additional reading faculty to enhance training for pre-service teachers in best practices in reading instruction as well as work with teachers in the field (University News Service, 2000; Hayden, 2000b). Additionally, BRI was also charged with assisting the MDE with the implementation of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model (MRRM) (University News Service, 2000).

The Mississippi Reading Reform Model

The development of the MRRM began with Mississippi's Reaching New Heights, a study conducted in 1995 of reading instruction in Mississippi school districts (MDE, 2006b). This study led to a Research to Action publication that included a review of the National Institute of Child Health and Development research conducted by Dr. Reid Lyon (University News Service, 2000). The National Research Council's report Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Griffin & Burns, 1998) also served as foundational research in the development of the MRRM (Dearman, 2000). In July, 1997, the MDE established the Mississippi Reading Initiative … Every Child a Reader (MDE, 2000b). The Mississippi Legislature passed Senate Bill 2944 during the

1998 Legislative Session to create the Reading Sufficiency Program of Instruction, which required every school district in Mississippi to establish and implement a program for reading reform (Dearman, 2000).

The goals of the MRRM were to create systematic change in student achievement through:

1. High quality professional development to improve reading instructional practices of Mississippi teachers, administrators, and support staff;
2. Early literacy interventions to ensure school readiness;
3. Extended instructional opportunities for children;
4. Parent/family literacy programs.

In the first BRI board of directors meeting criteria for low performing schools in Mississippi to apply for thousands of dollars in grants to improve reading achievement were established. Initially, it was decided that 40 schools would be selected to receive support from the institute. Twenty of the schools would be training schools. These were schools that were not at the bottom of the rankings among Mississippi's elementary schools in reading achievement, but could benefit from more extensive professional development in reading instruction. The other 20 schools were target schools and were selected because at least 40% of their 4th grade students scored in the minimum category on the reading portion of the 1998 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) (Hayden, 2000b). Four schools from each of the 5 congressional districts were selected to be target schools. Assistance and training in the schools was overseen by the Mississippi Department of Education and by Higher Education faculty members, who worked within the schools

providing professional development. In addition, the schools received funding for books and materials.

The Board also began its search for a director in March, 2000. The ideal candidate would have a strong background in reading research and instruction as well as strong management and administrative skills (Hayden, 2000b). In May, 2000, the BRI Board announced that, after reviewing 40 applications for the position, they had selected three final candidates: Robert Cooter, professor and director of the Center for Teacher Preparation at Southern Methodist University in Dallas; Dale D. Johnson, professor of education and associate dean for graduate studies, research and development at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, Louisiana, and D. Ray Reutzel, provost and academic vice president at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah (Hayden, 2000c). In June, 2000, Reutzel was offered the job as BRI Director. He declined the position however, stating that he had decided not to relocate his family. In July, 2000, Jim Barksdale announced the appointment of his brother, Claiborne Barksdale, as the BRI Director (Hayden, 2000d). Although his brother did not have a background in reading education (he taught English for one year at Murrah High School in Jackson, Mississippi, attended law school, and had spent the remainder of his career as council in private industry – Bell South in Atlanta being his most recent employer), Jim Barksdale did not want to delay BRI's work any longer in searching for a director. He was confident that his brother's strong administrative skills would effectively facilitate the work of the institute. In addition, it was announced that Dr. Boyd would remain at the institute to provide educational leadership (Hayden, 2000d).

Barksdale Reading Institute under the Leadership of Claiborne Barksdale

During its first year, BRI expanded its reading reform efforts to include early childhood literacy. Claiborne Barksdale reported to the Board of Directors in October, 2000, that he was examining the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, based in St. Louis, which uses school liaisons to visit homes and teach parents how to develop their preschoolers' literacy development and language skills (Hayden, 2000e). Claiborne Barksdale had observed the PAT program, which was already in place in some districts in Mississippi, and found it promising for facilitating literacy at the earliest ages. Claiborne Barksdale stated, "The years 0-3 are so critical. If a child comes from a home in which there is not much vocabulary, that child has a deficit in vocabulary and social skills that is so difficult to overcome" (p. 1). Claiborne Barksdale also expressed to the Board that he was frustrated at the slow progress of the first-year implementation in the 20 Target schools, stating that the paperwork for two of the schools was not complete because of changes in their grants (Hayden, 2000e). James Barksdale, however, stated, "Big successes are made from big problems" (p. 2). When asked how teachers in the Target schools were accepting BRI's assistance, James Barksdale said, "The way programs get killed is they kill it with a thousand smiles. I'm sure some people see it as an indication that they haven't been doing a good job" (p. 2).

BRI's work has been directly linked with the MRRM from the beginning with one of its early major functions being the facilitation of MRRM implementation in public schools. BRI identifies the following components as its reading model:

1. Reading Instructional Interventions in the essential elements of reading;
2. Extended instructional opportunities during school hours;

3. Early literacy community partnerships in childcare centers and Head Start programs feeding into BRI schools;
4. Parent/Family literacy connections in schools and childcare centers; and
5. Professional Development and in-classroom observation/feedback for effective instructional practices by teachers, administrators and support staff (Barksdale Reading Institute [BRI], 2006).

During the 2000-2001 school year, BRI expanded its influence – offering grants to schools for assistance with reading instruction. Additionally, BRI provided funds to Mississippi universities to pay the salaries of professors to facilitate the implementation of the MRRM at the university level – ensuring that new teachers would receive training before graduation in the reform model methodologies. With the assistance of the BRI sponsored professors, BRI staff began work developing professional development materials, *RAISE K-3 and The Elements of Reading Instruction,* as well as an early reading assessment tool to be used along with the MRRM, called the Mississippi Primary Reading Assessment (MPRA).

BRI also began an emphasis on early childhood education, partnering with other organizations such as the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University, the W. W. Kellogg Foundation, the Day Foundation, the Hardin Foundation, and the U. S. Department of Education (BRI, 2006). Over the next 2-3 years BRI began working in over 70 elementary schools across Mississippi. Regional Reading Coordinators (RRCs) provided the training for teachers and facilitated implementation of the MRRM. Schools that received the grants received large sums of money to use for purchasing books, establishing Parent Centers, funding Home-School Coordinators, and funding a stipend

for a teacher to serve as a BRI liaison. RRCs spent at least one day each week at the BRI schools, working with teachers in classrooms, and providing two hour training sessions for teachers. RRCs also trained assistant teachers to work individually with students, reading and discussing literary elements in a process called Reading Tutorial Partnerships. The BRI Liaison was assigned the duty of monitoring MRRM implementation, overseeing the Parent Center, ordering books and materials, and collaborating with the school principal and RRC. Teacher training took the form of Peer Coaching Study Team (PCST), a model developed by Showers and Joyce (1996), in which teachers are trained in effective research-based classroom instruction. Teachers collaborate in discussions about diagnostic procedures and prescribing reading instructional intervention strategies for struggling readers. After two years of affiliation with BRI, a school is evaluated and, based on effectiveness of the principal and BRI liaison in implementing the MRRM, the RRC may turn over more of the PCST meetings to the liaison, who, in most cases, does not teach in a classroom, but serves as a support for other teachers – providing interventions for struggling readers or modeling teaching methods. RRCs visit the school less frequently and more as a monitor of implementation than trainer.

Adjustments to Barksdale Reading Institute's Approach

During 2003, Claiborne Barksdale commissioned an evaluation of BRI's effectiveness by a private consultant, Jeanne Osborn (2003), who spent several months observing various aspects of the Institute's work at the school level and at staff meetings and reviewing professional development material developed by BRI. Osborn noted

several significant problems with the Institute's early reading assessment instrument, MPRA. Primarily noting that the instrument was too long and time consuming to administer individually, she also questioned the usefulness of the information to teachers. Osborn also noted that the decoding portion of the MPRA didn't follow the precepts of the NRP's findings, and referred to the three cueing systems, which is, according to Osborn, one of the "sacred cows of whole language" (p. 16).

Osborn (2003) also critiqued the reading reform model, the MRRM, citing the report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and the NRP report, suggesting ways in which the MRRM could be more closely aligned with their findings. Similarly, Osborn evaluated BRI's professional development materials, *Elements of Reading Instruction and RAISE K-3*, making similar notes about the need for more clarification and alignment with NRP's research base. In summarizing her evaluation, Osborn made the following recommendations:

1. Focus on Classroom Reading Instruction. Rather than focusing so intently on diagnosing and developing intervention strategies for struggling readers, Osborn recommended a greater focus on classroom reading instruction. She stated, "The emphasis on individual differences by using a diagnostic and prescriptive approach to teaching children is, in my view, neither effective nor efficient" (p. 15).
2. Select a Core (Basal) Reading Program. BRI staff should review basal series that are available for adoption in Mississippi and provide training and assistance to teachers in schools to facilitate their selection of the most explicit and effective program for their school.

3. Implement a Core Reading Program(s). According to Osborn (2003), "It would be wonderful if Barksdale schools could all use the same high quality, research based reading program" (p. 16).
4. Review the Content of the *Elements of Reading Instruction and RAISE K-3.* Because some of the components of these professional development materials came from multiple sources, according to Osborn, they were sometimes confusing, incomplete, and not compatible with the NRP research base. Osborn further stated, "My most pointed advice is to get rid of those two sacred cows of whole language, the triple cuing system and miscue analysis. (Prepare for some screams.)" (p. 16).
5. Appoint an Advisory Board. Osborn recommended that an "advisory board with a national reputation could provide advice and comment on many aspects of the Barksdale Reading Institute and the Mississippi Reading Reform Model" (p. 17). She specifically suggested Joseph Torgesen, Sharon Vaughn, Katherine Mitchell, and Russell Gersten as possible appointees to an advisory board.
6. Mount a Summer or Early Fall "Summit" Meeting. BRI staff, university and college affiliates, school liaisons, RRCs, and school principals would meet together at these meetings to learn from outside experts and each other regarding effective classroom reading instruction.
7. Maintain Established Relationships. Osborn stressed the importance of maintaining the good relationships BRI had already established with the MDE, state universities and colleges, and school districts, stating, "You have achieved

much in a short time, and it is important to keep in touch with all of these groups."

BRI's early years coincided with the great paradigm shift in reading instruction in the United States and, therefore, the shifting sands of the community of educational theorists and policymakers complicated the landscape for BRI. Osborn (2003) acknowledged this aspect of BRI's work, stating,

> I would like to acknowledge the difficulty of the undertaking. I suspect the organizers of the Barksdale Reading Institute did not realize the thorny thicket they were entering when they began their project. To carry out their work in the schools, they had to enter both the contentious world of reading education and the complicated social and political world of the public schools. (p. 2)

The year 2003 was marked by a series of changes for BRI. Kelly Butler joined the staff as Director of Regional Reading Coordinators. After spending several weeks studying the effectiveness of the university faculty BRI was funding at a cost of $900,000, Butler concluded that the progress being made at the IHL in improving reading instruction training for pre-service teachers was too slow and accomplishments made by BRI faculty members "was pretty hit or miss" (Hayden, 2003, p. 2). In November, Claiborne Barksdale announced his intention to discontinue funding faculty members at state universities, stating that he was disappointed at the ability of the 11 faculty members at the eight public university school of education to "influence other faculty members on teaching reading" (p. 1). James Barksdale, commenting on the decision to discontinue funding the professorships, said, "It's sad we've got to do this, but it's not effective to continue to do something that isn't more effective than this" (p.1).

During the same month, it was announced that BRI would no longer pay for after-school programs because they were not able to determine their effectiveness in helping

children with reading. Additionally, the home-school coordinator would no longer make home visits (a major component of the PAT program) (Hayden, 2003).

In 2003 BRI abandoned the MPRA and began using the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) – an assessment that had been put through the rigors of validation and tests of reliability and was a nationally recognized instrument. BRI began developing its professional development guide, *The Reading Universe,* in 2003 which would replace its other professional development materials, RAISE K-3 and Elements of Reading Instruction. This was a collaborative effort between BRI administrators, RRCs, and IHL faculty members. Following the guidelines of the NRP report (NIH, 2000), *The Reading Universe* emphasizes the importance of phonemic awareness as a foundational element in literacy development. Over the next 3 years *The Reading Universe* grew to include over 35 lessons targeting explicit skills on every aspect of reading instruction from early literacy instruction and phonemic awareness to small group instruction and positive talk (of teachers to students). Each lesson references the Mississippi Curriculum Framework, provides a rationale for the lesson, cites research, states the implications for learners who don't master the concept or skill, and provides activities to be used to teach skills as well as provide interventions for children who haven't mastered the particular skill.

BRI, the Higher Education Literacy Council, and Phonics Instruction

In January, 2003, the Mississippi Department of Education established the Higher Education Reading Council, funded by a Reading First grant, inviting at least one literacy faculty member from each of Mississippi's 15 public and private colleges. The Higher Education Reading Council was charged with making policy recommendations about

elementary reading teacher preparation. The Council's established goals included: increasing communication between colleges and universities and the MDE; developing greater consistency between teacher education programs; infusing scientifically based reading research (Brenner, 2005) into teacher preparation coursework; and making policy recommendations regarding reading teacher preparation. The Council was also encouraged to develop a shared set of standards for reading courses at the college level and consider recommending an increase in the number of credits required in reading for elementary certification. One of the first orders of business for the Council was changing its name from the Reading Council to the Higher Education Literacy Council (HELC), which more closely reflected the integrated approach most of its member assumed in teaching reading, writing, speaking and listening (Brenner, 2005).

The HELC, over the course of five months, came to an agreement and unanimously voted to increase the literacy course requirements for elementary certification from 6 hours to 15 hours and, while setting rigorous standards to be met in those courses, allow the individual IHLs to maintain flexibility and autonomy in designing the courses according to standards agreed upon by the Council, and adapted from the International Reading Association. In the fall of 2003, the HELC began the process of obtaining approval through the bureaucratic channels for the proposed addition of the literacy courses to the elementary education certification requirements: review by the Mississippi Department of Education's State Certification Commission and MACTE (Mississippi Association of Colleges of Teacher Education), and, following approval by the first two, final approval by the State Board of Education (Brenner, 2005).

At the same time the HELC was proceeding in its process to make changes in reading requirements, Claiborne Barksdale, expressed his concern that pre-service teachers were not being taught how to deliver phonics and phonological awareness in a "systematic and explicit way" (Brenner, 2005, p. 5). In October, Barksdale delivered a report to the state Board of Education recommending that a stand-alone 3-hour phonics course be taught at all Mississippi universities.

In going directly to the state Board of Education, Barksdale bypassed the HELC, the State Certification Commission, and MACTE, therefore creating a certain amount of strife between BRI and the IHLs. Regardless, Barksdale's recommendation was formalized by a motion from the state Board of Education at their December meeting. HECL members and MDE staff registered their concerns with then Superintendent of Education Henry Johnson, who informed them that the phonics course requirement had wide support among the state Board of Education members and, therefore, would probably be approved.

What ensued was a series of compromise meetings and conversations. The HELC enlisted the assistance of Robert Cooter, one of the final candidates for Director of BRI in 2000, to discuss their concerns with the state Board of Education. The HELC also consulted David Pearson, Dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California Berkeley, for advice in how to forge a compromise with BRI. The HELC drafted a position statement their position regarding phonics instruction in teacher preparation, stating:

- The National Reading panel report itself emphasizes that phonics should not be elevated above other components of reading. A stand-alone phonics course

conveys the incorrect message that phonics is the most important element of teaching children to read.

- Phonics should not be taught in isolation in the early childhood classroom. By teaching phonics in isolation in teacher education programs we may actually undermine the goals of increased study in phonics in teacher preparation by modeling ineffective practice.
- Requiring a phonics course may communicate to other states that Mississippi policy-makers do not understand current research, damaging our reputation and possibly hindering faculty recruitment.

The HELC further proposed a compromise of requiring 3 to 6 hours of systematic early literacy instruction rather than 3 hours of phonics instruction.

Claiborne Barksdale, in a written statement, outlined his opinion about why it was imperative that phonics instruction be included in teacher preparation courses. He stated:

> The lack of a solid foundation in phonics among teachers propels districts, especially for the lowest performing schools, to resort to expensive, off-the-shelf programs in an effort to fill this instructional void. Often, the educational underpinnings for reading instruction are lacking and therefore authentic professional development has not occurred. Programmatic constructs can also have the ripple effect of limiting adequate time for fluency and comprehension. (Brenner, 2005, p. 9)

A final compromise was forged during a meeting between BRI administrators and the HELC in February, 2004, in Oxford at the BRI office. Rather than one 3-hour stand-alone phonics course, two early literacy courses would be added to the teacher preparation requirements. The HELC worked with BRI to develop course descriptions for those courses, as follows:

> Early Literacy Instruction I: Concepts, materials and teaching strategies for oral language development and systematic early reading and writing instruction, specific to concepts about print, phonemic awareness, phonics.
>
> Early Literacy Instruction II: Concepts, materials and teaching strategies for oral language development and early systematic reading and writing instruction specific to vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. (Brenner, 2005, p. 10)

While the HELC and BRI were able to forge a compromise, a contentious relationship has persisted between BRI and most of the colleges of education in Mississippi. According to Claiborne Barksdale (personal communication, February 19, 2007), the only university he has a positive working relationship with is the University of Mississippi, and, after sending his most recent report of BRI's data to all the deans of the colleges of education in Mississippi, only the dean of the University of Mississippi's college of education acknowledged receipt or responded.

BRI Evaluates its Work and Data

The changes that began in 2003 in BRI's approach to accomplishing its goal of improving literacy levels in Mississippi were followed by further shifts in focus. During the 2004-05 school year BRI discontinued funding its schools' Parent Centers and the job descriptions and focus of the Home School Coordinators' being paid by BRI changed to providing reading tutorial partnerships to K – 3 students (Owens, D. D., personal communication, 2004). BRI staff and RRCs were continuing their work on developing the *Reading Universe* and, as their knowledge base-grew regarding reading instruction and methodology, so did their directives toward teachers about how to teach reading.

During this time, Claiborne Barksdale was very aware of the approaching 5 year deadline. James Barksdale's goal, at the beginning of BRI, was to see significant results

in the literacy levels of Mississippi's students within 5 years or abandon the program. Therefore, by the end of 2005, BRI was at a point of earnestly evaluating its impact. Since its beginning BRI has contracted with outside agencies to systematically evaluate the performance of students in BRI schools. A chronology of evaluations follows with summaries of their findings in Table 1.

Table 1

Chronology of BRI Evaluations

DATE AND AGENCY	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
July, 2001 The University of MS Center for Educational Research and Evaluation (Sullivan, 2001)	The primary focus of this initial study was to test pilot several instruments as well as evaluate student progress in BRI's first year schools. The instruments used to compare pre- and post-test results were the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests: Revised (Form G), and the Gates-McGinitie Reading Tests: Fourth Edition (Form S, Level BR for Grade 1 and Level 1 for Grade 2), and the Test of Early Reading Ability: Second Edition (TERA-2) (Form A). The Woodcock and the Gates were found to have adequate reliability (test-retests and inter-rater). However, the TERA-2 was eliminated from post-test administration because of questionable reliability. Student progress was evaluated in 8 BRI schools with a sample size of 237 first grade students and 243 second grade students. A major problem existed in the limited time span between pre- and post- testing (3 ½ months). The results of the post-testing found that overall, sample students in BRI schools scored below average on grade equivalent measures (1.65 for grade 1 and 2.25 for grade 2). However, there was a considerable difference between scores in the lowest scoring and the highest scoring school (of about 1 year). Implications for further practice and study: Low achieving students appeared to make greater progress in skills that do not require prior knowledge of vocabulary. The study also suggests that low achieving students perform better when learning rote skills than with skills involving higher order thinking such as the manipulation of words and ideas.

Table 1 (continued)

June, 2003 Interactive, Inc. (Mann, 2003a)	The focus of this study was a comparison of BRI's Target schools (the lowest achieving schools) with BRI's Training schools using MCT test scores for the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years. Although the Training schools began with higher achievement than the Target schools, BRI's Target schools had caught up with the higher performing schools. Whether a school had been with BRI for 2 years or only 1 year did not appear to make a difference in student performance on MCT. The quality of implementation of the MRRM appeared to have a significant impact on student performance. <u>Implications for further practice and study:</u> According to Mann (2003a), "… BRI has the capability to close the achievement gap for some of the State's most needy children and the Institute is well advised to focus its future efforts on what have been called Target schools…" (p. 3). Additionally, a closer examination of fidelity to the MRRM on the part of the RRCs and schools may be warranted.

Table 1 (continued)

November, 2003 The University of MS Center for Educational Research and Evaluation (Sullivan, Harper, Williams, & Edwards, 2003)	The purpose of this study was to evaluate BRI's effectiveness by comparing reading achievement in BRI schools with that of comparable schools. Random assignment was not possible; therefore, this was a quasi-experimental study with nonequivalent control group design. Evaluators limited their analysis to 3rd and 4th grade students who attended BRI or comparison schools for 2 successive years. Students in BRI school showed a higher level of achievement that those in the control schools. Fourth grade MCT reading scores for BRI students were significantly higher than those students in the control schools. However, effect sizes associated with BRI students' superior performance were minimal and, therefore, there didn't appear to be practically significant differences in performance between BRI students and control students. There was no evidence that length of time as a BRI school made any difference in student performance. It could not be concluded that student achievement improvements were associated with a school's involvement with BRI or a school's commitment to general school reform. Implications for further practice and study: Because of the statistical significance in BRI's fourth graders achievement compared with control students, it may be that BRI's impact becomes more visible over time. Longitudinal studies would be helpful in tracking this theory. It was recommended that BRI examine specific components of the MRRM to determine which are the most effective and which may need to be added or deleted "in order to increase the effectiveness of the program so that its practical significance is great enough to warrant replication" (Sullivan, et al, p. 28).

Table 1 (continued)

December, 2003 Interactive, Inc. (Mann, 2003b)	This is an analysis of the achievement outcomes of 8,496 students from 72 of BRI's 78 schools implementing the MRRM and achievement outcomes of 4,673 students from 41 comparable schools implementing some aspects of the MRRM (without BRI components and assistance). BRI students performed significantly better than comparable students after 3 years with BRI. However, practical significance was not found. According to Mann (2003), "Practical significance (eta2 below) is used to talk about research findings that can be put to use in changing teaching and learning or that can make a difference in outcomes. … Practical significance can sometimes contrast with statistical significance which measures whether or not findings may be due to chance alone" (p. 2). Mann (2003) found statistically significant differences between BRI students and control students after 3 years with BRI. These differences, according to Mann (2003), are "impressive, particularly for 2nd grade students" (p. 2). The longer a student is exposed to BRI's influence, the better the student does. In light of the fact that BRI's support diminishes by 25% each year over a 4 year period, this finding is found to be very positive. Gains in student performance are found to be related to the quality of school implementation. <u>Implications for further practice and study:</u> BRI schools are using a variety of basal programs and implementation of BRI's augmented version of the MRRM is not complete or evenly distributed across BRI schools.

Table 1 (continued)

February, 2005 The University of MS Center for Educational Research and Evaluation (Sullivan, Harper, Edwards, & Lloyd, 2005a)	This study evaluated the MCT reading scores of BRI students with students in control schools (as established in 2003). Spring 2004 MCT test scores for second, third, fourth, and fifth grade students were compared with these same students' test scores in 2003 when they were a year younger. On the 2003 MCT reading test, BRI's 3rd grade cohort scored significantly higher than the 3rd grade cohorts in the comparison schools. On the 2004 MCT reading test, BRI's 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade cohorts scored significantly better than 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade cohorts in the comparison schools. Effect sizes increased from a high of .003 in 2003 to .10 in 2004. Length of time of a school's association did not appear to be related to student achievement. Based on RRC's ratings of quality of implementation of the MRRM, principal/leadership commitment was found to be strongly correlated with reading gains, particularly with those of 4th grade cohorts in BRI schools. <u>Implications for further practice and study:</u> There appears to be a trend toward higher levels of improvement at higher grades. Therefore, future studies of the cohorts who were the subjects of this study would be useful in evaluating long-term impact of BRI.

Table 1 (continued)

April, 2005 The University of MS Center for Educational Research and Evaluation (Sullivan, Harper, Edwards, & Lloyd, April, 2005b)	The purpose of this study is to rank all BRI-funded schools and all non-BRI control schools in order of their gains on the MCT reading test. Additionally, the study included the proportion of students who scored at or above the proficient level on the MCT reading test after originally scoring below proficient level. A calculation targeting BRI's impact, labeled "But for BRI" was also derived from MCT data. 322 BRI students who scored below proficient in 2nd grade scored proficient or above by 4th grade. When this data was compared with the gains found in comparisons schools, it yielded a total number of 20 BRI students who became proficient because of BRI's involvement at the school level who would not have become proficient in a comparison school (But for BRI). In another analysis, 9.8% of BRI students who were proficient in 2nd grade lost proficiency by the 4th grade, compared with non BRI students, of whom 11.7% lost proficiency between 2nd and 4th grades (But for BRI). In summary, Sullivan, et al (2005) found that the total number of BRI students in the 2004 4th grade cohort (of 3,462 students) that benefited from BRI's higher improvement rate and lower rate of decline was 73. Of the 2004 4th grade cohort that reached or maintained proficiency, 2.11% would not have done so in a comparison school (using the But for BRI calculation). Application of the 2.11% impact percentage to the 12,617 BRI students overall yielded a total of 266 students who reached proficient status or above on the MCT reading test who would not have otherwise done so in a comparison school. Sullivan, et al (2005) caution that these findings are predicated on the assumption that the comparison schools were identical and that this assumption cannot be validated. <u>Implications for further practice and study:</u> Continued tracking of cohort students is recommended. Additionally, Sullivan, et al (2005) suggest that "extensive qualitative evaluation of BRI might also yield useful information regarding components of the BRI program that might be positively or negatively affecting the impact of the program" (p. 3).

Table 1 (continued)

October, 2005 The University of MS Center for Educational Research and Evaluation (Harper, Sullivan, Edwards, & Lloyd, 2005)	This study compared 2005 MCT test scores of BRI students with those of students in comparison schools. An analysis of student cohorts in 2nd – 6th grades was conducted to determine longitudinal impact of BRI on student achievement. Statistically significant differences favored the BRI cohorts on a number of measures: • Mean scores were significantly higher for BRI Grades 3 and 4 than for the comparison group in 2005. • Score gains from 2004 to 2005 were significantly higher for BRI Grades 3, 4, and 6 than for the comparison group. • Score gains from 2003 to 2005 were significantly higher for BRI Grades 4 and 5 than for the comparison group. • The percent gaining at least one level of reading proficiency from 2004 to 2005 was significantly higher for BRI Grades 3 and 4 than for the comparison group. • The percent losing at least one level of reading proficiency from 2004 to 2005 was significantly lower for BRI Grades 3, 4, and 6 than for the comparison group. • The percent gaining at least one level of reading proficiency from 2003 to 2005 was significantly higher for BRI Grade 5 than for the comparison group. • The percent losing at least one level of reading proficiency from 2003 to 2005 was significantly lower for BRI Grade 5 than for the comparison group. (Harper, et al, 2005) Regardless of the statistically significant findings, the effect size was still too low (with eta squared scores of less than .10) to find practical significance. <u>Implications for further practice and study:</u> There are indications of BRI's positive impact on students' reading achievement; however, according to Harper, et al (2005), "Several years of significantly and substantially higher rates of growth among current and recent participants in the BRI program compared to gains of students in the comparison group will be needed to support a conclusion of this nature" (p. 23).

BRI's inability to impact student performance at a level of practical significance was of particular concern to Claiborne Barksdale. According to Harper, et al (2005),

> School districts generally would want to consider a program that produces an effect size of moderate to high magnitude (i.e. .25 or higher) because effect sizes at this level represent a moderate to high degree of difference between the intervention and control groups' scores. (p. 8)

Mann (2003b), in his evaluation of BRI's impact, noted the lack of practical significance, stating, "Practical significance (eta squared below) is used to talk about research findings that can be put to use in changing teaching and learning or that can make a difference in outcomes" (p. 2). Prior to the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, BRI contracted with Management First (Mickens, 2006) to conduct a qualitative study of BRI schools in order to:

> capture how those responsible for implementing the model really felt about what they were asked to do. The question boiled down to whether schools were accepting BRI grants solely for the money or are they sincerely committed to making fundamental changes in the way teachers teach and consequently in the way children perform. (p. 5)

Between September, 2005, and February, 2006, Mickens conducted surveys and interviews in 20 BRI schools. A total of 123 teachers were interviewed and completed surveys, along with an additional 70 teachers and 96 assistant teachers completing surveys. Additionally, 17 principals and 16 BRI liaisons were interviewed, along with 8 BRI RRCs. Mickens reported several key findings as a result of her analysis:

1. Principals and teachers are often ambivalent about BRI. While having BRI's assistance is often seen as a godsend, it also represents an admission of failure. Teachers expressed a lack of training in how to teach reading effectively, in

particular how to meet the needs of struggling readers. In spite of training by RRCs in how to provide effective instruction and interventions, many teachers, especially veteran teachers, were reluctant to try new approaches. Mickens noted that the "very uniqueness of BRI plays into fostering ambivalence" (p. 8). Because BRI represents a comprehensive overhaul in how reading is taught, it is perceived as an "intrusion and a blow to teacher autonomy and creativity" (p. 8).

2. BRI Components are implemented to some degree. Teachers and principals cited peer coaching study team (PCST) as a valued component and one that set BRI apart from other programs they had used in the past. The ongoing training teachers received in classroom management, interventions, and sequential, systematic reading instruction, were seen as being extremely helpful. Of the Reading Universe, BRI's professional development manual, teachers and principals said it was the first time for most of them that they had been exposed to the building blocks of reading instruction. One teacher described PCST and Reading Universe lessons by saying, "It's like taking a two-semester college course" (p. 9). Mickens noted, however, that "Although principals emphasize the importance of teachers attending PCST, not all are as zealous about following up to see to what extent teachers are applying what they learn" (p. 9). Regarding the TPRI, teachers often complained about how time consuming it was to administer, but understood its value in helping identify the areas of instruction children needed help in mastering. The majority of teachers discussed providing interventions for their students and recognized how they helped their students' reading achievement. One aspect of BRI's instructional approach that seemed

problematic for teachers was employing small group instruction effectively. According to Mickens, "There is a good deal of reluctance to embrace this methodology. Teachers dread the loss of control and the increased planning times" (p. 10). Probably the greatest amount of ambivalence toward BRI's instructional components was toward RTPs – the reading tutorials provided by assistant teachers. Teachers expressed their belief that, while they understand the value of RTPs for the children, the assistant teachers' time could be better utilized. Mickens concluded that schools are employing BRI components in their reading instruction, although there is some discrepancy in how completely they are doing so. It appears, however, that the longer a school is with BRI, the greater their acceptance and the more teachers embrace the model.

3. BRI implementation is only as good as its leadership. The role of the RRC, according to Mickens, is pivotal in implementing the BRI model. Unclear, however, is the RRC's ability to overcome resistance and gain acceptance by the school staff. Mickens points out, "It is important that RRCs are seen as a part of the team at the school, as opposed to the intrusive 'Big Sister' who is coming in with all the answers" (p. 11). BRI liaisons, according to Mickens (2006) are often too busy with their teaching duties to do much more than oversee the ordering and distribution of books and materials, and, therefore, are unable to provide leadership in facilitating the implementation of the BRI model. The most significant factor in determining the extent to which a school benefits from BRI is the principal. According to Mickens, only 4 of the 17 principals interviewed discussed their reasons for applying for a BRI grant in terms of the outcomes for

children and only one of the principals mentioned researching which program would be most beneficial to students.

Mickens (2006) listed the following barriers to BRI implementation by schools:

- Tendency to view BRI as a program.
- Using supplemental reading programs in conjunction with BRI. (For example, in one school that used Success for All, teachers were satisfied with the program in place and, therefore, found BRI to be a "waste of time" (p. 14).
- Ineffective observation and monitoring by principals, liaisons, and RRCs.
- Failure to utilize teachers with special training. Teachers who already have a certain level of expertise in BRI components are not utilized effectively as trainers.
- Teacher assistant role not fully developed.
- RRC "fit" – in some instances there was a question about RRC competence or personality.
- Frequent changes – According to Mickens, "A sore point with some schools was their perception that BRI changed something every year. They especially hate to change the RRC. Changes in the instrument for reading assessment was also mentioned. Each change appears to be a bit of a setback or at least another reason to resist change" (p. 15).
- Liaisons who are also classroom teachers and, therefore, do not have time to provide real assistance to other teachers.
- Failure to incorporate BRI strategies/methodologies into all of instruction.

- Difficulty understanding the value of data collection. Many teachers and principals complained about the amount of paperwork required by BRI.
- Principals and teachers who resent time devoted to PCST
- Inability of teachers to perform honest self-assessments about their own strengths and weaknesses or speak of themselves as not having any areas in need of improvement.
- Reluctance to work as a team.

Issues of fidelity and implementation had been an ongoing concern for BRI and there were questions about the effectiveness of principals in monitoring teacher implementation of quality reading instruction, including small group and phonics instruction. At issue, also, was the ability of BRI's RRCs to influence teachers and administrators effectively (Mickens, 2006). Until the end of the 2004-05 school year BRI attempted to monitor school implementation through a self-reporting system in which RRC's would gather information from teachers on several factors such as the number of students receiving small group instruction, interventions, RTPs, etc. This data collection system was highly ineffective because, as is often the case with self-reporting systems, teachers often told the RRC what they knew was expected of them, and without controls in place to assess the validity of the teachers' reports, the data was generally invalid. Therefore, the effectiveness of relying so heavily on RRCs in the field to affect change in reading instruction in BRI schools was a source of much deliberation among BRI administrators (C. Barksdale, personal communication, February 3, 2006).

A New Approach to Reforming Reading Instruction

After several years of making a statistically significant difference in student achievement in BRI schools, but without practical significance, Claiborne Barksdale had begun considering extensive changes in BRIs approach to affecting change in the reading achievement of Mississippi's school children. In late Spring, 2005, Claiborne Barksdale announced his intention of piloting a new approach to reading reform by establishing demonstration classrooms in three BRI schools. While maintaining his RRC staff for the 2005-06 school year, three Barksdale Literacy Teachers (BLTs) and three Intervention Specialists (ISs) would be employed to teach struggling readers in schools in Jackson, Hattiesburg, and Moss Point, Mississippi (Collins, 2005).

One of the BRI administrators agreed to work as a BLT in a pilot classroom in Jackson, MS. A second BLT was hired to oversee a demonstration classroom in Moss Point, MS, and I, the researcher in this dissertation, was hired as a BLT in a demonstration class in Hattiesburg, MS. During the 2005-06 school year RRCs continued to work with schools other than those with demonstration classes. The three BLTs served the dual role as teacher trainer conducting weekly PCST meetings and lead teacher in the demonstration class. In addition, the BLTs supervised the work of an Intervention Specialist (IS) and, in two of the pilot demonstration schools, an Assistant Teacher (AT) provided by the school district. Instruction in the demonstration classroom was modeled after NRP (NIH, 2000) findings regarding scientifically based reading research. Core reading instruction was delivered by the BLTs to small groups of 6 students using a reading program called Read Well (Sopris West, 2006). The IS provided prescribed reading interventions to children in small groups of 3. The AT was responsible for

providing supplemental activities to groups of 6 students based on core instruction. During the 2005-06 pilot year, core instruction was provided for Kindergarten through 3rd grade, with 18 students in each grade for 1 ½ hours for each grade group. Students were selected to participate in the demonstration class based on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS, 2006) and TPRI (2006). Kindergarten through 3rd grade students who were determined to be the most at risk for reading failure, and who were not otherwise receiving assistance through special education services, were assigned to the demonstration class for reading instruction. Grade level reading instruction was conducted simultaneously so that, for example, when 1st grade students went to the demonstration class for reading instruction, the students who remained in their classrooms were, likewise, receiving reading instruction. Students who did not go to the demonstration classroom for reading instruction benefited by having fewer students in their classroom during reading instruction with their classroom teacher. Teachers benefited by having only the more capable readers in their room for reading instruction and, while it was often necessary for them to provide intervention at times to these students, they were not responsible for providing interventions to the students who were the most problematic. The teachers and administrators within the school were required to observe instruction in the demonstration class as part of their professional development. It was the expectation of BRI that teachers would employ the methodologies observed in the demonstration class in their own classes during reading instruction.

A prominent feature of the pilot demonstration classroom was the use of assessments to direct and differentiate instruction. Once students were placed in the class, their progress was monitored using DIBELS progress monitoring assessments.

TPRI and DIBELS benchmark assessments were administered, too, in January and May, 2006. In February, 2006, the three BLTs met with BRI administrators to analyze the data that had been collected up to that point and discuss the prospects for extending the demonstration classroom program. It was decided at that meeting that the Read Well program, which was designed as a kindergarten and 1st grade program, was inappropriate as core instruction for 2nd and 3rd grade. Therefore, it was decided that any future demonstration classroom program would provide core instruction for kindergarten and 1st grade, but would only provide intervention for 2nd and 3rd grade struggling readers. Read Well would still be used with the 2nd and 3rd grade students, but these students would receive core instruction in the basal series with their classes and would only have Read Well instruction as intervention in the demonstration classroom.

In the spring of 2006, BRI decided, based on the data generated from informal assessments administered to students in the pilot demonstration classrooms, that they would expand the demonstration classroom project across the state (Hayden, 2006a). Demonstration classrooms appeared to be more promising in affecting change in the literacy levels of Mississippi children than using RRCs within the schools working with teachers. Therefore, the RRC position was eliminated and each of the nine RRCs were given the opportunity to work as a BLT in a demonstration classroom. One of the RRCs chose not to accept a BLT position and sought employment elsewhere. Two reading specialists, who had regularly attended RRC meetings and training sessions, employed by the University of Mississippi agreed to work in demonstration classrooms. The BRI administrator, who had been working as a BLT, resumed her administrative position at BRI. Therefore, with the 9 BRI RRCs, the 2 reading specialists from the University of

Mississippi, and 2 returning BLTs from the pilot project, a total 13 BLTs overseeing 13 demonstration classrooms throughout the state of Mississippi during the 2006-07 school year became the new BRI literacy program for schools across Mississippi. Claiborne Barksdale began contacting schools receiving BRI grants to discuss the demonstration classroom program with them. Those schools who were interested in becoming a demonstration classroom site would be provided a BLT and Intervention Specialist (IS) by BRI and, in return the school would supply the classroom and furnishings and an Assistant Teacher (AT). By the end of the 2005-06 school year, the sites for the upcoming demonstration classrooms were secured and the BLTs were assigned to their respective schools. For the most part, the IS positions had also been filled by the end of the 2006-07 school year.

Training of all the newly assigned BLTs and ISs was conducted for 3 weeks during the month of July, 2006. Because of the intensity of the training that would be needed, a conference center was reserved in central Mississippi where all the BLTs and ISs would stay and attend training sessions in the Read Well program, TPRI and DIBELS assessments, reading interventions, and *The Reading Universe* (BRI's professional development series). In addition, for 2 weeks, BRI conducted a reading camp for kindergarten and 1st grade students in a nearby school district at a local school to give the new BLTs and ISs an opportunity to observe the 3 BLTs from the previous school year and to practice methodologies they would be using in the demonstration classrooms.

A Detailed Description of the Barksdale Demonstration Classroom Project

Because of the uniqueness of the demonstration classroom project, a more detailed description of its features is warranted. There are 13 demonstration classrooms across the state of Mississippi in 12 different schools and each of them share several common features.

Barksdale Literacy Teacher (BLT)

The BLT is the lead teacher in the demonstration classroom and, as such, is considered the lead literacy teacher in the school. A BLT, by definition, is an expert in the field of reading instruction. BLTs are exempt from certain responsibilities at the school level, such as bus, lunch room, or hall duty. Originally, in the spring of 2006, in order to qualify as a BLT, it was necessary to have a Master's Degree in Education (this requirement has since been relaxed and teachers with Bachelor of Science degrees and state certification can serve as BLTs). The RRCs are highly qualified to serve as BLTs, not only because of their education, experience as classroom teachers, and experience in the field as teacher trainers, but also because of the professional development they have received through their employment with BRI. Periodically, since its beginning, BRI has invited prominent reading researchers to participate and provide training in RRC meetings. Leaders in the field of reading, such as Joseph Torgesen from Florida State University and Marilyn Adams, author of *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (1990) have met with BRI and provided training for RRCs.

Intervention Specialist (IS)

The IS position was conceived as a beginning teacher who would provide interventions to students as prescribed by the BLT. The IS would not provide core instruction and would benefit as a beginning teacher by working closely with an experienced lead teacher. Like the BLT, the IS is exempt from certain responsibilities such as bus, lunch room, and hall duty. In addition to providing interventions, the IS assists the BLT in administering assessments and planning instruction. During the 2006-2007 school year, the IS was also required to use the Read Well program as intervention instruction for 2nd and 3rd graders. The IS position has changed somewhat since the beginning of the demonstration classroom program because some of those positions have been filled by more experienced teachers – some of whom are highly qualified, retired teachers. During the 2006-07 school year, only 5 of the ISs were either new teachers or teachers with less than 2 years of experience. The rest of the IS positions are filled with a diverse group of certified teachers. One IS is a retired high school teacher with 50 years of teaching experience.

The Demonstration Classroom and Furnishings

A certain amount of uniformity exists among all the demonstration classrooms in how they are arranged and furnished. Figure 1 provides a diagram of a typical demonstration classroom. While some of the classrooms are located in portable buildings in deteriorating schools and others are located in state of the art refurbished or newly built schools, the interior of the classrooms are relatively the same. The school district is asked to provide one kidney shaped table for the BLT to use during small group

instruction and two more tables (either round or kidney shaped) for the IS and AT. Six student chairs for each table are to be provided by the district, as well as chairs for the 3 teachers. Some demonstration classrooms separate different parts of the room with lattice work partitions suspended from the ceiling or with bookcases.

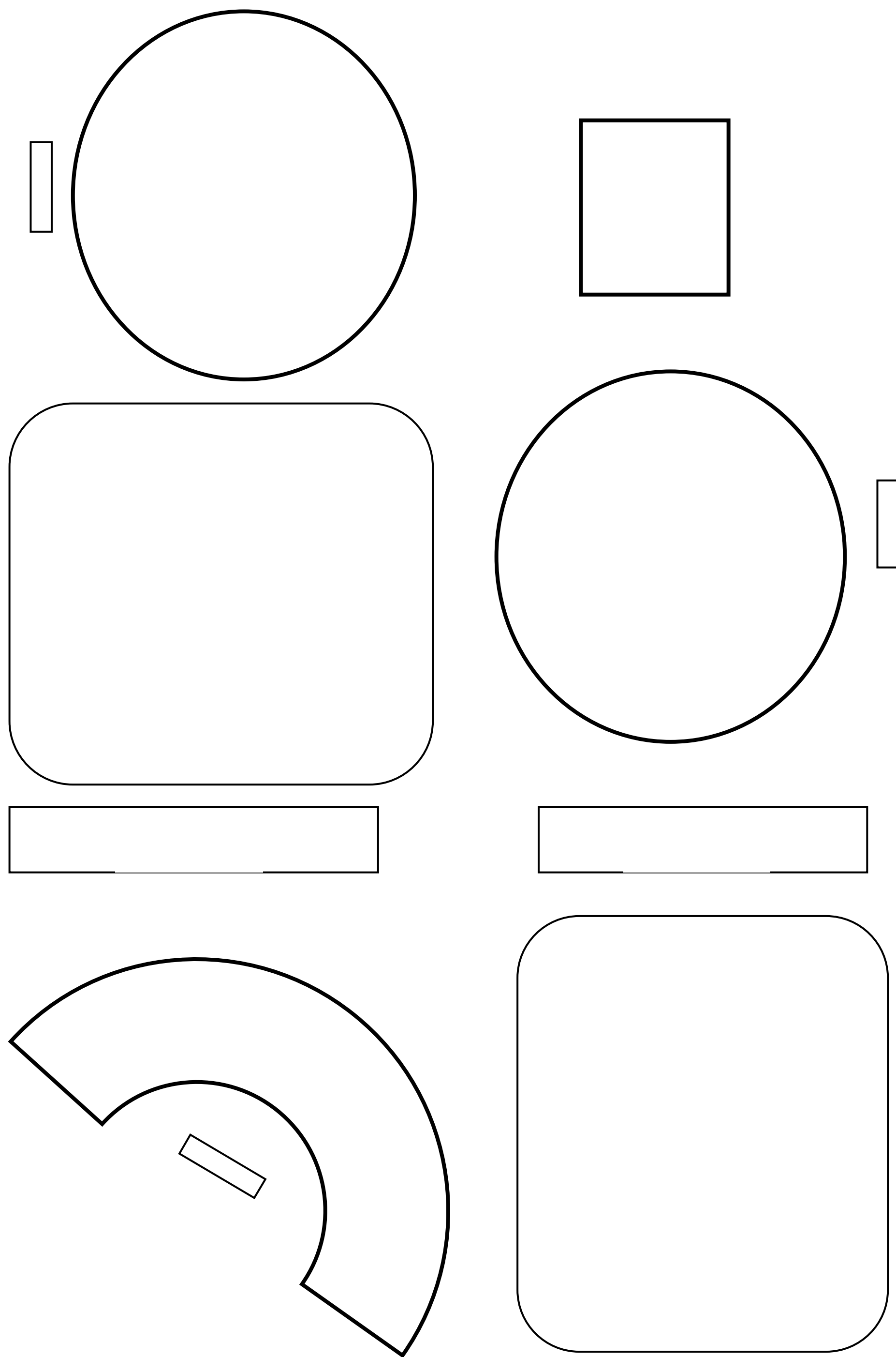

Figure 1

Demonstration Classroom Layout

Another common feature of the demonstration classrooms is the separate whole group areas for kindergarten and 1st grade. On one wall is displayed the Read Well - Kindergarten alphabet cards and poem posters and on another wall in the room is the Read Well – First Grade alphabet cards and poem posters. There is a large rug in front of the Read Well – Kindergarten alphabet cards where the kindergarten students sit during whole group story time, alphabet review, and whole group instruction. Often there is a second large rug in front of the Read Well – First Grade alphabet cards where 1st grade receives whole group instruction. Some BLTs have 1st graders remain in their seats at the tables for whole group instruction or sit in chairs in front of the alphabet cards. There is also some uniformity in the demonstration classrooms about how materials and assessments are stored. BRI provides storage containers for the AT's materials and color coded notebooks for Read Well assessment materials.

Instructional Materials and Curriculum

The greatest uniformity in demonstration classrooms is in the instruction. The Read Well program was chosen by BRI administrators because all five of the basic elements of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) are taught daily (Sopris West, 2006). Read Well is a highly structured, scripted program for kindergarten and 1st grade. Read Well – Kindergarten has both a whole group component as well as a small group component. Read Well – First Grade is designed for small group instruction with suggestions for whole group thematic units and read alouds. There is an expectation of fidelity to the Read Well program within the demonstration classrooms, although it is not expected that the script be followed

verbatim. Since the demonstration classrooms serve as a model for small group instruction, Read Well's small group components are the basis of core reading instruction and are considered the cornerstone of the demonstration classroom. Both the kindergarten and first grade small group units consist of units. The kindergarten units are called magazines which are consumable. They consist of 6 black and white pages. The first page/magazine cover highlights the letter that is to be learned and a race track game to be used as a review. Each subsequent page in the magazine has guided letter/sound reading practice and reinforcement activities and games. Slinky –type toys are used during small group instruction with the magazines as a way to practice stretching and shrinking words in order to develop phonemic awareness. The units are also accompanied by a guided reading, decodable book with duet and solo stories. Duet stories contain small print that is read by the teacher as well as rebuses and large print read by the students with the teacher. A teacher script is written in small print throughout the duet stories to provide assistance in teaching vocabulary and comprehension. Solo stories are exclusively written with large print and rebuses so that, after repeated guided practice with the teacher, they can be read independently by the student. Read Well – First Grade materials are very similar to the kindergarten materials with the exception that first grade unit materials are bound in a workbook format, contain only 4 pages, and are not consumable. The accompanying books are similar – with duet and solo stories. Read Well – First Grade also has consumable workbooks for the students to use in practicing skills. In the 1st grade demonstration classroom, the AT oversees the completion of workbook pages.

One of the benefits of using Read Well is its functionality in differentiating instruction. When the 18 students from each grade were initially assigned to the demonstration classes, they were administered a Read Well placement assessment. The students were then assigned to a group of 6 students based on their Read Well unit placement. In an average classroom it can be assumed that some students would begin in a prelude unit (which means that they need to develop certain skills in order to begin in Unit 1), other students would begin in Unit 1, and other students might be able to begin in a later unit. In demonstration classrooms, since all of the students have been assessed as being at-risk of reading failure, with few exceptions, the students began the school year in a prelude unit or Unit 1. Once small group instruction begins in the Read Well units, instruction is differentiated based on the pace with which the groups successfully complete the units. The teacher manuals that accompany each small group unit offer several options for pacing. Some groups are able to move fairly rapidly through the units, while other groups may need 2 weeks or more on a unit. The skills taught in small group are intended to be taught to mastery. Therefore, the decision to move to the next unit is dependant on the students' successful completion of a unit assessment. Since the program is designed so that a group can only move to the next unit once each student has passed the unit assessment, the teacher sometimes has to make a calculated decision regarding how to proceed when only 1 or 2 students is unable to pass the assessment regardless of a protracted time on a unit. Sometimes, particular skill deficits are referred to the IS so that the group can proceed on to the next Read Well unit.

The IS is permitted broader discretion liberty in the selection of materials used for interventions. Actual books and reading passages are not used during intervention

lessons, however. Interventions are primarily focused on giving students practice with phonemic awareness skills such as segmenting words into individual phonemes initial sound fluency. Pictures are commonly used when practicing phonemic awareness skills (for example, pictures of a pig, a plane, a pancake may be shown to a child as they are asked to say the sound that the all begin with -- /p/). Phonological skills such are rhyming and syllabication are addressed by the IS as needed. As students advance as novice readers, letters are used to facilitate letter/sound correspondence and word building activities.

During the 2nd and 3rd grade intervention classes, Read Well is used by the BLT and IS as the primary resource. The AT, however, is assigned the task of overseeing independent reading with the Accelerated Reader program and fluency training using the book *The Six-Minute Solution: A Reading Fluency Program* (Adams & Brown, 2003). Using *The Six-Minute Solution* with a prescribed format of guided, independent, and timed reading of word lists and/or page long reading passages, the AT works with groups of 5 students measuring and charting growth in fluency rates.

Small Group Instruction and Classroom Management

Small group instruction is managed in much the same way in kindergarten and 1st grade demonstration classrooms. In many of the demonstration classrooms, 2 hours is allotted for 1st grade and 1 ½ hours is allotted for kindergarten. In other demonstration classrooms 1 ½ hours is allotted for both 1st grade and kindergarten. Regardless of the discrepancy in allotted time for instruction, there is uniformity in how time is used for reading instruction. The first part of class is devoted to whole class instruction, reading

aloud, introducing letter names and sounds, recitation of the alphabet, shared reading of letter chants and poems, and singing songs. What follows is small group instruction in which groups of 6 students rotate from the BLT's table, to the IS's table and independent center work, to the AT's table. The rotation is relatively routine and not much different than most early childhood class rotations during center activities. It is unique however, with respect to the IS's instructional time. The IS divides each group of 6 into 2 smaller groups of 3 to facilitate interventions more effectively. While 1 group of 3 is receiving interventions from the IS, the other group of 3 participates in literacy center activities (word games, writing, listening center, reading solo stories, etc.). Each child, therefore, receives interventions from the IS 2 days and participates in literacy centers for 2 days each week. In demonstration classes that see students for 2 hours each day for reading instruction, whole group instruction lasts 30 minutes and each small group rotation lasts 30 minutes. In demonstration classes that see students for 1 ½ hours each day, whole group instruction lasts 20 minutes and each small group rotation lasts for 20-25 minutes.

Monday through Thursday instruction follows the same routine. Friday, however, is deemed a "cooperative learning" day for kindergarten and 1st grade. While the BLT, IS, and AT work together to plan Friday instruction, the lessons and activities are primarily delivered and overseen by the IS and AT. Friday, for the BLTs, is intended to be a day for administering assessments when needed and planning. The 2nd and 3rd grade students do not come to the demonstration classroom for interventions on Friday. Therefore, Friday afternoons are available for the IS and AT to use for planning for the coming week. Kindergarten and 1st grade cooperative learning activities are generally

literature based (on books read aloud or Read Well books). Additionally, students participate in literacy games and center activities on Fridays.

Second and 3rd grade intervention schedules are markedly different from the kindergarten and 1st grade schedules. The Mississippi Department of Education, in part, has determined the schedule for students only receiving interventions in the demonstration classroom. First of all, the students work within groups of 5, since this is the maximum group size for students receiving interventions according to MDE guidelines. Next, the students work with either the IS or the BLT for 30 minutes each day for intervention with Read Well. One hour was devoted to 2nd grade interventions and one hour was devoted to 3rd grade interventions. Twenty 2nd graders and twenty 3rd graders were assigned to the demonstration classrooms for interventions, where they would work in small groups of five. The original design for 2nd and 3rd grade required the students to be in the demonstration classroom for 45 minutes each day Monday through Friday for 30 minutes of intervention instruction and either 15 minutes doing fluency lessons with the AT or 15 minutes of reading AR books independently. The schedule consisted of overlapping groups coming and going from the room at staggered times and, for some BLTs and classroom teachers, proved to be unmanageable or inefficient. Therefore, as the 2006-07 school year proceeded, the schedule was altered in some demonstration classrooms so that either all the 2nd grade students were in the room for the entire hour or there was no overlapping of groups.

Assessments

Three different assessments are used in all the demonstration classrooms: DIBELS, TPRI, and Read Well Assessments. The DIBELS assessments are "standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development" (DIBELS, 2006). DIBELS are designed to be quick one minute assessments that measure a series of reading skills: Initial Sound Fluency (ISF), Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), Retell Fluency (RTF), and Word Use Fluency (WUF). The measures were developed to assess specific learning domains as discussed in the NRP (NIH, 2000). They are designed to be used to evaluate individual student development as well as provide feedback to schools regarding progress toward meeting instructional objectives (DIBELS, 2006). The TPRI is a comprehensive assessment of individual student reading development. Beginning with a screening process, the TPRI uses an inventory of skills to develop a profile of a student's strengths and areas in need of more focused attention (TPRI, 2006). Like DIBELS, TPRI is administered individually.

A fairly strict schedule is followed in administering the DIBELS benchmark assessments and the TPRI at the beginning of the year, mid-year, and the end of the year. The first 2 weeks of school in August, 2006, were devoted to administering DIBELS and TPRI assessments to all Kindergarten through 3rd grade students in each of the schools. An assessment team consisting of representatives from each grade was enlisted at the school level to facilitate this wide-spread effort. The initial DIBELS and TPRI assessments were used to select the 18 kindergarten and 18 1st grade students who would be a part of the demonstration class program, as well as the 20 2nd grade and 20 3rd grade

students who would receive reading interventions in each of the demonstration classrooms. The mid-year assessments were administered in most of the schools during the first two weeks of school following the winter break. BRI specifies not only the dates on which assessments will be administered but also, for the mid-year and end-of-year assessments, how the task will be accomplished while not interrupting the schedule for kindergarten and 1st grade reading classes. During the 2 week period when assessments are being administered by the BLT and IS along with the school's assessment team, the AT oversees reading instruction in the demonstration class, with the children participating in literacy activities, reading of Read Well solo stories and center activities.

While DIBELS benchmark assessments and the TPRI are administered 3 times a year, DIBELS progress monitoring assessments are administered monthly. Kindergarten students are administered the Initial Sound Fluency Progress Monitoring Assessment monthly; 1st grade students are administered the Nonsense Word Fluency Progress Monitoring Assessment monthly; and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade students are administered Oral Reading Fluency Progress Monitoring Assessment monthly.

Read Well provides its own assessments as part of its program. Initially students are administered a placement assessment in order to determine in which unit they will be placed when they begin small group instruction. Once the students begin small group instruction they are administered an individual assessment upon completion of each unit. Only when all members of a group successfully pass the end of unit assessment is the group able to proceed to the next unit. If the Read Well assessments are followed with fidelity, a group can move very slowly through the units, based on one or two students' inability to successfully master particular skills.

Amidst the changes in BRI's approach to reading reform, the Mississippi Department of Education was in the process of reviewing and revising its annual assessment, the MCT in accordance with requirements by the United States Department of Education requirements for an alignment study (MDE, 2006a). Of particular importance to BRI was the combining of the reading and language arts tests, the elimination of the 2nd grade test, and the increased rigor of the assessments. The implications for BRI included: the difficulty in maintaining longitudinal data for tracking student achievement in BRI schools with the combination of the language arts and reading tests; and the increased rigor that would create alarm among all Mississippi schools. Many Mississippi schools that have been rated as successful based on MCT scores will very likely lose that status with more rigorous testing. BRI had already begun questioning the validity of MCT reading scores in light of their use of DIBELS and TPRI assessments and the discrepancies between grade level expectations for fluency rates and students' level of proficiency on the MCT reading test. BRI conducted an internal study of BRI students' MCT scores compared with their TPRI and DIBELS results (BRI, 2006). While the majority of the students scored at the proficiency level on the MCT, many of those students had fluency rates far below grade level expectations. Likewise, it was found that some students who scored at the advanced level on MCT were assessed on the TPRI as not being fully developed, according to grade level expectations. Therefore, an increase in rigor on the expected student scores on the revised MCT would be more in alignment with student scores on the DIBELS and TPRI assessments. The revised MCT is scheduled to be field tested in the 2006-07 school year, the first school year in which BRI's demonstration classroom project is implemented.

Accelerated Reader

BRI provided assistance in maintaining, beginning, or reviving the Accelerated Reader (AR) (2006) program each of the 12 schools with demonstration classrooms. Schools already using the AR program efficiently received funds for additional AR books for the school library. Other schools had the AR program but it had not been well maintained and was not being used efficiently for the benefit of the students. These schools received AR training for their faculty and funds for AR books in the library. A few schools did not have AR in the schools at all. These schools were given the AR program, books, computers, tests, and training. All of the schools with demonstration classrooms were required to be networked with the national AR program, rather than through the school district's network. This was so that BRI would have access to data generated through the AR program – the number of tests being taken by students, the average scores on those tests, etc.

The Goal of the Demonstration Classroom Project

The demonstration classroom project reflects a new reform model for teaching students at risk for reading failure. As Osborn (2003) noted, accomplishing reform within public schools is a difficult undertaking and reading education, in particular, is contentious. BRI met the challenge of reforming reading education by placing BLTs within the schools to work with children at risk of reading failure. BRI administrators organized the demonstration classroom program with an emphasis on uniformity and fidelity because of the need to evaluate the program's effectiveness. If the program is successful, BRI will consider implementation in more schools and, possibly, the program

will serve as a model for the Mississippi Department of Education to use in schools across the state. Claiborne and James Barksdale have established grand goals. As illustrated by BRI's success in adding two early literacy/phonics classes to teacher education programs in Mississippi colleges and universities, the Barksdales will use their influence with state agencies and officials to meet their goals. Claiborne Barksdale (personal communication, January 5, 2007) explained, "The whole program is founded on the idea that we can get MDE and the Legislature to support expanding it state-wide." If BRI is successful in having the demonstration classroom program replicated throughout the state, this study is valuable as documentation of its first year of implementation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of 12 of the Barksdale Literacy Teachers as they establish demonstration reading classes in Mississippi schools. While the Barksdale Reading Institute's focus in this project is the improvement of the literacy levels of the children enrolled in the demonstration classes, the focus of this study will be the story of the teachers as an element of change in the academic lives of young children. Of interest, too, will be the teachers' experiences as elements of change in the overall climate of the schools in which they will work. Student achievement will be discussed, since it is the basis of the entire experience; however, it will be viewed generically and only through the lens of the teachers as part of their narratives.

This study will serve to inform the Barksdale Reading Institute regarding the feasibility of implementing demonstration classes on a larger scale in the future. As noted by Yatvin (2000), too often researchers cite teaching methodologies that benefit

struggling readers, but fail to consider whether or not these methods are adaptable to a classroom environment. This study will provide insight from expert reading instructors, BLTs, as they employ several different methodologies that have been cited by the National Reading Panel (NIH, 2000) as effective in teaching reading.

Research Questions

The Research Question for this study is: How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe their experiences in their first year as a BLT? In order to fully address this Research Question, these more specific questions will be addressed:

1. How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe their experiences in the first year of implementing demonstration classes?
2. How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe their work with young children at risk of reading failure?
3. How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe their experiences as agents of change within a school's structure and approach to reading instruction?
4. How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe teaching reading using the strategies and methodologies promoted by the National Reading Panel?

Importance of the Study

Reforming Reading Instruction in Mississippi through Demonstration Classes: Barksdale Literacy Teachers' First Year Experiences contributes to reading reform research in several ways. It documents the first year of implementation of a unique model for reforming reading instruction through demonstration classrooms and addresses scientifically based reading reform methods endorsed by the NRP and, therefore, it adds

to the growing body of reading intervention research. This is a qualitative study and, therefore, provides a more complete picture of reading instruction with struggling readers by focusing attention on the teachers who are on the frontline of implementing the demonstration classroom program.

While many reading reform models are comprehensive, school-wide efforts that include everything from parental involvement to character education, and others attempt to meet the needs of struggling readers through relatively short interventions that last a few days or several months (Borman, Cookson, Sadovnik, & Spade, 1996), this study examines a new model for working with students at risk for reading failure. The demonstration classroom program is designed to meet the needs of struggling readers by offering core reading instruction as well as intense, systematic intervention for an entire school year. This more focused reading reform model is unique and, therefore, worthy of examination.

This study contributes to reading intervention research by documenting how expert teachers in a demonstration classroom use the scientifically based reading research methods in a classroom. Yatvin (2000) questioned whether all of the methods found to be superior by the NRP in teaching children to read could be reasonably implemented in the classroom. She suggested that the NRP should have examined how the methods are or could be implemented in real classrooms.

Critics of the National Reading Panel have cited the lack of qualitative research in their meta-analysis of reading research (Pearson, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Yatvin, 2000). Purcell-Gates (2000) suggested that qualitative research can be useful in addressing issues that are not easily examined through quantitative research methods,

such as race, culture, and poverty. This study provides insight into the experiences of BLTs teaching children who are at risk of reading failure and who also live in predominantly African American, low socioeconomic communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because the broad scope of this study touches on so many issues at the forefront of reading research and policy today, the literature review focuses on several key aspects that are anticipated as being relevant in discussions with the subject of the study, the BLTs. First, literature related to the National Reading Panel is reviewed in order to describe its history, its relevance to current research and practice, and critiques of its methodologies, findings and use. Next, literature related to intervention studies is reviewed to examine the current body of research on instruction with struggling readers. This is followed by a review of literature related to three aspects of the BRI demonstration classroom program that distinguish it from other programs that target the needs of struggling readers and are the focus of much of the instruction overseen by the BLT: phonological and phonemic awareness, fluency, and small group instruction. Finally, literature related to effective teaching and the thoughtful teacher (Pearson, 2005) is reviewed.

The National Reading Panel

The history and philosophy of BRI has been intertwined with the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis of reading research and its recommendations for effective reading instruction. The National Reading Panel was convened by the Director of the

National Institute of Health and Human Development (NICHD), in consultation with the Secretary of Education, in 1997 at the behest of the Congress. The goal of the NRP was to assess the status of reading research as well as the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching reading. According to Shanahan (1999), the fundamental idea behind he federal government's establishment of a review panel was to establish a standard of quality for teaching reading and, therefore, restore public confidence in schools. The NRP was composed of 14 individuals who were considered (as directed by Congress) "leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents" (NIH, 2000, p. 1-1). The final report was to be submitted by November, 1998. However, when this deadline proved to be insufficient for the work to be completed, the NRP was given permission to extend the deadline to February, 1999. The Report of the National Reading Panel, and the Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the Subgroups was submitted to Congress and published at the completion of the NRP's analysis.

The NRP built upon and expanded the existing report of the National Research Council (NRC) Committee on Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), which did not specifically address the most effective methodologies, materials, and approaches to use for teaching children to read.

The initial work of the NRP involved determining how to accomplish a comprehensive analysis of reading research and how to make the work manageable. A preliminary examination of public databases revealed that approximately 100,000 research studies on reading had been published since 1966 (and more than 15,000 prior to 1966). Therefore, the next task undertaken by the Panel was the narrowing of their focus

to a set of prioritized topics. Regional Public Hearings were held in Chicago, IL, Portland, OR, Houston, TX, New York, NY, and Jackson, MS, in order to provide an opportunity for teachers, parents, students, and policymakers to voice their needs and concerns regarding reading research and instruction. Approximately 125 individuals and organizations representing parents, students, and members of the educational and scientific community provided written or oral testimony to the NRP. Following the regional meetings and debate among the NRP members, the following topics were selected for intensive study: (a) alphabetics (phonemic awareness and phonics instruction); (b) fluency; (c) comprehension (vocabulary, text comprehension, and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction); (d) teacher education and reading instruction; and (e) computer technology and reading instruction (NIH, 2000).

The NRP recognized the limits of the analysis and the exclusion of a number of issues relevant to reading instruction and stated,

> The Panel's silence on other topics should not be interpreted as indicating that other topics have no importance or that improvement in those areas would not lead to greater reading achievement. It was simply the sheer number of studies identified by Panel staff relevant to reading … that precluded an exhaustive analysis of the research in all areas of potential interest. (NIH, 2000, pp. 1-3)

Although the Panel had already narrowed its focus to 5 topics, decisions were made regarding methodology in order to further narrow the scope of the analysis. Initially, it was decided that any study selected for consideration had to focus directly on children's reading development from preschool through grade 12, and had to be published in English in a refereed journal. Studies initially selected for consideration were then screened to determine if additional criteria could be met: participants had to be carefully

described; interventions had to be described with sufficient detail so that the study could be replicated; methods used in the study had to allow for judgments about instruction; fidelity had to be ensured; and a full description of outcome measures had to be included. Finally, only experimental or quasi-experimental (only when an insufficient number of experimental studies were available) studies were considered for inclusion in the analysis. In the event that there were an insufficient number of studies available to examine a particular topic, the Panel included correlational or descriptive studies that concurred with the experimental studies that were available. "No claim could be determined on the basis of descriptive or correlational research alone" (NIH, 2000, p. 1-7).

Once the studies used in the final analysis were compared, each study was coded. Next, an NRP subgroup determined whether there was sufficient data generated from the studies to conduct a meaningful meta-analysis of each topic. In the absence of sufficient data, the subgroup could decide to conduct a literature analysis of a particular issue or question without a meta-analysis, incorporating all the information gained from the literature in the NRP report. Effect sizes were calculated for studies when feasible. The effect sizes were analyzed as part of the meta- analysis in order to estimate a particular treatment's impact on reading instruction as well as the treatment's impact under different methodological conditions, program contexts and features, population differences, and outcome measures (NIH, 2000, p. 1-10).

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of the NRP Report and the impact it has had on reading policy and instruction since its publication. Its completion coincided with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 and, therefore, the findings of the NRP became codified as federal law shortly after its release. While many

members of the educational community hold the NRP report in high esteem, others criticize the Panel's findings on several fronts. According to Krashen (2003),

> The NRP's conclusions have virtually become 'law of the land.' State and local reading plans mirror the NRP's conclusions, and federal funding requires allegiance to them. In fact, as noted earlier, they have become axiomatic, considered by some to be proven facts rather than hypotheses. (p. 1)

For those who support the NRP's findings, the report represented the final chapter in the long-standing debate between phonics advocates and those who favor a whole language approach to reading instruction. The NRP report was closely aligned with the findings of reading researchers and theorists who had been advocating for phonics instruction since the 1950s (Flesch, 1955; Chall, 1967). This has lead to the criticism that the NRP members were appointed, in part, because of their theoretical stance and, therefore, the conclusions reached by the Panel were a foregone conclusion. The National Council for Teachers of English (2002) challenged NRP's findings, stating, "The research examined does not represent the full range of scientifically valid research methodology, but appears to have been chosen as selective support for a preconceived notion of what constitutes best practice" (p. 2). Coles (2001) stated that the outcome of the NRP report was predictable and showed that "the majority of the panel had publications and public materials that revealed they shared reading theories and instructional views with those who selected them" (p. 28).

Far from settling the long-standing debate between advocates of skills based approach to reading instruction and advocates of a whole language approach, the NRP report has actually drawn the line in the sand more clearly between the two approaches.

While the skills-based approach is fairly straight-forward in its defined approach to teaching reading, the term whole language is used to mean a variety of different approaches, methodologies, and learning theories. Krashen (2000) defines whole language in terms of the input or comprehension hypothesis which, quite simply means that literacy and language develop in much the same way. Therefore, as young children are guided toward acquiring and understanding spoken language, they are guided toward understanding written text. The teacher's job is to provide opportunities for children to explore written text and, therefore, learn to understand it. The teaching of skills is only employed to facilitate comprehension of text.

In the late 1980s and 90s there was a move toward finding consensus between whole language and phonics-based approaches. This movement has been referred to as balanced literacy or a balanced approach. Strict advocates of a skills based approach, however denigrate any reference to balance in reading instruction, claiming that it is simply a disguise for whole language (Moats, 2000). Any reading instruction that is not strictly phonics based has become associated with whole language. For example, Berninger, Abbott, Vermeulen, and Fulton (2006) studied 2nd graders at risk for reading disability with the purpose of examining 2 distinctly different paths to reading comprehension. One path to reading comprehension focused primarily on vocabulary and verbal reasoning (an approach more aligned with whole language). The other path focused on written language and multiple links between subskills. Figure 2 presents this relationship

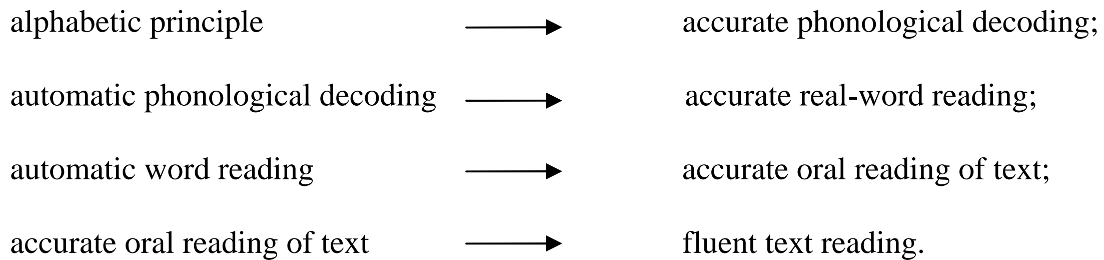

Figure 2

Path from Subskills to Fluent Reading

Berninger, et al (2006) found that the explicit, systematic teaching of subskills was more effective in leading students to the ultimate goal of comprehending text. Interestingly, the elements of explicit, systematic teaching of subskills, while seemingly narrowly defined, can encompass almost any methodology that is found to be effective; whole language methodology is defined in broad terms that can encompass almost anything that one wishes to find ineffective. Research endorsed by those aligned with the NRP findings examines the effects of subskill instruction. Therefore, by the very nature of its investigation of a subskill, it is accepted as scientifically based reading research (SBRR) (Pearson, 2005, contends that SBRR is defined as whatever the NRP says it is.) However, research that examines a more comprehensive program, or approach, to reading instruction, that takes into consideration the effects of an environment or motivation, is not considered SBRR because it cannot be easily fit into one of the NRP categories of reading elements. For example, Reading Recovery (2006) is a program that offers a variety of methods for teaching struggling readers, many of which are aligned with a skills-based approach. However, because of the *either/or* environment that has existed

since the publication of the NRP report, Reading Recovery has been deemed a whole language incarnation which covertly embodies whole language ideas (Moats, 2000). Likewise, Marie Carbo's Reading Styles (National Reading Styles Institute, 2006) is labeled "another misinformed approach without scientific underpinnings" (Moats, 2000, p. 12).

According to Coles (2001), the NRP began its inquiry with the wrong question. Rather than beginning their analysis by asking "What is the best instruction for teaching children to read?" the Panel should have asked "What needs to be done to ensure that all children learn to read and write?" (p. 1). Yatvin (2000), the only education practitioner to serve on the NRP, wrote a Minority View which was appended to the final report criticizing the Panel's methods and findings. In a subsequent article Yatvin (2002) criticized the NRP for failing to formulate their own definition of reading and using the term reading to mean everything from decoding nonsense words to a thorough understanding of text.

According to Krashen (2003), the NRP based its claims about phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, skills-based instruction, and independent reading on insufficient evidence, citing marginal effect sizes and misinterpretation of studies. Yatvin (2002) stated that, far from the thousands of studies the NRP is claimed to have studied, only 438 studies were actually included in subcommittee reports. Garan (2001) asserted that the NRP report "fails to meet the criteria for a sound meta-analysis for two reasons: 1) the small number of studies seriously compromises the reliability of the results, and 2) the dependent variables of the meta-analysis are conceptually inconsistent" (p. 5). In her Minority View, Yatvin (2000) expresses concern that the NRP report will

lead to a promotion of one philosophical view of reading or “constrain future research in the field on the basis of the Panel’s limited and narrow set of findings” (p. 2). She asserted that the NRP had too little time and resources to accomplish their analysis and, by limiting the scope of their meta-analysis created a situation that could be harmful. She expressed concern that the NRP report would be used to make policy decisions at the national, state, and local levels and that topics not investigated by the Panel would be labeled as failed practices simply based on their omission by the Panel.

Yatvin (2000) further stated that the Panel “should have assessed the validity of the claims of various commercial programs being sold as cure-alls to schools and parents” (p. 2). Pearson (2005) stated that the major function of research should be to expand, not contract, the set of tools available to teachers. Researchers have expressed their concern about the use of the NRP report to limit the tools available to teachers and promote pre-packaged teacher-proof materials (Coles, 2001; Meyer, 2003; NCTE, 2002; Pearson, 2005; Rice, 2006). Coles (2001) asserted that these pre-packaged programs place teachers in the role of middle managers rather than professionals who use expertise to judge what students need. According to Rice (2006), “scripted curricula have the effect of deskilling teachers who become simply the deliverers of content and skill processes…”(p. 1). In a position statement, the NCTE (2002) stated that mandated scripted programs are crowding out time for “reading aloud, independent reading of enjoyable and informational texts, writing, discussion, and in-depth exploration of literature” (p. 2). Shannon (1983) examined the effects commercial reading programs had on reading teachers, finding that teachers tended to become alienated from their reading instruction and began treating reading instruction as the application of materials.

Allington (2002a) stated that there are no proven programs that can make "mediocre teachers expert and engaging" (p. 18). Pearson (2005) criticized the use of decodable texts in teaching reading skills to children, asserting that, while their use may seem like common sense, there is little evidence (one or two studies) to support special instructional texts. Teachers, according to Pearson (2005) should have clear choices in what reading material to use with their students. Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) recommended against using a different reading program with low socioeconomic children, stating that the effect of using a different program that progresses at a slower pace will be that low socioeconomic children will fall further behind their grade level peers.

Goodman (2001) asserted that political forces in the United States are determined to dismantle public education and, therefore, use illiteracy as a crisis and health issue. Paterson (2002) also noted a strong connection between the neo-conservative movement and state and federally legislated mandates to implement phonics-based reading methods. Allington (2002a) criticized the use of the NRP findings to mandate reading curriculum, and suggested that educational issues should be left in the control of state and local educational agencies.

According to Tierney and Thome (2006), the NRP report has lead to the widespread use of assessments like DIBELS that measures a narrow set of reading sub-skills. DIBELS fails to separate outcomes from means and, therefore, DIBELS tests define what is taught and what outcomes are measured. The authors asserted that progress, as measured by DIBELS, may not be much more than what is tested and taught; students may be performing better on DIBELS tests but not in terms of the larger goals for literacy. Pearson (2006) examined the overwhelming acceptance of DIBELS as an

assessment of literacy and asserts that its popularity is due to several factors. First, there is a large body of research that validates DIBELS as an assessment of reading ability. The validity indicators reveal that these tests are similar to other tests of reading and verbal ability. While there are challenges to DIBELS' validity (Pressley, Hilden, & Shankland, 2006), it is accepted as being one of the most widely used assessment instruments in schools today. Another appeal is the ease with which its tests are used. Each test is designed to take only a minute. Additionally DIBELS is popular because of its "transparent match with the sort of curriculum championed by the Reading First plank of No Child Left Behind (2002)" (Pearson, 2006, p. vii). Commercial reading series such as Scott-Foresman market DIBELS alongside its elementary reading program. Finally, DIBELS has the endorsement of the Reading First Assessment Academy, an advisory group on which Roland Good, DIBELS' author, served. According to Pearson (2006) DIBELS' appeal "is based on its political positioning in the enactment of NCLB and Reading First policy" (p. viii). The problem with DIBELS is that its tests have become a curricular blueprint and provides a flawed view of the process of learning to read. Pearson expressed further concern regarding DIBELS' focus on speed rather than accuracy. What are teachers to do with students who read accurately but slowly? The typical response in classes that employ DIBELS as a progress monitoring tool is to have those student engage in a regimen of timed readings to increase speed. This, according to Pearson, is an example of how DIBELS is used to dictate curriculum.

Pearson (2005) criticized the exaggerated use of the term scientifically based reading research (SBRR), stating that the term has been operationally defined as whatever is claimed in the NRP report. According to Pearson, the term SBRR occurs

over 110 times in the Reading First portion of NCLB. While teachers should employ scientifically proven methods to teach, they should be free to use them with flexibility. According to Pearson (2005), research can inform practice, but it can never fully determine it.

Yatvin (2000) expressed concern that many questions about how children learn to read were not addressed. As the only teacher practitioner on the reading panel, Yatvin noted that her fellow panelists relied too much on experimental studies of methodologies while overlooking qualitative studies and stated, "What they did not consider in most cases were the school and classroom realities that make some types of instruction difficult – even impossible – to implement" (p. 2).

Purcell-Gates (2000) critiqued the National Institute of Health's (2000) Report of the National Reading Panel's emphasis on experimental and quasi-experimental studies in its findings. Purcell-Gates asserted that the panel's over-reliance on experimental and quasi-experimental research represents a "clear danger" (p. 1) in the minds of funders and users of research that only these types of research are valid in providing answers to educational problems. She further stated the findings of qualitative and ethnographic research, which can provide valuable information, are overlooked. Purcell-Gates further noted that the National Reading Panel's report falls short in addressing issues that are deeply embedded in race, culture, class, gender, and family income. While experimental and quasi-experimental research is critical, correlational, descriptive, and ethnographic studies are more often suitable for seeking answers in the field of education. Pearson (2005), too, faulted the NRP for not including any natural experiments in their analysis of reading instruction.

Intervention Studies

According to Cooper, McWilliams, Boshkin, and Pistochini (2002), a reading intervention program is one that hinders or alters reading failure by preventing it from occurring or stopping it if it has already started. Barr (2006) described 3 different types of intervention programs: (a) comprehensive interventions, generally new or restructured literacy programs, designed to be used with an entire class of children; (b) focused interventions generally designed to supplement existing literacy programs to meet the needs of subgroups of individual children in need of additional, instruction; and (c) comprehensive intervention programs designed for subgroups or children who do not respond well to existing programs. Torgesen (2004) distinguished between preventive interventions and remedial interventions. Preventive interventions are those generally begun in kindergarten or early first grade before "children have had a chance to exhibit noticeable or significant failure in learning to read" (p. 360), while remedial interventions are designed to accelerate reading growth once children have exhibited difficulties in learning to read. According to Allington (2002b), preventive interventions are those which reliably reduce the incidence of reading difficulties; acceleration interventions are designed to accelerate learning so that literacy development of participating children is comparable to their peers; and longer term support interventions are designed to maintain on-level literacy development over the long term. Cooper, et al (2002) differentiated between intervention and remediation. Intervention is in addition to regular classroom reading instruction, while remediation is generally a pull-out program often taking the

place of classroom reading instruction. The goal of intervention is to move students out of the program as quickly as possible, while remedial reading students tend to remain in remedial programs from one grade to the next. The instructional focus of intervention is on strategies that move students to reading independence, while remediation focuses on book-specific vocabulary and comprehension questions. Intervention instruction is fast paced and delivered daily in a structured routine, while remediation often takes place 2 or 3 times a week for 20 or 30 minutes.

Torgesen (2004) suggested a standard for preventive instruction with young children is reading achievement within ½ standard deviation of the mean on a nationally standardized test – roughly the 30th percentile. To Torgesen, "Preventive intervention instruction should have as a goal not allowing children to fall below the 30th percentile on critical word reading at any time during their early elementary years" (p. 366).

Haager (2001) described student outcomes following the implementation of an early reading intervention project with 1st and 2nd grade English language learners at risk of reading failure in an urban school. A key component of the project was the use of assessment (a) to identify students in need of intervention, (b) to guide instructional planning, and (c) to monitor student progress. A second key component was an emphasis on essential reading skills: phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text. Using DIBELS, Haager found upward growth on the following subtests: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), and Word Sentence Fluency (WSF). However, she noted, "a significant proportion of the students fell within the risk range, particularly in reading fluency" (p. 9).

Hedrick and Pearish (1999) reported the results of an intervention program for 31 1st grade students in a low income school which consisted of 30 minute sessions each school day with groups of 8 students. The following components were included in each session: read aloud, phonics, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. The authors reported significant gains in that 15 of the 31 students met the district's requirement to be considered at or above grade level for the end of 1st grade and 10 of the students scored only slightly below grade level. Only 6 of the 31 students still scored significantly below grade level.

McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2003) conducted a study of 232 1st graders who participated in an evidence-based peer-mediated class-wide reading project (Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies, PALS). A dual discrepancy approach was used to identify 66 children who were performing at levels substantially below grade level expectations and were considered unresponsive to PALS. These 66 unresponsive students were randomly assigned to one of three increasingly individualized treatments: PALS, Modified PALS, or one-or-one tutoring by an adult. A comparison of the treatments was based on phonological awareness and reading related measures. While no statistically significant between-group differences were found, effect sizes comparing the treatments and proportions of nonresponders following treatment suggest that one-to-one tutoring was the most promising intervention.

Allinder (2001) found that middle school students (n = 50) with learning disabilities and reading difficulties improved on a standardized norm-referenced test when provided a ten week intervention (50 minutes, 3 days each week) focusing on oral reading instruction. Additionally, she found that students who received instruction with

specific reading strategies (reading with inflection, not adding words, pausing at periods and commas, self-monitoring for accuracy) made significantly greater gains in reading than students who were simply encouraged to do well. The author noted the strong link between fluent reading and comprehension and concluded that reading instruction for students with reading problems or learning disabilities should include fluency instruction and that students benefited from learning specific oral reading strategies as part of reading instruction.

Jitendra, et al (2004) conducted single-subject design studies of 7 children in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade who were identified as being at-risk for reading failure. The Read Well program (Sprick, Howard, & Fidanque, 1998-2000) was used to provide intervention for 5 of these students; 2 students served as controls in the study. The decoding skills of all the children who received Read Well as an intervention were improved. The authors concluded that Read Well was an effective supplemental reading program for children, whether they have learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or are English language learners.

Instructional Emphasis

There are several instructional features that distinguish the BRI demonstration class program from other intervention programs for struggling readers. Literature is reviewed related to three features that are the focus of emphasis in the demonstration classroom: phonological and phonemic awareness, fluency, and small group instruction.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological awareness is a global term that encompasses a variety of pre-reading skills such as rhyming and syllable segmentation. The concept of phonological awareness is relatively new. According to Stahl and McKenna (2000), although reading researchers have been assessing skills that fall under the umbrella of phonological skills since the 1960s, it wasn't until the 1970s that it began to gain widespread attention. Phonological awareness, since then, has grown in importance as a contributing factor in reading achievement. Adams (1990) recognized the importance of phonological awareness in learning to read.

> After years of working with this issue, researchers now recognize that the major difference between prereaders who get high versus low scores on readiness tests of phoneme discrimination derives from their ability to understand the instructions. Low-readiness prereaders can hear the difference between phonemes as well as high-readiness prereaders. The difference is that the low-readiness prereaders are unprepared to analyze the sound structure of the syllables consciously in this way. (p. 67)

Adams further noted a "deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns, and words, and of the phonological translations of all three, are of inescapable importance to both skillful reading and its acquisition" (p. 416).

Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness and, although the terms are often used interchangeably, is distinguishable from phonological awareness in that it is reserved for the awareness of individual phonemes (Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Hempenstall, 2003; International Reading Association, 1998). According to Heilman (2002), phonemic awareness is the knowledge or understanding that words are composed of discrete, individual sounds or phonemes (the smallest units of sound in speech). Ehri and Nunes (2002) and the NRP (NIH, 2000) define phonemic awareness as the ability to

focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Ball and Blachman (1991) and Yopp & Yopp (2002) describe phonemic awareness as the ability to recognize that words consist of a sequence of individual sounds. The NRP also notes that there may be an upward limit on the utility of phonemic awareness. They found through their analysis of research that programs that lasted less than 20 hours were more effective than longer programs, with single sessions lasting an average of 25 minutes. They also found that computers can be used to teach phonemic awareness as well as teachers (NIH, 2000).

While phonemic awareness is generally thought of as an oral/aural skill, there is evidence that using letters in conjunction with phonemic awareness training yields better results for learning to read (Hempenstall, 2003; Heilman, 2002;). While phonemic awareness is often conducted with children learning to manipulate the sounds in words using blank tokens or markers, teaching phonemic awareness with young children is more effective when letters are used (Ehri, 2004, NIH, 2001). An analysis of empirical studies lead to the NRP's conclusion that

> Teaching children to blend phonemes with letters helps them decode. Teaching children phonemic segmentation with letters helps them spell. If children have not yet learned letters, it is important to teach them letter shapes, names, and sounds so that they can use letters to acquire PA. (p. 2-6)

In a position paper on the relationship between phonemic awareness and reading, the International Reading Association (1998) states, "the relationship between phonemic awareness and learning to read is reciprocal: phonemic awareness supports reading acquisition, and reading instruction and experiences with print facilitate phonemic awareness development." Stahl and McKenna (2000) conducted a study of 74 children and, based on their findings, propose that phonological awareness is most effective when

taught in a precise sequence that supports particular word learning (consonants first, followed by vowels, consonant blends, and so on) rather than teaching global phonological awareness training.

The NRP suggested several tasks which can be used to assess the level of a child's phonemic awareness. These included:

1. Phoneme isolation. For example, "Tell me the first sound in dog." (/d/)
2. Phoneme identity. For example, "Tell me the sound that is the same in log, leg, and lamb." (/l/)
3. Phoneme categorization. For example, "Which word does not belong? Pig, pan, cat." (cat)
4. Phoneme blending. For example, "What word is /m/ /a/ /t/?" (mat)
5. Phoneme segmentation. For example, "How many sounds are in chip?" (three: /ch/ /i/ /p/)
6. Phoneme deletion. For example, what is stable without the /s/? (NIH, 2001)

Manning (2006) suggested that there are four levels of phonemic awareness. Figure 3 presents Manning's levels of phonemic awareness and how children can be quickly assessed to determine their level of phonemic development by asking them to segment words:

Level I: pony	No syllables or phonemes are segmented.
Level II: po – ny	Words are separated by syllables
Level III: p – o – ny	Only one syllable is segmented
Level IV: p – o – n – y	All phonemes are segmented

Figure 3

Manning's Four Levels of Phonemic Awareness

According to Manning (2006), phonemic awareness can also be determined by observing a child's invented spelling. For example, when a child is writing and using

letters or symbols randomly in a way that makes it impossible to determine the intended word, the child is at Level 1. When one letter is used for each syllable (for example, mk for monkey or st for sister), the child is at Level II. When a child begins to use invented spelling in a way that makes it more decodable because there is more than one letter for each syllable (for example, cmt for cement or apl for apple), the child is at Level III. If the child is almost able to use conventional spelling (even if there is inaccuracy), the child is at Level IV.

Bishop and League (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of 79 students from kindergarten through 3rd grade and found that an assessment of phonological awareness, along with letter identification and rapid naming of letter names and sounds, at the beginning of kindergarten was an accurate predictor of long term reading success.

Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, and Voeller (2001) found that instruction that is the most phonemically explicit produced the strongest reading growth – particularly for those with the weakest phonological skills in the beginning. Katzir, et al (2006), in a study of 123 dyslexic children in 2nd and 3rd grade, found that phonological awareness contributes to comprehension of connected-text. Reiner (2002) found that adding phonemic awareness lessons to her kindergarten reading program facilitated more meaning literacy development in her students. After examining 378 children from 7 – 9 years old on a battery of tests that assessed both linguistic and nonlinguistic abilities, Shaywitz (2003) concluded that phonological deficits are the most significant and consistent cognitive marker of dyslexic children.

Krashen (2003), however, claimed that there is insufficient evidence to support the National Reading Panel's assertion that explicit phonemic awareness training

significantly improves children's reading. His critique of NRP's findings regarding phonemic awareness are based on the limited number of studies conducted and, therefore, reviewed by the panel, and that, of the 11 studies reviewed, only 5 dealt with English-speaking children. According to Krashen, studies have demonstrated that many children with weak or no phonemic awareness perform adequately well on tests of word reading and were not found to be delayed in learning to read when compared with children who demonstrated a higher level of phonemic awareness. Gray and McCutchen (2006) examined the role of phonological awareness on lexical processes (word and sub-word reading) and supralexical processes (sentence reading). A study involving 152 children revealed a connection between phonological awareness and word reading, but a limited connection between phonological awareness and sentence comprehension.

Fluency

The NRP (NIH, 2000) defines fluency as the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression. Fluency is discussed in the NRP report in terms that are synonymous with automaticity, citing The Literacy Dictionary (Harris & Hodges, 1995), which defines fluency as "freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension" and automaticity as "fluent processing of information that requires little or no effort" (p. 3-7). Fluency has also been defined as a set of skills that includes accuracy, rate, and prosody (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NIH, 2000).

In examining the subset skill of accuracy, Pinnell, Pikulski, Wixson, Campbell, Gough, and Beatty (1995) found that overall oral reading accuracy was not significantly

related to comprehension; however, the number of miscues, or significant differences between the text and what the child read was strongly related to the child's comprehension of the text. Schwanenflugal, Kuhn, Meisinger, Bradley, and Stahl (2003) found that oral reading accuracy was related to reading comprehension in 1st and 2nd grade, and only slight correlational evidence between comprehension and oral reading accuracy in third grade and above. Therefore, accuracy, as a subset of overall fluency may be only important in early grades (Stahl, 2004).

While oral reading accuracy seems related to reading comprehension only in early grades, oral reading rate remains important throughout the elementary years (Stahl, 2004). Chall, et al (1990), and LaBerge and Samuels (2003) stress the importance of automaticity with word recognition, asserting that automatic recognition of reading does not interfere with overall reading comprehension. Researchers have confirmed the finding that slow decoding creates slow readers, and slow readers have greater difficulty comprehending text (Allinder, 2001; Pikulski, and Chard, 2005; Raskinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005; Samuels, 1979; Samuels, 2002; Torgesen, 2004).

However, simply teaching children to read isolated words faster does not appear to improve overall reading comprehension (Stahl, 2004). Levy, Abello, and Lysynchuk (1997) conducted a study of children receiving instruction that focused on reading words faster, and found that, while it did improve performance on reading text, there was no improvement in comprehension. Katzir, et al (2006) studied 123 dyslexic 2nd and 3rd grade children, and found that phonological awareness, rapid letter naming, and orthographic pattern recognition contributed to word-reading skills. Additionally, they

found that rapid naming, orthographic pattern recognition, and word reading fluency only moderately predicted different dimensions of connected text reading including comprehension.

Prosody is the third subskill of fluency instruction that has been recognized as an important component in overall reading comprehension. "Prosody is a linguistic term to describe the rhythmic and tonal aspects of speech: the 'music' of oral language" (Hudson, et al, 2005, p. 704). Prosodic features include pitch or intonation, stress patterns, and duration, all of which requires that students comprehend text as they read. Raskinski (2006) recommends fluency instruction that focuses on more than accuracy and speed, but also on prosody in an "integrated and synergistic manner" (p. 705). By reading texts with a performance component such as poetry, song lyrics, chants, rhymes, plays, monologues, dialogues, and letters, teachers expose students to a wider range of genres and, in turn, students gain in accuracy, automaticity, and comprehension (Rasinski, 2006). Hudson, et al (2005) stress the need to provide instruction in not only speed, but also accuracy and prosody. According to Hudson (2006),

> Focusing on increasing reading rate and focusing on meaning are not mutually exclusive. In fact, teaching students that reading is only about reading words quickly misses the point of why we work to increase students' fluency – so that they have sufficient attention to reach a deep understanding of the text they read. (p. 2)

The NRP (NIH, 2000) noted that there is evidence of a close relationship between fluency and reading comprehension. However, they also noted that competent reading instruction extends beyond mere single-word reading, and is best accomplished through contextual reading for meaning. Adams (1990) reported that "…repeated reading of text

is found to produce marked improvement in word recognition, fluency, and comprehension" (p. 153). Torgesen, et al (2001) recommended providing readers with a great deal of reading practice in order to "improve reading fluency, while maintaining gains in reading accuracy and comprehension" (p. 101). Strauss (2006) discussed the concern many educators have expressed that, with increased emphasis on reading speed, students are not reading for meaning. Griffith and Rasinski (2004) found that at-risk students made greater gains in fluency and comprehension when purposeful reading, such as reader's theater, was used for fluency instruction. Rasinski, et al (2005) cautioned teachers to beware of fluency programs or interventions that focus merely on boosting a student's reading rate, asserting that instructional activities that utilize repeated and assisted reading for meaning will lead to faster reading and, more importantly, reading with and for meaning.

There is a growing body of research on the features of fluency training that are most effective. Blanchard (1981) and Tan and Nicholson (1997) found that prereading unfamiliar words to students prior to reading improves comprehension. Certain features of the text used for fluency training also appear to be important. Hiebert (2004) conducted a study of 2nd graders participating in Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI). One group read literature-based texts and the other group read science and social studies texts. Over a 10 week intervention, the students reading literature based texts gained 25 words and the students reading social studies and science texts gained 31 words. After 20 weeks of intervention the readers of literature based text had only gained 2 words for a total of 27; and readers of social studies and science texts had, likewise, gained 2 words for a total of 33. Hiebert (2004) concluded that the features of texts

appeared to have an influence on students' fluency. Additionally, doubling the length of an intervention did not have the effect of doubling students' gains in fluency.

Richards (2002) found that fluency training is most effective with texts at a student's instructional or independent level and with texts that model a student's natural language patterns. According to Richards, "If fluency is to be developed, not only appropriate methods but also appropriate materials must be used" (p. 111).

Lagrou, Burns, Mizerek, and Mosack (2006) conducted a study of 119 3rd grade students to determine the effect of readers' skill and format of text (book or typed text) on fluency and comprehension. Students were divided into groups based on skill level. Results suggested that for students who where average or above average readers the text format made no difference. However, low performing readers' fluency and comprehension gains were greater when reading from a book, rather than from a typed text. Kuhn (2005) examined 2nd grade students using 3 different fluency intervention strategies: repeated reading, wide reading (of different genres and for different purposes), and listening only; and found that struggling readers in the wide reading and repeated reading groups made greater gains for word recognition in isolation, prosody, and correct words per minute. Additionally, students in the wide reading group made greater gains in comprehension.

Therrien (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of fluency and comprehension strategies and found that repeated readings of text are an effective intervention to improve fluency and comprehension. However, his review delineates essential instruction components that should be included in repeated reading instruction to improve effectiveness if the goal is to improve overall reading fluency and comprehension: the

student should read the passage aloud to an adult, be provided corrective feedback on errors and read the same passage until a performance criterion is reached.

Strauss (2006) expressed the concern shared by many educators that instruction that only emphasizes speed can detract from the overall goal of reading for meaning and comprehension. Rasinski, et al (2005) cautioned that fluency programs that only target student reading rates through rate-building exercise and admonitions to read faster will result only in students who can read quickly, but don't comprehend what they read. The NRP (NIH, 2000) noted that too much attention to fluency issues can detract from reading comprehension.

Although there is a concern about children becoming fast readers but without comprehending what they are reading, Chad and Shinn (2003), in a study of 66 3rd graders and their teachers, found that teachers often mislabel students as "word-callers" who can read fast, without comprehension. Only half of the students teachers labeled as "word-callers" were reading without comprehension; the other half, while reading quickly, were found to be comprehending the text they read.

Torgesen (2004) reported that children who reach an oral fluency benchmark of 40 accurate words per minute on grade-level text by the end of first grade are on track for grade-level reading comprehension at the end of third grade. However, he noted, "These benchmarks for absolute reading skill level have not yet been applied broadly in intervention research, so they cannot be used as a standard for evaluating the success of current preventive efforts" (p. 366). Rasinski (2002) recommended the use of fluency rates as a tool for assessing students' overall reading performance. According to DIBELS benchmark goals, first graders should obtain an oral reading fluency rate of 40

words correct per minute (wcpm) by the end of their school year; second graders should be able to read 90 wcpm; and third graders should be able to reading 110 wcpm.

Accelerated Reader

Accelerated Reader (AR) is a program in which books are assigned reading levels, based on their difficulty. Points are earned by students after passing a computerized comprehension quiz on book they've read. The points a student earns can be redeemed for prizes. According to Trelease (2004), over half the school districts in the United States use the AR program. Renaissance Learning (Accelerated Reader, 2007), the company that produces and distributes the AR software, reports that more than 70,000 schools have adopted the program. Trelease noted that, in spite of its widespread popularity, there haven't been many peer-reviewed or refereed studies on AR, and, while it has many fans, it also has many critics.

According to Topping (1999), AR has potential as a tool to raise students' achievement in reading because it enables frequent, detailed, and consistent assessment of student reading comprehension of authentic literature. Samuels, Lewis, Yi-Chen, Reininger, and Murphy (2003) attempted to design a study that would test AR efficacy by comparing a group of students using AR with another group of students receiving similar practice and encouragement reading without the tests and rewards associated with AR. They found that students using the AR program significantly outperformed their non-AR peers in passage comprehension and vocabulary.

Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski (2002) investigated the effects of AR during elementary school on the reading habits of middle school students and found that the

program had no apparent lasting effect. Students not exposed to AR were reading more than their peers who had been exposed to AR in elementary school. Labbo (1999) criticizes AR's reliance on points and rewards as well as its ineffective use of computers in reading instruction. According to Labbo, the use of AR can have substantial negative consequences. According to Krashen (2003), the benefits associated with AR result from the time provided for free reading and the benefits of using tests and rewards, the cornerstone of AR remain unproven. Cuddleback and Cepriano (2002) studied the effects of using AR with first grade students who had failed to meet the standards for promotion during a summer school program. They found that AR was effective with these students. However, since there was not comparison group doing activities with literature minus tests and rewards, it couldn't be concluded that the benefit was based on the AR program or solely to the time devoted to reading authentic literature. In their meta-analysis of reading research, the NRP (2000) found no clear evidence that the use of AR is associated with gains in reading achievement.

Small Group Instruction

According to Crawford and Torgesen (2004), differentiated, explicit instruction is the most efficient when delivered either individually or in small groups of 3 – 8 students, 3 – 5 times a week. Tyner and Green (2005) propose that small group instruction can facilitate the move from being students who are learning to read, to being students reading to learn. Allington (2002b) noted, "Although reading and learning disabilities specialists routinely work with groups of five to nine students, the evidence indicates that group size needs to shrink considerably for measurable effects to be achieved" (p. 278).

Additionally, he noted that instruction should be tailored to meet the individual needs of students, and programs that provide the same text to all students will "fail to successfully develop reading proficiencies in all students" (p. 276). Small group instruction facilitates differentiated instruction targeting the individual differences in the instructional needs of young readers (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). Torgesen (2004) suggested, "The most practical method for increasing instructional intensity for small numbers of highly at-risk students is to provide small-group instruction" (p. 364). According to Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, and Shumm (2000), grouping children with learning disabilities in small groups of 4 or less significantly improves reading performance. Cartledge and Musti-Rao (2006) found that direct, skill-based, explicit instruction in small groups for 30 minutes daily has a positive impact on the reading achievement of urban children. Small group instruction allows teachers to carefully observe individual students, address particular individual needs and provide responsive scaffolding for young readers (Torgesen, 2004).

Effective Teaching and the Thoughtful Teacher

The link between teacher quality and effectiveness has been discussed by a number of researchers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2006; Crosby, 2002; Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 2003; Thurnstrom and Thurnstrom, 2003; Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1998). One of the cornerstones of NCLB is the requirement for teachers to be highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Defining what is meant by effective teaching and highly qualified teachers is an ongoing process. Likewise, what it means to be a highly qualified reading teacher is a subject of inquiry. Pearson (2005) speaks of effective

teaching in terms of the thoughtful teacher and calls for research on what exemplifies the practice of a thoughtful teacher. Cotton (1995) conducted a synthesis study of research on school effectiveness. Regarding teachers, Cotton found the following characteristics that describe the practices of effective teachers. Effective teachers:

1. demonstrate high expectations of their students,
2. provide incentives, recognition, and rewards to promote excellence,
3. interact with students in positive, caring ways,
4. give high-needs students the extra time and instruction they need to succeed,
5. support the social and academic resiliency of high-needs students, and
6. promote respect and empathy among students of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Topping and Ferguson (2005) examined 5 teachers who, based on their students' performance and the level of their expertise, were considered to be effective literacy teachers. They found that there are behaviors during shared reading sessions that these teachers exhibit that promote literacy development. Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, and Wray (2001) examined 225 British teachers who were considered effective literacy teachers to determine common features of their theoretical beliefs and orientations to reading and writing. They found that more experienced, more educated (with Master's degrees) teachers tended to favor a whole language approach to teaching reading, while the newer teachers tended to favor a phonics based approach. Overall, the theoretical orientation of effective literacy teachers tended to be constructivist with a stronger commitment to child centered teaching and reading and writing within a range of contexts and for authentic purposes. Poulson, et al (2001) found that, although the

effective teachers they studied expressed a more negative orientation toward phonics-based instruction, they were not opposed to teaching phonics per se. While they taught letter-sound correspondences to help children learn to decode words, their negative attitudes were directed more toward phonics analysis as the main strategy in decoding unfamiliar words. Poplin and Soto-Hinman (2005) reported preliminary findings of a 2 year study of effective teachers in high-poverty schools. They noted that principals, in directing the researchers to their most effective teachers, hesitated to acknowledge teachers whose students are the highest scoring on standardized tests. The teachers the principals thought of as the most effective tended to be those who embraced constructivism; the teachers who were most successful at producing high test scorers were highly structured teachers who used fast-paced, direct instruction, and questioning strategies. Poplin, et al (2005) speculated that ideology directs those in education at the elementary school and the higher education level to define effectiveness in terms of their beliefs about teaching. The researcher questioned the fairness of this, stating,

> … we are left with the disturbing questions regarding why middle-class educators so strongly resist achievement measures as a marker of success for 'other people's children.' These are the tests that their own children do quite well on. Even if their children and grandchildren did not do well on them, they would find a way to have them privately tutored until they did. (p. 44)

Howard (2002) studied 30 African American students ranging in age from 2nd grade to 8th grade from 5 urban schools to explore what characteristics they identified with teacher effectiveness. Three characteristics were commonly identified by the students as valued, and therefore, effective. First, the students valued the family and community-like environments teachers created for them in the classroom in which interdependence and

cooperative learning were promoted. Second, explicit and implicit displaying of concern by the teacher was valued – particularly when it manifested in positive reinforcement and refused to accept less than the students' personal best. Third, "language plays a quintessential role in the communicative process for African American students" (p.441), and, therefore, verbal affirmation is highly valued by students. Pearson (2005) described thoughtful teachers as those who "demonstrate and model literate behavior at every opportunity" (p. 78). Additionally, thoughtful teachers scaffold the learning environment so that students are able to cope with the complexities of developing literacy, gradually releasing the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student. Accomplished teachers prefer teaching strategies that reflect coaching (student centered) rather than simply telling (teacher centered). Pearson also asserted that thoughtful teachers "place a premium on student engagement and control" (p. 85), allowing students to make decisions about the texts they read and write. Thoughtful teachers always look for connections between what students do in the classroom to their everyday lives and other curricula, and base learning experiences on "positive and optimistic views of student potential" (Pearson, p. 98). Pearson promoted an alternative view of balanced literacy – ecological balance, stating "we need a comprehensive literacy curriculum that leaves nothing to chance …where we emphasize interconnections among the components … and with other curricular efforts … to achieve ecological symbiosis" (pp. 111-113).

Rasinski and Padak (2004) discussed balance in literacy instruction, stating that a simplistic notion of balance needs to be expanded. Literacy instruction needs to become more comprehensive in order to develop students who are truly literate people. According to the authors, "…literacy needs to be integrated within all facets of the

classroom and school, literacy needs to be integrated with the home, and literacy needs to be integrated into the life of the community itself" (p. 101).

Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriquez (2002) studied classroom practices of elementary teachers during reading instruction and found that how reading is taught is just as important as what is taught. Their findings indicated that teachers who involved their students in instruction, rather than telling students information, were more effective in teaching reading. Effective teachers used more student-centered approaches such as coaching and modeling. Students of effective teachers, too, spent more time actually reading and writing. Taylor, et al (2002) also found that small group instruction was more effective than whole group instruction.

Bohn, Roehrig, and Pressley (2004) studied 6 primary teachers from 5 different schools during the first few days of school to examine how effective teachers approach a class of students at the beginning of the school year. The authors found that 2 of the teachers exemplified specific characteristics that distinguished them from the other teachers. They were enthusiastic, had high expectations, praised their students for specific behaviors, developed a sense of responsibility for student self-regulation in behavioral and academic applications, and managed their classrooms with a higher level of democracy (for example, they allowed their students to choose their own books to read). Walker (2003) followed the progress of struggling 2nd grade readers for a year and found that the students' progress toward success as readers was facilitated by instruction that promoted social interaction.

Theoretical Framework

This study will assume the form of phenomenology in that the intent is to create a "rich, detailed description of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2003, p. 133), namely the implementation of a reform model for reading instruction for students at risk for reading failure. Thus, no explicit theoretical explanation is adopted to frame this study. However, the field of reading instruction and research has been mired in debates about reading pedagogy. The theoretical underpinnings of BRI are inextricable with those of the NRP, which rejects whole language methodologies with its origins in constructivist pedagogy, in favor of a positivist philosophy about the nature of learning. According to Elkind (2005), NCLB has been the death of constructivism and has killed much of the creativity and innovation that goes with true constructivist pedagogy. Moats (2000) stated that "Whole-language beliefs about the psychology of basic reading instruction, and the practices that have been based on those beliefs, are misinformed in theory and ineffective in application" (p. 9). It is anticipated that discussions of reading theories will find their way into interviews as BLTs discuss methodologies used in BRI's demonstration classes and, will, therefore, become a part of the final data analysis. During the analysis stage of research, too, as certain themes or patterns emerge from the teacher narratives, the stance of a grounded theorist may be assumed in developing theory grounded in the data collected throughout the course of this study (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 1997; Spradley, 1980).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOLGY

This research was an examination of the experiences of Barksdale Reading Institute's BLTs during the first year of implementation of reading reform with demonstration classes in 13 schools in Mississippi. The subjects of the study were 12 of the BLTs. I served the dual role of researcher and the 13th BLT also involved with implementing the demonstration classroom project.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this investigation for several reasons. The experiences of the BLTs were emergent and it was important that the research methodology be emergent as well. According to Creswell (2003), "Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured" (p. 181). The BLTs' perceptions and reactions to their experiences were apt to change as the year progressed. Therefore, what was considered to be an appropriate question at the beginning of the study, wasn't necessarily relevant later, as the school year progressed.

While this study encompassed many facets of reading education that were measurable and those things would inevitably be discussed during interviews, the focus of this study revolved more around how teachers perceived themselves as implementers of methodologies, and not the methodologies themselves. Qualitative research, broadly

defined, means any kind of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by statistical methods (Hoepfl, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A qualitative design was applicable because of my role as a BLT examining the experiences of other BLTs. As Creswell (2003) stated, “qualitative research systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182).

The primary method for gathering data was through interviews. Gay (1996) stated, “…qualitative research is the collection and analysis of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into a situation of interest not possible using other types of research” (p. 208). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative researchers in education continually ask questions of people about what they are experiencing and how they interpret their experiences. For some qualitative researchers the inquiry process can be characterized as a dialogue. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler (1998) stated, “People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to one’s experience …” (p. 7). According to Glesne (1999), “qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and ways in which the intersect.” (p. 1). By allowing the BLTs to tell their stories, a clear understanding of what it meant to be a literacy teacher for struggling readers in a demonstration classroom emerged – a new experience not only for them, but for the schools within which they worked, and, for the most part, uncharted territory in reading reform.

The 12 BLTs, the participants in this investigation, shared a common job description and role within their respective schools; however, the settings within which they worked each day were different. While all the students they worked with were

considered at risk for reading failure and had common features regarding the demographics of the populations served by the BLTs, there were other features, such as the quality of leadership within the school and the actual setting of the school, that were different.

Validity

The etymological root of the word valid is *valere*, which is Latin for well, strong, powerful, or effective (Greene & Freed, 2005). Qualitative researchers often speak of validity in terms of the trustworthiness of the findings (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). My role as a BLT added a distinct quality to my research. On one hand, I had to maintain an awareness of my own bias regarding my personal experiences (see Curriculum Vitae in Appendix A) and feelings about my work as a BLT, as well as my own theoretical stance toward reading instruction and pedagogy. On the other hand, without such an intimate knowledge of the role of a BLT and the intricacies of the expectations BRI has for those implementing their reform model, I may not have known what questions to ask in order to develop a true understanding of what it meant to be a BLT. Subjectivity, therefore, complimented the depth of my research, allowing me to delve more deeply into the experience of being a BLT (Glesne, 1999).

That is not to say, however, that I didn't closely monitor my own reactions and bias. Reflexivity is the practice of being aware of one's own role in constructing the social reality under study (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Merriam, 1999). Briggs (1999) speaks of reflexivity in terms of reflecting on one's relation to the research situation, and further stated that since the researcher can't de-link himself from the research, self-

examination is critical with each data that emerges. Greene and Freed (2005) described the dilemma faced by qualitative researchers as they engage in the subjective realm of narrative research.

Several procedures were employed to ensure the validity or trustworthiness of my findings. First, ISs were interviewed, sometimes with and sometimes separately from the BLTs with whom they worked. Their reports, along with information gathered through BLT memos, meeting agendas, lesson plans, and other forms of documentation, helped develop a coherent justification for findings as a means of triangulation (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 1999). Member-checking was employed periodically, reviewing my reports of events or themes with respondents to ensure accuracy. Multiple-session interviews enabled me to capture the BLTs' experiences at different points of time, giving them time to reflect between conversations and, therefore, possibly be more articulate with their opinions, feelings, and constructs of teaching in a demonstration classroom (Glesne, 1999). Many of the BLTs were interviewed on at least three different occasions at locations. While some interviews took place in social settings before or after a monthly BRI meeting, others took place in the BLT's classroom, and some took place on the phone. Altering the setting for interviews was beneficial inasmuch as discussions outside of the workplace provided a more relaxed environment and facilitated conversation with greater ease.

Greene and Freed (2005) described validity as a continuum, with complete objectivity on one end and complete subjectivity on the other. While quantitative researchers seek to be as close to the complete objectivity end of the spectrum, qualitative researchers, who acknowledge their roles as co-creators of reality alongside the subjects

of their study, move back and forth along the objective/subjective continuum. My stance toward subjectivity, therefore, was an acknowledgment that I could not remove myself from the status of a peer and colleague of the BLTs; it was also an acknowledgment that I value my status as a peer and colleague. My subjectivity did not detract from the trustworthiness of my findings. However, it necessitated continual monitoring of my place on the objective/subjective continuum. A constant evaluation of my bias (Glesne, 1999) served to add tension to my analysis and pull me away from complete subjectivity, in the direction of the objective end of the continuum.

Briggs (1999) advised caution in conducting interviews. The very nature and structure of an interview requires a certain implied agreement about the roles of participants in the interview event. Therefore, according to Briggs, “Given the fact that the researcher plays the dominant interactional role in interviews, her or his participation must be assessed in analyzing each datum that emerges from the setting.” (p. 120). I constantly and reflexively assessed my role as an interviewer in order to ensure that my questions were not *leading* interviewees to respond in a way that they perceived reflected a consensus with my opinions.

Data Collection Process

Participants

The participants in this study were the twelve BLTs who implemented the demonstration classroom program in eleven Mississippi schools. Eleven of the BLTs had a relationship with BRI prior to 2006 - 2007. Eight had formerly served as RRCs and, when the RRC position was eliminated in the spring of 2006, moved into the role of BLT

in order to implement the new reading reform model. Two BLTs had worked during the 2005 – 2006 school year with the University of Mississippi, in a role similar to the RRC role within schools. When the grant that funded their positions was not renewed, they accepted BRI's invitation to join the institute's staff as BLTs. One of the BLT's had worked in a school for several years and joined BRI during the 2005 – 2006 school year as a BLT in a pilot demonstration classroom. The BLT who did not have a previous relationship with BRI was a first year teacher who was hired during the summer of 2006 to serve in the IS position in a demonstration classroom. However, when the BLT she worked with abruptly resigned in August, 2006, she was moved into the BLT position and a new IS was hired. Therefore, most of the BLTs were highly knowledgeable about reading instruction and had extensive experience working in public schools. Table 2 provides a picture of the attributes of the BLT group in general.

Table 2

BLT Attributes

Attribute	**Number**
15 or more years of teaching experience	11 of 12
Master's Degree or Higher	11 of 12
Formerly a Regional Reading Coordinator	8 of 12
Taught College Level Reading Courses	2 of 12

Table 2 (continued)

Formerly Served in Administrative Positions in Public Schools	7 of 12
African American	2 of 12
Caucasian	10 of 12

There were 11 schools that housed demonstration classrooms. One of the schools was very large and, therefore, had two demonstration classrooms. The schools in which the BLTs worked shared certain attributes as well. Table 3 provides information about the schools in which BLTs worked.

Table 3

School Attributes

Attribute	**Number**
90% - 100% Low Income Population	11 of 11
90% - 100% African American	11 of 11
Located in a Rural Setting	8 of 11
Located in an Urban Setting	3 of 11
Accountability Rating 2 – Underachieving	3 of 11
Accountability Rating 3 – Successful	4 of 11
Accountability Rating 4 – Exemplary	4 of 11

BLT Interviews

At the outset of this study I planned to interview each BLT a minimum of three times in order to fully develop the stories of their experiences. The initial interview was a more formal interview and took place at an agreed upon location. Five of these interviews took place at the schools where the BLT worked at a time when their students were not present. Seven interviews took place at restaurants.

Two follow up interviews were designed to clarify points from the initial interviews or elicit answers about specific areas unaddressed previously. These follow up interviews occurred prior to or following the monthly BRI meetings, on the telephone, or via e-mail. Several of the initial interviews, particularly those that took place in restaurants, were quite extensive, sometimes lasting 1 ½ hours or more. The data gathered during these interviews was extensive and thorough and, therefore, I didn't have a great need for follow-up interviews. The interviews that occurred in the schools tended to be shorter and, therefore, it was more important to follow-up in order to develop their responses more fully. It was possible to visit with BLTs briefly, directly after, or over lunch during a monthly BRI meeting in Jackson, Mississippi. On several occasions BLTs responded to questions via e-mail or during a telephone conversation. Therefore, while all twelve BLTs participated in a formal interview that lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours, the follow-up interviews were of varying lengths and formats. Many of the follow up interviews would best be characterized as short, informal conversations or responses to e-mails. In each case, however, it was understood that the intent of the exchange was for the purposes of collecting data.

The interviews were informal, using a general interview guide to facilitate the conversation around a set of topics. Questions were open-ended in nature, inviting respondents to respond to, as well as provide, further information and opinions about events (Yin, 1994). As Gall, et al (1996) described, "The order in which the topics are explored and the wording of the questions are not predetermined. They can be decided by the interviewer as the situation evolves" (p.309). Spradley (1980) spoke of developing a rich and thorough description in terms of a "grand tour" in much the way one gives a first time visitor a grand tour of your home. Spradley describes nine dimensions of every social setting that can serve as points of reference in developing a thorough description of an event:

1. Space – the physical place or places
2. Actor – the people involved
3. Activity – a set of related acts people do
4. Object – the physical things that are present
5. Act – single actions that people do
6. Event – a set of related activities that people carry out
7. Time – the sequencing that takes place over time
8. Goal – the things people are trying to accomplish
9. Feeling – the emotions felt and expressed (p. 78)

In order to capture the experiences of BLTs in their entirety, I framed my interview guide around basic literary elements: characters, setting, plot, mood, theme, problem and solution. For the purposes of this study the elements were defined as follows:

1. Characters – the students and teachers in the demonstration classes, co-workers within the school setting, BRI staff members;
2. Setting – primarily the demonstration class, but setting also referring to the school or community;
3. Plot – the BRI demonstration class project, the implementation of demonstration classes;
4. Mood – the climate of the demonstration class, school, community, or among BRI employees; and
5. Problem/Solution – problems that arose during the course of implementing demonstration classes and how they were addressed or solved.

These five elements served as the topics to be discussed in BLT interviews.

Data Analysis

Spradley (1980) recommended using a question matrix to ensure completeness of data collection, as well as a tool in developing an understanding of the interrelatedness of the different aspects of experience under study. I developed a matrix of the elements of my study of BLTs (see Figure 4).

	Characters	**Setting**	**Plot**	**Mood**	**Theme**	**Problems/ Solutions**
Characters	Can you describe the people you work with?	How are children arranged in your class?	How do children progress through reading instruction in your class?	Can you describe the overall mood of the children in your class on a typical day?	What issues arise regarding the overall well being and educational progress of your students?	Can you describe any specific problems that you encounter with your students and how you attempt to solve those problems?
Setting	How do you decide how to group or arrange the seating of your students in the classroom?	Can you describe your classroom/ school/ community?	How did your school become a part of the BRI demonstration classroom program?	What is the mood typically of the adults in your classroom?	How does your classroom environment "set the stage" for accomplishing your goals?	Have you encountered problems in setting up/equipping your classroom?
Plot	How do you decide which children are assigned to your class?	How was the configuration of your classroom decided? (blocking off areas, etc.)	Can you describe the BRI Demonstration Class?	Do you perceive changes in the mood/climate a the school level?	Can you think of one word to describe the work or purpose of the demonstration class?	Can you describe any problems you've encountered that BRI helped you solve?
Mood	What steps do you take to control the climate/mood within your class?	How does the mood/climate of the school affect you and your class?	Can you describe the overall mood of the BRI staff regarding the demonstration classroom project?	Can you describe the overall mood of the mood/climate of the school and community?	Can you think of one word to describe the mood of your classroom?	Are there specific problems among school faculty that affect the mood/climate of the school?
Theme	Describe the overall focus of your classroom?	Describe any theme you sense within the school community. Where is the focus in general?	Is there a common theme intrinsic to the demonstration class project?	Can you think of one word that would best describe how you feel about the quality of your work?	Can you describe the theme of the BRI Demonstration classroom program?	Are there problems that you think cannot be solved – problems that are intrinsic to the community?
Problems/ Solutions	How do you address problems with students/ teachers/ curriculum?	How involved are you in solving problems at the school level?	What barriers do you foresee in the work of the BRI demonstration class project?	Have you encountered attitude problems with adults either within or outside your class?	Can you describe the state of MS's overall attitude toward public education?	Can you describe how the school or BRI supported you in solving problems?

Figure 4.

Interview Question Matrix

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection; therefore the question matrix was useful analytical tool. Upon completion of an interview, tapes, when available, were transcribed and memos were written to document information generated from the interview (Merriam, 1998). Points of data were then placed within the appropriate category on the question matrix. As data collection proceeded, and the data was placed within respective categories, it was anticipated that patterns and themes would emerge and, likewise, an understanding of the experiences of the BLTs in the demonstration class program. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) offered suggestions about the data analysis process:

1. Decide, as you collect and analyze data, how to narrow the scope of your study.
2. Clarify the type of study you want to conduct. For example, do you want a full description of a setting or are you really interested in one aspect of the setting?
3. Develop analytic questions. As field work proceeds, review questions to determine their effectiveness in developing an understanding of the event; reformulate questions when needed.
4. Allow each interview, or data collection session, inform future interviews or data collection sessions.
5. Write many "observer's comments" as you collect data.
6. Write memos to yourself about what you are learning as you collect and analyze your data.
7. Use key informants/subjects to try out ideas and themes in order to advance your analysis.
8. Explore literature while you're gathering data in order to enhance your analysis.

9. Think in terms of metaphors, analogies, and concepts as you explore your data. Reflection about what different aspects of the data remind you of can facilitate greater depth of understanding.
10. Use visual devices to help clarify your analysis. This can be as simple as doodling or as sophisticated as computer-generated models.

As data analysis progressed throughout the data collection process, and themes began to emerge, the categories of data, too, began to become more focused. As certain points on the question matrix became more saturated with data than others, it became clearer which issues were more salient to the BLTs' descriptions of their experience implementing the demonstration classroom experience.

All of the BLTs were willing to share their experiences. Some were anxious to tell their stories, sharing the conviction that the work being done by BRI in the demonstration classrooms was important and would have a lasting and meaningful effect on reading instruction within Mississippi, as well as in other states across the country. Most BLTs agreed to allow me to record their interviews, but a few requested that I not use a tape recorder.

Several BLTs were concerned about confidentiality. Beyond not wanting their names to be used in the dissertation or articles and reports that might follow, they wanted reassurance that it would be impossible to identify them or the school within which they worked. This was understandable because of the small number of BLTs and schools associated with BRI's demonstration classroom program. While the names of the schools were published in newspapers and on the BRI website, it was important to the BLTs that they wouldn't be seen as discussing issues that might disparage the schools within which

they worked. One BLT said, “I don’t want to do anything that could have a negative impact on this school.” Another BLT said, “I want to make sure I don’t pick up an article five years from now and read about my school. I don’t want the folks at this school to think I’ve been saying things about them that I shouldn’t be.” Several BLTs pointed out that, while their schools had problems, the people in the community cared about their school and supported the efforts of the school and district administrators to make improvements.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, "How do Barksdale Literacy Teachers describe their experiences in the first year as a BLT?" In order to fully answer this question, four questions were formulated to explore what it means to be a first year BLT implementing a reading reform model in Mississippi. The first question addressed the BLTs' experiences implementing the demonstration classroom project during its first year and explored how they responded personally to the work of implementing a reading reform model in schools serving large populations of children at risk for reading failure. The second question explored the BLTs' work with the children in their demonstration classrooms. The third question explored the BLTs' use of reading strategies and methods promoted by the National Reading Panel (NRP). The fourth question explored how BLTs described themselves as agents of change within the schools where they worked.

This research is important because it answers the call (see, for example, Pearson, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 2000, Yatvin, 2000) for qualitative studies that explore the use of the strategies and methodologies promoted by the National Reading Panel (NIH, 2000). Additionally, it explores the important role of excellent teachers in implementing reading reform and working with children at-risk of reading failure. This study illustrates the

complexities of reading reform and the need to see beyond the "quick-fix" sought by education administrators and policy-makers.

Because of issues of confidentiality, I took great care in making decisions about how to report my findings. During the analysis phase, as certain points on the interview question matrix became more saturated than others, each datum associated with particular issues was coded and placed on a separate table. This was a painstakingly slow process at times, because, as the study progressed and more data were gathered, it was necessary to re-examine the data multiple times. However, because of this process, data was filtered two different times. First, it was filtered as it went from the interview transcript and memo and placed in the interview question matrix with all identifiers removed. Next, it was filtered a second time as data was transferred from the matrix onto a table designed as a tool to collate data around a common theme. New themes emerged and new categories of data were created. Therefore, the data within the matrix was harvested multiple times. By the time most of the data had been assembled, tables I had created were devoid of any identifiers and I felt that I had successfully developed my findings in a way that completely protected my participants as well as their schools. Figure 5 provides an example of the tables I constructed as I coded the data.

"There's nothing left at the end of the day."

"You have to push all the time. You're exhausted at the end of the day, but somehow you keep working."

"Have you ever juggled 100 balls at one time? That's how I feel."

"In a regular classroom you may have two of these at-risk children. We have a classroom full of them."

"Sometimes I worry because I feel like I'm the last hope for all these kids."

"I can't enjoy the kids. I've got to keep busy."

"We're under a microscope all the time. We don't want to look bad."

"I'm exhausted. I feel like I've been digging ditches all day."

"It's exhausting physically. I get up at 4:45 every morning and it's hard to get enough rest. .."

"In the beginning progress was so slow, it took an emotional toll."

"I think the problem may be the newness of each task."

"There are so many time constraints. We keep having to push."

"It's the weight of everything that causes stress."

"We want balance in our lives, but at the end of the day there's nothing left."

"I'm having to teach kindergarten and 1st grade skills to the first graders at the same time."

"I feel like I've been doing hard labor all day."

Figure 5

BLT's Expressions of Stress

The story that emerged from the data culminated in a description of the BLTs as thoughtful teachers who, while implementing a new reading reform model, were confronted by issues that required a thorough understanding of how to teach reading as well as the ability to make decisions at every turn. The demonstration classroom program turned out to be more complex for many BLTs than they had anticipated because the job of teaching reading was only part of the overall picture. The issues surrounding the children who were at the heart of BRI's reform efforts were much more compelling than many were prepared to deal with. The Read Well program, while offering a sound early reading curriculum that undoubtedly made their jobs easier, prompted questions, too, that became more pronounced as the school year progressed. I was reminded of Osborn's (2003) comments after completing her evaluation of BRI's early work with schools:

> I suspect the organizers of the Barksdale Reading Institute did not realize the thorny thicket they were entering when they began their project. To carry out the work in the schools, they had to enter both the contentious world of reading education and the complicated social and political world of the public schools, (p. 2)

To borrow Osborn's term, I suspect that the BRI's work with demonstration classroom program was an even thornier thicket than BRI's earlier work with schools in 2003.

BLTs' Descriptions of Their Experiences Implementing Demonstration Classrooms

Sense of Purpose

The BLTs shared a sense of purpose about their work. While they acknowledged that the work was difficult and stressful, all the BLTs felt very positive about their job.

Several BLTs described the experience as rewarding. One BLT stated, “We’re trying to create a miracle.” Another said, “We’re trying to make something big happen.” Another described the job as exhilarating.

Several BLTs used the word intensity to describe their experience implementing the demonstration classroom project. One BLT said, “It’s all consuming. I eat, sleep, and breathe my job. I really love what I do.” Another BLT stated, “It’s not just a job; we’re really interested in the students.” According to one BLT, “When we get frustrated we don’t give in. When we hit the wall, we say, who’s going to move this wall?”

Teacher Stress

One of the themes that emerged early from this research was teacher stress. With the exception of one teacher, all BLTs described feeling a great deal of stress. Stress among teachers is not uncommon, particularly in low performing schools. Turchi, Johnson, Owens, and Montgomery (2002) studied the effect of high stakes accountability on professional development practices and found that teachers in schools that are considered low performing described their jobs as stressful more often than teachers in adequate or high performing schools. While the state accountability ratings of the schools housing demonstration classrooms varied, they shared the common feature of serving populations with a high number of low socioeconomic students. Additionally, the students who received reading instruction in the demonstration classrooms were all at risk for reading failure. Therefore, it would be expected that the stress associated with teaching in a low performing school would also be experienced by the BLTs. One BLT stated, “All of these kids are at-risk for a number of reasons, not just for reading.”

Several BLTs worried about their students' lives away from school, relaying anecdotes about the turbulent lives their students lead. According to Howard and Johnson (2002), teachers often find working with children who deal with poverty or abuse stressful.

One BLT described the difficulty of working in a class solely composed of struggling readers: "In a regular classroom you may have two at-risk children. We have a classroom full of them." Another BLT stated that part of her stress was attributable to the fact that she had to teach not only first grade skills, but also the kindergarten skills many of her students never got the previous year. Other BLTs noted the lack of experiences their students had and the lack of literacy support they had at home. According to one BLT, she had students who had never been to a McDonald's restaurant, seen an airplane, or traveled beyond their rural community. According to the BLTs, their students' lack of experiences resulted in a limited vocabulary and difficulty with comprehension.

Greene, Beszterczey, Katzenstein, Park, and Goring (2002) examined the effect of student behaviors on teacher stress. Teachers reported that students with ADHD were significantly more stressful to teach than students without ADHD. Additionally, they found that students with ADHD associated with oppositional/aggressive behavior or severe social impairment were significantly more stressful to teach than students with ADHD without other behaviors and difficulties. All of the BLTs reported teaching several students with significant behavior issues. In some cases there was a preponderance of angry children in one grade. Most BLTs felt that many of their students exhibited symptoms of ADHD. The difficulties associated with teaching children with behavior problems created added stress for many BLTs.

According to Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) the primary source of stress in teachers is work overload. Several BLTs described feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work involved in managing the demonstration classroom. Not only did they describe the job as demanding, but several BLTs drove almost an hour getting to and from work and, therefore, began their days extremely early. One BLT reported, "For me, it's exhausting physically … it's hard to get enough rest."

Problems with stress were most severe at the beginning of the school year. One BLT stated that she felt that part of the stress she experienced at the beginning of the year was because of the newness of everything. Not only were the teachers learning to use a new reading program, they were also working in a new setting, with a new format. There was an expectation by BRI that there would be uniformity in teaching strategies and classroom management. BLTs described being concerned about meeting the standards established by BRI for the demonstration classrooms. Several reported that the job became less stressful for them as they became more accustomed to routines and they became more comfortable using the Read Well program.

For several BLTs their stress was due to the gravity of the responsibility they felt toward their students. One BLT said, "Sometimes I worry because I feel like I'm the last hope for all these kids." Another BLT stated, "It's the weight of everything that causes stress." Thompson (2004) noted that compassionate teachers who truly care about their students' emotional, physical, and academic well-being run the risk of becoming consumed by their students' problems. She cautioned teachers to avoid developing a "savior complex" and to do all they can to help their students, but not to take their problems home with them. According to one BLT, the slow progress her students were

making at the beginning of the year took an emotional toll on her, but once they began to show improvement she felt better.

BLTs expressed stress in different ways and some had more difficulty than others. Some described their stress in terms of being exhausted, comparing the rigors of overseeing a demonstration classroom to doing hard labor or digging ditches all day. One compared the experience to that of juggling a hundred balls at one time. Other BLTs spoke of feeling as if they had to push all the time to get things done. Several felt pressure because of time constraints, not able to get everything done. One BLT stated that she felt as if she was unable to enjoy her students because of the pressure to get things done.

One component of the demonstration classroom program that created stress for some BLTs was the sense of being monitored constantly. One BLT described the experience of teaching in a demonstration classroom as “being in a fish bowl.” Teachers and principals were required to observe instruction in the demonstration classroom each month. Being observed by teachers and principals didn’t seem to bother most of the BLTs and they reported that after a while they didn’t notice other teachers’ presence in the room. Other teachers’ presence did not seem to have a negative effect on their students either. A few BLTs, however, reported feeling nervous about being observed by BRI administrators, concerned that they were not meeting their high standards or performing their jobs as expected. Issues of fidelity to the Read Well program caused some stress for a few BLTs, concerned that they might be reprimanded for veering from the program’s script. One BLT reported feeling nervous that her students weren’t

performing as well on their assessments as students in other demonstration classrooms. One BLT stated, “We’re under a microscope all the time. We don’t want to look bad.”

A key difference between the BLTs’ experiences of feeling stressed out and those generally experienced by other teachers is that BRI administrators were aware of and concerned about their teachers’ emotional well-being and attempted to alleviate the stress as much as possible. While other teachers often feel unsupported by school administration (Turchi, et al, 2002), BLTs described their administrators as concerned and supportive. Early in the school year BRI engaged the services of a clinical psychologist to speak with the group of BLTs and ISs about sources of their stress and stress management strategies. In August he spoke primarily about the need for balance in their lives; in October, he shared more specific stress reduction strategies and encouraged the BLTs and ISs to exercise regularly as an effective method for reducing stress.

Johnstone (1993) and Austin, et al (2005) studied teacher stress and found that the most common source of stress is work overload and, although teachers reported using a variety of coping strategies, the only conclusive positive strategy utilized by the majority of the teachers to lower stress levels was exercise. According to Beck (2003) teachers were able to reduce their stress levels by 34% after participating in a stress-management program for teachers that included an exercise component. Claiborne Barksdale offered an incentive to all the BLTs and ISs for participating in some form of exercise several times each week. In December the BLTs and ISs who had exercised at least three times a week received a $100.00 gift certificate for Amazon.com.

In order to ameliorate the stress associated with the BLTs’ work load, BRI administrators arranged for every BLT and IS to take one “mental health day” each

month. Beginning in December, administrators substituted for the BLTs or ISs one day a month, taking over their small group instruction, and allowing them to miss work without the concern that their students would miss instruction. Additionally, by the end of the first semester of the school year, BLTs were given a little more flexibility in how they conducted reading instruction in their classrooms, relieving some BLTs' concerns about fidelity to the Read Well program. For some BLTs, while there was a still an expectation of uniformity in the demonstration classrooms, this small amount of freedom helped lower their levels of stress. According to Brownell (1997) increased autonomy can be helpful in relieving job related stress for teachers.

Assistant Teachers

Some BLTs found themselves not only teaching children and modeling reading instruction for other teachers, but having to teach ATs about how to interact with children. In some schools, assistant teachers were accustomed to speaking harshly to students. Some had been working in the school for several years, with other teachers, and for them it was normal to yell at or even belittle students. One BLT explained that after she'd discussed the need to avoid speaking harshly with the students and never say mean things to them, the AT continued to interact inappropriately when out of earshot of the BLT. Another BLT had a similar situation with her AT. The AT felt that the BLT wasn't firm enough with the students and that she, because she lived in the community and knew the kids as well as their families, had to lend the BLT a hand. As she walked the children back to class, she told them that the BLT was too nice to say so, but they were in her reading class because they were dumb and needed extra help. The AT found

nothing inappropriate about telling the children what she considered to be the truth. BLTs sometimes had to call upon BRI administrators to work with ATs.

BRI provided professional development for ATs, training them in using different materials and methods as well as appropriate ways of interacting with students. This did help alleviate some of the difficulties some BLTs were experiencing with their ATs. However, inappropriate interactions between ATs and their students continued to be a problem in more than one demonstration classroom. One BLT felt that the problem may be more cultural than anything else because the African American parents in her community tended to speak much more forcefully with their children. Additionally, the AT had grown up in the community and was related to or knew many of the families of the children in the demonstration classroom. She felt, then, that it was appropriate for her to speak to the students in the same way their families spoke to them. The AT saw the BLT and IS as being soft on the children and not effective disciplinarians.

In some of the schools corporal punishment was the norm when disciplining children. BLTs never used corporal punishment in the demonstration classrooms and, therefore, other teachers in the school, too, thought of the BLTs and ISs as being ineffective disciplinarians. The BLTs, on the other hand, all stated that, while some of the children in their classes were difficult to teach and exhibited behavior problems, they were able to take care of the problems in their class without resorting to extreme methods. Behavior in the demonstration classes were all handled proactively through rewards and various forms of behavior modification. Sending children to the office was a rarity and only occurred if a child hurt another student or exhibited extreme antisocial or inappropriate behaviors that required outside assistance from a counselor or principal.

The BLTs' insistence on positive interactions with children supports Krashen's (1988) theory regarding the affective filter which serves to inhibit learning when the affective conditions surrounding learning are less than optimal. Krashen's research primarily focuses on the acquisition of second languages. However, Delpit (1995) suggested that the same affective filter can inhibit the learning of children who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Constant correction can affect their ability to learn to read and speak Standard American English (SAE). The same may be true when a student's behavior is constantly corrected or they are spoken to in a demeaning way. By attending to the affective conditions in the classroom, the affective filter can be lowered and, therefore, learning can occur with greater ease.

Time

Several BLTs expressed frustration that they didn't have enough instructional time with their students. A few noted that they limited the amount of time they spent reading aloud to their first grade students, although they recognized that reading to students is an effective way to improve their vocabulary and comprehension. Several BLTs, too, thought that too much time was devoted to assessments.

Prior to beginning instructing students in the demonstration classroom, BLTs and ISs administered DIBELS and TPRI assessments to all kindergarten through third grade students in their schools (this served to determine which students would be enrolled in their reading classes). Again, following the winter break and prior to summer break, BLTs and ISs assessed all kindergarten though third grade students again. Although they received assistance from a team composed of one teacher from each grade level and,

sometimes BRI administrators, the process took anywhere from one to two weeks. According to one BLT, even if you consider the first two weeks of school spent on assessments unavoidable because it determines which children would benefit from being in the demonstration classroom, students who were assigned to the demonstration classrooms missed two to six weeks of instruction from the BLT and IS. During the second and third assessment periods the students still reported to the demonstration classroom; however, they did not receive core instruction or interventions during that time. They spent their time in reading class doing center activities, such as sorting words or listening to books on tape, while being monitored by the AT. One BLT noted the irony that the students who most needed intense reading instruction where the ones who ended up receiving the least amount of reading instruction since the other teachers (with the exception of those serving on the assessment team) did not have to stop teaching during the assessment periods.

According to Kunjufu (2002), master teachers overcome the difficulties of teaching low-income children by having high expectations and spending the greatest number of minutes during the school day on instruction. Kunjufu pointed out that if a teacher loses only a few instructional minutes a day, by the end of the year, that lost time accounts for days, even weeks worth of time that students have missed in instructional time. One factor that distinguishes master teachers from less effective teachers is that they guard their instructional time. BLTs recognized that the time they spent administering assessments was time their students were not receiving instruction.

Focus on the Children

Although their role was limited to reading instruction with the children in the demonstration classroom, and most of their students' time at school was spent with their homeroom teachers, most of the BLTs felt that, in trying to teach their children to read, they had the ability to impact their entire lives. When children exhibited difficult behaviors BLTs didn't allow their problems to become a barrier to instruction; rather, the BLTs attempted to discover the source of the behavior so that they could make adjustments in their instructional approach with the children to accommodate their particular needs. A few BLTs described seeking outside help for children. For example, a child in one demonstration classroom constantly had emotional melt-downs and temper tantrums when he didn't perform as well as the other children in his small group. In order to help him, she enlisted the help of the counselor, who already worked with the child on other issues, and asked her to practice playing games with him and model how to react when he didn't win. Other BLTs described having disruptive children sit close to them during small group instruction in order to more closely monitor their reactions to other children. In one instance a BLT, after trying a number of other ways to work around the disruptions of a particular student, realized that if she simply gave him a moment within the group to be in charge, either reading a passage aloud first to the other students or demonstrating how to decode a difficult word, it had the effect of defusing his disruptions by giving him a role that was significant to him. One BLT stated, "I don't let anything stop me from teaching these kids." Another BLT said, "Some of our children have learned that if they act badly enough and annoy the teacher enough they get put in a

corner by themselves somewhere and won't be bothered anymore. I think they're surprised when it doesn't work in here." The BLTs' attitudes toward their students exemplified Thompson's (2004) description of phenomenal teachers:

> Any decent teacher can become successful with well-behaved and high-achieving students. Only the phenomenal teachers … can succeed with underachievers, students from challenging backgrounds, and those who are perceived as discipline problems. Becoming a phenomenal teacher is not easy, but it is an option that is available to all teachers. (p. 131)

According to Kunjufu (2002), master teachers understand the importance of having high expectations of their students. Describing students' perceptions of their own potential, Kunjufu stated, "I don't become what I think I can, I don't become what you think I can, I become what I think you think I can" (p. 43).

Concerns about Language and Expectations

BLTs frequently spoke of the decisions they had to make regarding their students' African American Vernacular English (AAVE). According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (2007), AAVE is a dialect of American English that "is a regular, systematic language variety that contrasts with other dialects in terms of its grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary" (p. 1). In a 1997 position statement on AAVE, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) noted that children learn best when teachers respect their dialect, culture, and social background. Several BLTs deliberated about how much they should correct a student's grammar during teaching and conversation. For other BLTs the issues they were most concerned with revolved around assessments, which are discussed in another section.

A few BLTs expressed concern that being too vigilant with pronunciation could interfere with their students' ability to become readers. For example, if a child read the text, "That boy's hat is red" as "That boy hat is red," the BLT wondered if it was more important to insist on accuracy in pronouncing the final consonant /s/ or if it was more important to overlook the error, since it represented more of a dialectical difference. A few BLTs questioned whether or not you should count it as an error every time a student drops a final consonant during a DIBELS or TPRI assessment. Some students, when concentrating on improving their fluency rates, would make dialectical errors that affected their final score. According to DIBELS' administration rules, the BLT should count off for every error in accuracy. However, one BLT pointed out that the rules allow for errors attributable to speech problems (such as pronouncing /s/ as /th/. Therefore, she felt that she should make the same accommodation for dialectical differences. This BLT stated

> After all, we allow for speech problems because we know that the kids will learn to say the sounds correctly – from a speech teacher or whatever -- why can't we look at dialect the same way? We can continue to work on teaching accuracy, but should we let that hold the child up?

BLTs did not insist on their students speaking American Standard English (ASE) during conversations in the classroom. The issue for them was primarily how to balance their role as reading teachers with their desire to make their students comfortable in their classroom. Several of the teachers, however, were concerned that they weren't explicitly teaching grammar to their students. A few BLTs limited their role to that of teaching reading, leaving language arts and spelling instruction to the homeroom teachers. A few BLTs, however, were charged with teaching language arts in its entirety (spelling,

sentence structure, parts of speech, etc.) and, therefore, voiced concern that the materials they were provided to teach language arts did not address grammar explicitly enough. One BLT stated, "If I'm going to try to teach language arts, I want to really teach it." BLTs were concerned that they weren't able to teach their students everything they felt that they needed to know.

BLT's Description of their Work with Children At-Risk for Reading Failure

The cornerstone of the demonstration classroom project was the children. The hard work and stress associated with the BLT role was mitigated by the successes they were witnessing with their students. Discussions about the problems experienced by so many of the children in the demonstration classrooms tended to dominate conversations about the BLTs' experiences with their students. However, that does not imply that they were more important than the lighter moments and joyful experiences. BLTs described their work with their students as being exhilarating and the successes of the children made all the hard work worthwhile. BLTs spoke of their students with pride, laughed about their silly moments singing and dancing the "Boogy Woogy ABC" song (Sopris West, 2006), and relayed the happy moments when students realized that they could read all by themselves. Additionally, BLTs willingly offered to attend Teacher Support Team (TST) meetings to represent their students when they were experiencing difficulties in their homeroom classes or were at risk for failing the school year. While homeroom teachers viewed the TST meetings as a necessary step in having students tested for placement in special education classes, the BLTs recognized it as a formalized process for documenting their intervention activities with students and, more importantly, an

opportunity to demonstrate their students' improvement. BLTs fulfilled the role as advocates for their children and at times their participation in the TST process kept students from being placed in special education classes.

In writing about the students in the demonstration classrooms, it would be easy to convey the message that all of our students lived in dire conditions or that none of our students' parents were actively involved in their education. All of the BLTs reported having at least some parents who were committed to their children's academic success. Some parents were interested in all their children's assessments and requested copies of books for their children to read and practice with at home. BLTs agreed that the children in their reading classes who have involved and supportive parents have a much better chance at being successful.

My great-grandmother had a saying that comes to mind as I reflect on the BLTs' experiences with their students. She would say, "You always favor your weakest limb." In other words, if you have a sprained ankle, you walk in a way that favors the ankle that hurts – taking the weight off of it, so that, not only is the pain lessened, it will be able to heal more quickly. In conversations with BLTs, it became apparent that they tended to favor their weakest students. The students with the most difficulties were at the forefront of their minds, not because they caused the most complications in class, but because they tugged at the hearts of the BLTs. One BLT noted, "You can sometimes leave your work at school, but it's almost impossible to leave your concerns about the children at school. They're always with you."

Therefore, I want to be clear that not all children who live in poverty will struggle to learn to read. Nor do all children who live in poverty have behavior problems or are

exposed to violence. My findings are derived from my conversations with the BLTs implementing the demonstration classroom project in its first year, and they offer insight into the issues that are common in many of the reading classes. My findings also reveal the problems faced by these particular children who all shared the common characteristics of needing extra assistance with learning to read and, for the most part, lived in communities plagued by problems associated with poverty.

Fragile Learners

A recurring theme throughout this study was the difficulty associated with teaching students who are, as one BLT stated, “at risk for a number of reasons, not just reading.” A few BLTs reported that they felt unprepared to deal with the range of problems associated with the children in their reading classes. One BLT summed up the problems of some of her children by saying, “We’re trying to teach them to read, and they’re trying to survive.” As BLTs, we came to think of many of our students as “fragile learners,” for whom success was often tenuous. According to one BLT, “Teaching reading with some of the children often feels as if you’re taking one step forward, and two steps backward.”

For some of the students in the demonstration classrooms, progress was steady, and, once they’d acquired the foundational reading skills of phonemic awareness and phonics, they were able to move quickly towards becoming successful readers, able to work at grade level. For other students, however, growth was slower and required much more contemplation by the BLTs. There were often other complicating factors that made teaching these fragile learners even more difficult.

Attention Deficits and Behavior Problems

Most of the BLTs reported having students in their classes who exhibited ADHD type behaviors. According to one BLT, three-fourths of the students in her demonstration reading classes exhibited attention problems. BLTs described having students who were unable to sit still, bouncing off the walls, and unable to pay attention. One BLT stated that some of her students fell apart when they didn't get something right, or it wasn't their turn in a game or activity. Some of the teaching methods used in the demonstration classes were formatted to be like a game for the children; therefore, it was a challenge to conduct lessons with children who have a hard time taking turns or not winning every game. According to Greene, et al (2002) teaching students with ADHD, particularly those who also exhibit oppositional/aggressive behaviors or social impairment, is associated with higher levels of teacher stress. Their observations of teachers indicated that students with ADHD consume a significantly higher percentage of a teacher's attention than other students.

BLTs distinguished students who they described as having attention problems from those with other types of behavioral difficulties. Students in need of instructional intervention who have attention problems minus hyperactivity can often be overlooked in a regular classroom because they are not demanding the teacher's attention. In the demonstration classroom, however, attention problems were more obvious because of the amount of interaction between the students and teachers. With a BLT, IS, and a TA in the classroom with 18 students, the student/teacher ratio was 6:1; therefore, students were almost always face to face with a teacher and their attention problems were difficult to overlook. BLTs reported that they spent a great deal of time during small group

instruction redirecting students to their lessons. Even when doing something fun in a small group, some students would stare into space and appear to be daydreaming. One BLT stated that she felt that, with some students, their primary problem was with attention, not reading.

Many BLTs described having problems with angry children. One BLT stated, “It takes a few minutes to just get some of the kids settled down and ready to learn. They come in with a chip on their shoulder, ready to argue.” Another BLT reported,

> I’ve never seen such angry children. They’re mad every day and I don’t even think they know why they’re mad. They’ll say it’s because of something that was said or they got in trouble for something they didn’t do, but I don’t think they really know.

Several BLTs reported problems with anger in particular grade groups. For example, two BLTs stated that their 3rd grade students were angrier than students in other grades they taught. One BLT stated, “My kindergarteners are angry and jaded.” According to one BLT, “…our kindergarteners are violent. It just drains your energy.” Students also exhibited social problems and difficulties interacting with each other. For example, one BLT reported, “If someone accidentally touches them, they ball up their fists and they get in each other’s faces.” Another BLT said that she had to spend instructional time teaching social skills in addition to reading:

> I’m having to teach things like what to say when somebody accidentally hits them or touches them. I have to be very specific with them. I’m having to teach them how to express themselves …

One BLT reported that her students who struggled the most academically also had the greatest behavioral problems. Another BLT felt that counseling would help students develop better social skills and deal with anger. When asked to make suggestions for

improving the demonstration classroom program, she said that having a counselor to work with the kids every day during their small group instruction would be helpful because their lack of social skills interfered with their ability to learn to read.

The Effects of Abuse, Violence, and Trauma

Some students in the demonstration classes exhibited behaviors that were extreme and disturbing to the BLTs, requiring outside intervention from counselors or social workers. These behaviors, according to the BLTs, were often associated with abuse -- physical, sexual, and emotional -- and provided insight into the troubled lives of some of their students.

BLTs reported concerns that their students were sometimes neglected at home – not necessarily rising to the level of criminal neglect, but to the extent that it influenced their students' ability to learn. Children were often unable to stay awake in class. One student, when asked why she was so sleepy, spoke about going to bed the night before, only to be woken up to go to her aunt's house with her mom, where she went back to sleep only to be woken again to return home. According to the child, this was a common occurrence. Other children described staying up very late and watching television programs, some with adult themes. Children often lived in homes with several adults and children – aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and boyfriends and girlfriends of family members -- sharing rooms and beds. The people who lived in a home sometimes changed frequently, as did the sleeping arrangements for the children.

A few BLTs reported that some of their students frequently came to school in dirty clothes. At times children would wear a shirt several days and then turn it inside out

and wear it a few more days. Some BLTs also reported being concerned about the health of the children they taught. One BLT spoke about a child who had been sick for several months with an upper respiratory infection. The child clearly felt bad day after day and could barely hold her head up in class. Other children complained of toothaches that went untreated. According to Pellino (2006) the health of children growing up in poverty is often affected by poor nutrition and high levels of stress It is, undoubtedly, harder to learn when you're not feeling well.

Students were often exposed to violent behavior, describing shootings in their homes or neighborhoods. Children sometimes came to school agitated or upset, describing violent events that occurred at home. One second grader described a big fight between his mom and dad when the police were called and his mom was arrested. One kindergartener came to school on a Monday morning telling the story of her grandmother's (who is raising the little girl while her mother is in prison) argument with her husband, reporting that the man had a gun in his pocket and her grandmother got a shotgun and began waving it around. The argument continued until neighbors came to the house and intervened. Another student described a confrontation between the police and his father in which his father was thrown to the ground and then taken to jail. The uncle of one student was shot and he died a week later in the hospital. The student was very angry during the weeks surrounding the incident and he was unable to concentrate on his work. Most BLTs stated that they had many children with relatives in prison – a parent, uncle, or cousin. One BLT said her students were "old before their time." She worried that they didn't seem to have much of a childhood. Brownlee (1996) reported that young children who are frequently exposed to violence can experience neurological changes and

are susceptible to attention deficit disorders. Additionally, they tend to be over-vigilant to social cues around them, making it difficult for them to listen to their teachers.

Sometimes the problems experienced by the children in the demonstration classrooms were the type all families experience, such as deaths in the family, automobile accidents, or major illnesses. Some children, however, seemed to have poor coping skills and became more aggressive or regressed. For example, when the father of one student had a major stroke and his mother's time was consumed with caring for her husband, the student seemed angrier than usual and aggressive toward other students. A kindergarten student, following her grandmother's death (with whom she lived) exhibited infantile behavior, curling up on the floor and sucking her thumb. Another student, when her father died after a lengthy hospital stay, missed several weeks of school and had great difficulty getting caught up with the rest of the children in her class.

BLTs reported that some of their students spoke of witnessing illegal drug use. In one demonstration classroom, children (one kindergartener and one second grader) took freshly sharpened pencils and pretended they were injecting themselves in the crook of their arm – to the amusement of the children around them. In another classroom, when the BLT was preparing to read a Read Well story designed to teach kindergarten students about the 9-1-1 emergency phone number, she asked the class, "When might you need to call 9-1-1?" The students called out various answers that reflected their own experiences, such as when someone breaks into your house and has a gun, or when someone has a knife or gun and they're going to hurt someone. One little boy said you should call 9-1-1 when your dog bites a policeman. One little girl said that her mother told her to call 9-1-1 when someone was smoking. Another little girl nodded in agreement, saying that her

momma told her to call 9-1-1 if someone was smoking and told her to hold it. Curious, the BLT asked the girls if they were supposed to call 9-1-1 anytime they saw someone smoking a cigarette. To that, three or four children told the teacher that they weren't talking about a cigarette, but a blunt (marijuana cigarette). Apparently sensing the naïve teacher's confusion, one little girl began to explain to her how a blunt is made, describing the process in detail until the teacher realized what she was talking about and redirected the conversation. For the BLT, this incident brought home to her the difference between children who live in lower income communities and children living in middle class communities. Generally, when talking about 9-1-1, she would expect to hear students talk about calling the emergency number if there is a fire or someone gets hurt or very sick. With the children in her kindergarten class, however, 9-1-1 was associated with crime. The Read Well story depicted children calling 9-1-1 when they realized that a neighbor's house was on fire. That was apparently the first time her students had been taught that you use the emergency number for any reason other than when witnessing someone doing something illegal.

According to Thompson (2004), classrooms throughout the United States are filled with children from difficult homes. The U. S. Census Bureau reported that there were 690,658 substantiated cases of child abuse in 1990, and by 1998 that number had grown to 861,602. Thompson reported that "more than half of these cases involved neglect; 23 percent involved physical abuse; and 13 percent involved sexual abuse" (p. 130).

There is a substantial research base of the effects of trauma, neglect, and abuse on young children. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (1992) noted that

there is a wide range of socioemotional problems that occur as a result of maltreatment, including aggression, hyperactivity, compulsivity, tantrums, oppositional behavior, and learning problems. The Massachusetts Citizens for Children (2001) reported the following statistics:

- 30% of abused children have some form of language or cognitive disability;
- 50% or more have difficulty in school, including poor attendance and misconduct;
- 22% or more have a learning disorder;
- 25% require special education services at some time. (p. 4)

Brain research has demonstrated that children who have experienced abuse react to angry confrontations involving other people differently than children who have never been abused. They are overly vigilant to an argument or fight even when it doesn't involve them and remain on edge even after the fight is resolved. Children who have not experienced abuse, while initially responding with alarm, are able turn their attention away from an angry confrontation. The inability to disengage, common to abused children, can lead to unhealthy behaviors later in life such as aggression, social anxiety, and addiction (Basu, 2005; Reynolds, 2003).

Lack of Parental Support

BLTs frequently cited uninvolved parents as a problem. In some schools, parents rarely came for parent-teacher conference days, and often did not respond to requests for conferences. Students often did not get help with homework; papers that were sent home to be checked and signed by parents often came back with no signature and it was obvious that they had never been taken out of the backpack.

McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) conducted research on parental involvement in high poverty, urban schools and found that parents often resist becoming involved in their children's elementary school because they feel the faculty had been biased against African American and Latino children and, therefore, they distrust the school administration and faculty.

Lack of Experiences

Teaching many of the struggling readers in the demonstration classroom was difficult because of their lack of experiences and limited vocabulary. Simply reading aloud to the children could be difficult because so many of the words were unfamiliar to them and had to be explained in order for the story to make sense. Students did not have the same experiences that are common to most middle class children, such as going to McDonalds, going to the airport, or traveling outside their communities.

According to Pellino (2006), children from poor families lack experiences, such as the use of a home computer, visits to the zoo or museums, attendance at pre-school programs, exposure to literature and educational learning materials, interaction with educated, literate and well-spoken adults, and being read to by a parent. These experiences are common for most middle class children and, therefore, account for why learning seems much easier to them. Additionally, children living in poverty are often unable to develop positive social skills and have limited opportunity to learn effective language skills. Bylsma (2004) found that 86% of the 5th graders in one Detroit school had never ordered food from a menu in a restaurant and, therefore, were confused by a question on a standardized test that involved adding the prices of various items on a

menu. The author points out that students may also have problems comprehending stories about fishing, camping, or attending a concert. She contends that raising academic achievement will only be possible when barriers associated with poverty are eliminated.

Absenteeism and Transiency

Absenteeism was described as a fairly significant problem in many demonstration classrooms. A few BLTs reported that the same students missed school often and for days at a time. One BLT noted that it was the children who struggled the most academically and were in her lowest reading group who seemed to miss the most days in school. According to one BLT, “Children will miss school and, when you ask them why they weren’t there, they say things like their mom didn’t get up in time or they don’t know why they didn’t come to school.” Absenteeism in the demonstration reading class was particularly problematic, not only for the children who were frequently absent, but also for the other children in their reading group since one of the mandates of the Read Well program is that a small reading group cannot progress to the next unit until all six of the children in the group had passed the end of unit assessment. Therefore, students who were often absent slowed the progress of the other children in their group.

In a couple of the schools with a demonstration classroom, transiency was a substantial problem. In one of these schools, a full one third of the children in the kindergarten and 1st grade classes had withdrawn and transferred to another school before February. In another school, the BLT reported that one child, since the beginning of the school year, had moved away and returned three times. Another student had been withdrawn from school, reportedly because the family was moving, and was reenrolled

three weeks later. According to the BLT the student had not moved, and had been at home during the three week absence. Pellino (2006) reported that high-mobility is a common problem among families living in poverty since they may live in places that rent by the week or even the day. School transfer for some poor children becomes the norm, as does irregular school attendance.

Experiences at School

Several BLTs felt that some of their students were often treated unfairly at school in their homeroom classes. One BLT stated, “Our kids are excluded from everything – field trips, special programs. Teachers don’t want to be bothered with them.” Another BLT reported:

> With a lot of our kids, they’re getting nothing in the regular classroom. … One thing we’re seeing is that a lot of our kids are kind of getting lost in the shuffle. They know if they just sit there and do nothing, no one will bother them. They know their teacher just wants them to be quiet and if they’re quiet nobody expects anything from them. Just don’t bother the teacher and don’t bother the other kids.

Many BLTs described their classrooms as a safe haven for their students – the one place in the school where some of their students were unconditionally included in every activity. One BLT said that it took her students awhile to realize that the demonstration classroom was a safe place for them. Another BLT felt that this was the first time for some of her students to experience success and to receive positive attention. According to one BLT, “Our kids are the ones that are always out in the hall during regular class time. They are never involved in anything.”

Poverty

The experiences of BLTs working with the children in demonstration classrooms reflect the spectrum of issues surrounding teaching children who are at-risk for reading failure. Many of these issues described by the BLTs were attributable to the poverty most of the children live with every day. There is a strong link between poverty and low academic achievement (Byslma, 2004; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2006; Pellino, 2006; Zackson, 2005). According to Pellino (2006),

> The term at-risk refers to children who are likely to fail in school or in life because of their life's social circumstances. … Poverty is considered a major at-risk factor. … Some of the factors related to poverty that may place a child at-risk for academic failure are: very young, single or low educational level parents; unemployment; abuse and neglect; substance abuse; dangerous neighborhoods; homelessness; mobility; and exposure to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences. (p. 1)

According to Yeung and Glauber (2007) in 2002, 16.7% of children in the United States lived in households with total incomes below the official federal poverty line. Of the children under the age of six living in a female-headed household, 48.6% lived below the official federal poverty line. In Mississippi, 31% of all children live below the poverty rate (Groce, 2005). According to Save the Children (2007), Mississippi has the third highest child poverty rate in the country. Over half the children in Mississippi do not get their basic needs met. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2006) reported that African American children are more likely to live in poverty in the United States than other children. While 10% of white children live in poor families, 35% of African American children, 28% of Latino children, and 29% of Native American children live in poor families.

Hart and Risley (1995) conducted a longitudinal study of the language interactions between preschool children and their parents and found that children living in poverty have significantly different experiences with language than their working class and middle class counterparts. Not only do their parents speak to them much less frequently, but the quality of their language interactions is significantly different. Parents of children in middle class homes tend to talk to their children in much more meaningful ways, with explanations and descriptions. For example, when a child jumps on the couch, they will not only tell them to stop jumping on the couch, but will also explain to them why it is dangerous and what the consequences might be if they continue to jump. Children of working class parents will have similar interactions, but shorter and more direct. Children from poor homes, however, tend to be spoken to much more abruptly, and with no explanation: "Get down." According to Hart and Risley, the difference in how parents interact with their preschoolers has a profound and lasting effect on later academic achievement and accounts, in part, for the achievement gap between middle class and poor children.

Dialectical Differences

Another issue that was discussed by BLTs was that of language in the demonstration classrooms. Although, the issues associated with poverty were discussed far more often, BLTs also discussed concerns about how to approach teaching reading to children who don't speak standard English. Some BLTs wondered if, or how much, they should correct their students' grammar or whether to consider dialectical features of the students' speech as errors – particularly on assessments. In October BLTs were given a

copy of an article which addressed issues regarding reading instruction and speakers of AAVE. In the article, Labov (1995) suggested five principles to apply within reading programs that will provide the maximum assistance to students who speak AAVE.

Principle 1: Teachers should distinguish between mistakes in reading and differences in pronunciation;

Principle 2: Give more attention to the ends of words;

Principle 3: Words must be presented to students in those phonological contexts that preserve underlying forms (for example, introducing past tense *–ed* in reading after words ending in /t/ or /d/;

Principle 4: Use the full forms of words and avoid contractions; and

Principle 5: Grammar should be taught explicitly.

Of interest to several BLTs was the problem many of their students were experiencing learning to read contractions. In the Read Well kindergarten and first grade programs, the word *I'm* is taught in the earliest units, and the students were not permitted to proceed to higher units until they'd passed the end of unit assessments. Some BLTs chose to overlook the end of unit assessment rule if the only problem the student had was with the contraction. Most BLTs noted that many of their kindergarten students, when reading their name sentence on the cover of their small group unit magazines, would say *I'm am Susie,* rather than *I'm Susie.* While most BLTs found Read Well to be effective, explicit, and systematic, they questioned why the program consistently introduced contractions prior to teaching the words they represented.

Another issue that was debated by BLTs was whether to count as errors every time a student failed to pronounce the final consonant in a word. An emphasis was

placed on reading fluency rates during the second semester of first grade, as well as second and third grade. Therefore, sometimes when students were concentrating on reading quickly, they dropped the final consonants in words. One BLT pointed out that, in terms of comprehension, this wasn't necessarily an error, but according to the rules of the assessments, it had to be counted as an error because the word wasn't read accurately. Some BLTs reported overlooking errors that were directly attributed to dialect if it was clear that the child knew what he was reading.

A few BLTs expressed concerns about the sequencing and content of lessons in the Read Well program, supporting the findings of Lobov, Baker, Bullock, Ross, and Brown (1998). While examining the common reading errors of inner city children, they found that the students had great accuracy with initial consonants and had little trouble learning words with the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) structure such as *cat, sit,* or *hot.* More difficult for the children were words with more complex consonantal onsets (blends) or words with more than one vowel or consonant. After examining the phonics program used in the schools within the study, the authors found that 62% of the lessons were devoted to words that begin with single initial consonants, which the children found fairly easy. Seventy-two percent of the lessons are devoted to CVC words, which, again, represents a word pattern the children had little trouble learning. According to the authors, the proportion of the content in the program doesn't reflect the skills the inner city students need help with the most. Phonics programs, in order to be effective, should dwell primarily on word structures that present the most difficulty for students. Additionally, according to the authors, the sequencing of the program is a problem, too. Long vowels, for example, are not introduced until page 157 in the phonics text used for

instruction. In the first grade program, most children would not complete all the lessons and, therefore, might never get to long vowels at all. Based on their analysis, closer attention to the design of early reading programs could facilitate greater reading success for students in inner cities. BLTs expressed concern that most children in the demonstration classroom would not progress far enough in the program to learn the silent *e* rule associated with long vowels. BLTs worried that their students, already fragile learners, would enter second grade without the reading instruction they need to succeed and would fall further behind. Their students would, therefore, become victims of the Matthew Effect in which struggling learners fall further behind each year (Stanovich, 1986).

While questioning features of the Read Well program, the BLTs did not think there was another program available that would meet the needs of their students better. However, it was clear they were aware that the language needs of their children, primarily speakers of AAVE, required special consideration and greater understanding. There was not a consensus among BLTs about how vigilant they should be about correcting reading errors associated with their students' dialect. Additionally, BLTs who questioned the pace and sequencing of Read Well remained unsure about how to proceed or what the effect would be on their first graders if they did not complete all of the units in the program.

BLTs' Descriptions of Their Use of Reading Methods and Strategies Promoted by the NRP

At the outset of this study, I anticipated that conversations about the strategies and methods promoted by the NRP would focus on the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency as well as the use of small groups to differentiate instruction. These particular elements were emphasized in the demonstration classrooms as foundational skills in developing literacy in young children. Early in the data collection phase of this study, however, it became clear that it was going to be more difficult than I anticipated to disaggregate the data to capture the experience of BLTs' use of specific methods and strategies. The use of the Read Well program took center stage early in the data collection process and, therefore, my discussions with BLTs about methods and strategies were embedded in discussions of Read Well.

A careful consideration of the meaning of the words strategy and method helped in forming a plan for analyzing data related to reading instruction in the demonstration classrooms. For the purposes of this study, I adopted the definition of strategy as an elaborate and systematic plan of action (WordNet, 2007). A method, on the other hand, is a way of doing something. Therefore, I identified the strategy, the plan of action, for reading instruction within the demonstration classroom as the use of the Read Well program as the core curriculum. The methods used in the demonstration classroom were the components of Read Well. For example, one of Read Well's methods for teaching word decoding was to teach the children to bumpy (sounding words out phoneme by phoneme) and smooth blend (slowly blending phonemes together) words.

The Rationale for Read Well as Core Curriculum

The decision to adopt the Read Well program as core curriculum has been debated since the beginning of the demonstration classroom program. One BRI administrators has enthusiastically endorsed the Read Well program since its adoption in 2005. Another BRI administrator, contending that a good teacher can "teach reading with nothing but the phone book," wanted to use the reading programs already in place in the schools housing demonstration classrooms (personal communication, August, 2005). As one of the original BLTs in the pilot program, I, too, voiced my opinion that the demonstration classroom program would be more meaningful to teachers, who would be required to observe BLT and IS instruction, if we were using the same basal readers or programs they were using in their classrooms. Therefore, since the beginning of the demonstration classroom program, the use of Read Well has been somewhat contentious.

Garan (2004) outlined the reasons schools and districts choose to use scripted reading programs and outlined the case that is made for them:

- Scripts mean that the curriculum is preset and standardized. Teachers do not need to prepare for classes or make decisions.
- All Teachers at a grade level are on the same page at the same time. Therefore, it's easy to keep track of what they are doing.
- If schools are saturated with scripted – or even just tightly controlled – reading programs, teachers do not need to be educated in a variety of methods. The script will do their thinking for them.

- Business can run commercial teacher training programs set up as alternatives to traditional schools of education. Since the training is less comprehensive, it will be possible to pay the new-age teachers less money than more rigorously trained professionals. (p. 85)

According to BRI, using a program made replication of demonstration classrooms more feasible and easier to manage. Training for new BLTs and ISs, which has been conducted by a Read Well trainer, would also be easier to facilitate with a program. BRI could, with Read Well, ensure that students were receiving consistent, high quality systematic, explicit instruction. Additionally, the design of Read Well made it possible to differentiate instruction within each class.

The Consequences of Using Read Well as Core Curriculum

BRI's strategy to use the Read Well program in order to facilitate the teaching of NRP promoted reading methodologies in the demonstration classrooms supports the concerns of reading researchers that the NRP report would be used to promote pre-packaged teacher-proof programs (Coles, 2001; Meyer, 2003; NCTE, 2002; Pearson, 2005; Rice, 2006). In spite of the fact that the NRP did not endorse the use of commercial reading programs, it is the politicization of reading instruction through the No Child Left Behind legislation and the Reading First initiative (Allington, 2002a, Garan, 2004) that has lead to the proliferation of commercial reading programs in schools. According to Garan (2004), the case against adopting pre-scripted reading programs can be made for the following reasons:

- Because all students are unique, a single method or standardized program doesn't work for all children.
- Teachers are intelligent. They can and they should be instructional leaders and make decisions in conjunction with other teachers and parents. They should be a part of the educational process instead of reading scripts and mouthing someone else's words and thoughts like ventriloquists' dummies.
- Because teaching is an art as well as a science, teachers need to understand children's growth and development.
- There is no research – government or otherwise – that supports the use of any commercial program.
- Scripted programs … aren't new. They've been tried and ultimately rejected by schools for decades. It's a lot of money for a proven failure. (p. 86)

Shannon (1983) examined the effect commercial reading programs has on reading teachers, and found that teachers tend to become alienated from their reading instruction and begin treating reading instruction as the application of materials.

The need for a program that would facilitate the replication of the demonstration classroom project was a major factor in adopting the Read Well. The benefits of the program, according to administrators and BLTs, outweigh any possible negative consequences of using a scripted program. My research, however, supports Shannon's (1983) findings in that there has been a blurring of the lines between what constitutes reading instruction provided in the demonstration classrooms and the Read Well program. This was demonstrated by a remark by one of the BLTs that the principal of

another school in her district was sending teachers to the demonstration classroom to observe Read Well (and not effective teaching methods).

During interviews with BLTs, discussions of reading methodologies invariably became discussions of Read Well. Therefore, analysis of the data in this study was confounded in that it was difficult to parse specific methodologies from conversations about how BLTs teach reading. As found by Shannon (1983), teaching reading was becoming synonymous with teaching the Read Well program. In almost every instance, when asked to discuss their experiences with regard to the teaching methods used to teach reading, BLTs spoke about teaching Read Well. It was only through more probative questioning that specific discussions about teaching particular reading elements, such as fluency and phonemic awareness, were elicited at all.

Discussions about Teaching Reading Elements

Core curriculum for kindergarten and first grade in the demonstration classrooms was taught by the BLT. The BLT, as lead teacher, however, was also in charge of overseeing instruction provided by the IS and AT. While the other teachers participated in instructional planning, to varying degrees in different demonstration classrooms, the BLT took the lead and was ultimately responsible for the reading instruction children received. Figure 6 is an example of a typical daily lesson plan for small group instruction for the BLT, IS, and AT.

BLT – Core Curriculum

Read Well Lessons:

Three groups receiving differentiated small group instruction. Often each group is in a different unit in the Read Well program.

IS - Interventions

5 minutes: Phonemic Awareness *
Initial Sound Matching with blends –
(for ex., drink, drum)

10 minutes: Phonics
Word Dictation**

5 minutes: Nonsense Words

*group 1 and 2 – blends; group 3 – continue to work with consonants (focus on b and n)
**group 1 and 2 – introduce dictation with blends; group 3 – continue with CVC words

AT – Support Activities

10 minutes: Read Well Work Book (on each group's unit)

10 minutes: Practice reading Read Well solo stories

Figure 6

Typical Daily Lesson Plan for the BLT, IS, and AT

Several BLTs cited how easy it was to plan their core instruction using Read Well. However, a few BLTs wondered why, if they were the more experienced teacher in the demonstration classroom, were they providing the instruction that required little, or no, planning, and the ISs (a position originally designed for novice teachers) taught the methods that required the most planning and expertise. For a few BLTs there was a certain amount of irony in having the more experienced lead teacher using teacher-proof, scripted materials. One BLT stated that she wished she could do the interventions and leave the Read Well lessons for the ISs to do.

Phonemic Awareness

When asked about phonemic awareness instruction in the demonstration classroom, BLTs generally spoke of the specific methods used by the IS (for example, using felt squares to demonstrate phoneme segmentation or clapping out syllables). All of the BLTs felt that phonemic awareness training was critical for the children in the demonstration classroom, who often have language and speech deficits as well as difficulties with reading. They also agreed that reading deficits for most struggling readers could be directly attributed to a lack of foundational phonemic awareness. Several BLTs stated that they believed that if the kindergarten children in the demonstration classrooms were able to master phonemic awareness skills by the end of their kindergarten year, they would be able to attain grade level expectations and be prepared to begin first grade on par with their peers.

It is interesting that the phonemic awareness training most BLTs described was delivered by the IS in the demonstration classroom. Although the BLTs deliver the core

instruction, they did not speak of themselves as the primary source of phonemic awareness training. At issue is not that Read Well doesn't include phonemic awareness instruction in its program, because phonemic awareness instruction is including in Read Well lessons. What is noteworthy, however, is that teachers did not parse phonemic awareness instruction from Read Well. One BLT indicated that she didn't think there was much phonemic awareness instruction in Read Well, stating, "I know it's so important for our kids, but there's not a whole lot of it in Read Well. The I.S. does most of that at her table." In fact, there are specific strategies in the Read Well lessons to teach phonemic awareness; however they are not labeled as phonemic awareness activities in the Read Well lessons. Table 4 provides examples of phonemic awareness instructional methods used in the demonstration classroom by the BLT and IS, denoting which activities are included in Read Well lessons. However, as in almost all discussions about teaching reading, the BLT did not separate specific methodologies from the Read Well lessons. In other words, BLTs taught Read Well; ISs taught phonemic awareness.

Table 4

Phonemic Awareness Instructional Methods

Activity	Who does Activity	Materials	Method
Phoneme Counting I	BLT during some Read Well Lessons; IS during Intervention Lessons	n/a – oral activity	The teacher says a word (for example, *dog);* then repeats the word slowly while holding up a finger for each phoneme (/d/ /o/ /g/). The word is repeated again with the child joining in, saying the word and holding up a finger for each phoneme.
Phoneme Counting II	IS during Intervention Lessons	Small Felt squares	The teacher says a word (for example, *mat*). She then places felt squares in front of the child – one for each phoneme in the word. She repeats the word slowly, touching one of the felt squares as each phoneme is pronounced. The process is repeated with the child saying the word and touching the felt squares. This activity can also be done using other materials – pennies or plastic disks.
Phoneme Segmentation I	IS during intervention lessons	n/a – oral activity	The teacher says a word slowly, enunciating each phoneme (for example, /c/ /a/ /t/); students write the word.

Table 4 (continued)

Phoneme Segmentation II	IS during intervention lessons	n/a – oral activity	The teacher says a word and asks the student to say each phoneme in the word (the opposite of Phoneme Segmentation I activity).
Word Stretching and Shrinking	BLT during some Read Well lessons	Small slinky-type toy	The teacher says a word. She then holds up the slinky; while she says the word slowly, she stretches the slinky. After stretching the word, she closes the slinky and says the word quickly.
Initial Sound Matching	IS during intervention lessons	Small pictures of objects	The teacher shows the student several pictures (for example, a mouse, an apple, and a hat); she then says a letter sound (for example, /m/) and asks the child to point to the picture that begins with that sound.

Phonics

Most BLTs stated that they found the phonics lessons in the first grade small group Read Well units to be one of the strongest components of the program. They thought the explicitness of the instruction was helpful with the struggling readers they teach and routines built into the units were enjoyable. One BLT stated, “My kids really like the routines. At first I thought it might be boring after a while since it’s the same

thing every day, but they really seem to like knowing what to expect." One BLT said, referring to Read Well, "We have a starting point. … When it comes to teaching the lowest deficit skill, we can with this material. Before I would think what do I use?" Several BLTs cited the amount of practice the students get with new skills as a strength of the program.

In addition to phonics and decoding lessons provided in Read Well lessons, students received phonics and decoding instruction from the IS during intervention lessons. As the school year progressed, BLTs also began to supplement their Read Well lessons with other activities when students experienced difficulty mastering skills. Table 5 provides examples of phonics and decoding activities used by the BLT and IS to teach decoding and phonics.

Table 5

Decoding and Phonics Instructional Methods

Activity	Who does Activity	Materials	Method
Bumpy and Smooth Blending	BLT during some Read Well Lessons;	Read Well small group unit lesson and/or word cards	Bumpy Blending: Students are shown a word that has dots under each letter. They place their finger on the dot under each letter and say the letter sound (for example, /b/ /a/ /t/), sounding out the word by saying each phoneme. Smooth Blending: the same as Bumpy Blending, but instead of dots under the letters, there is a curved line drawn under the letters demonstrating how to smoothly blend a word together.
Letter/Word Dictation	IS during Intervention Lessons BLT as a supplement to Read Well lessons	Small dry erase boards and markers or paper and pencils	The teacher calls out a letter sound and asks the students to write the letter that matches the sound (for early kindergarten the teacher calls out the letter name). If students know letter sounds, the teacher can call out words slowly, enunciated each phoneme, while the students write the words on their boards.

Table 5 (continued)

Word Building	IS during intervention lessons BLT as a supplement to Read Well lessons	Magnetized dry erase boards; magnetic letters	The teacher selects sets of letters and places them on students' boards. The students are asked to use the letters to spell simple words. The teacher leads to students to change one letter at a time to make new words. (for example, if the students have the word *log* on their board, the teacher might say, "Change the *l* to a *b*, and what word do you have?"
Nonsense Words	IS during intervention lessons	Dry erase board and marker	The teacher will write a nonsense word on a board and hold it before the students, asking them to decode the word. (For example, *zam*)
Onsets and Rimes	IS during intervention lessons	Set of letter cards and cards with rime endings	Students are given a set of cards with letters and rimes. Teacher calls out a letter sound first, then a rime to be placed next to the letter to form a word. (For example, *f* and the rime card *it*, making the word fit. Rime cards are changed to make new words.

Fluency

Several BLTs expressed frustration that their students, particularly 2nd and 3rd graders, while becoming better at decoding words, remained slow readers, and it was often their slow reading that kept them from passing end of the unit Read Well assessments. Two BLTs expressed concern about the fluency instruction provided by the assistant teachers for 1st – 3rd graders. One BLT said, "I hear the AT over there and the kids are just trying to read faster and faster … It's the wrong message … there's no accuracy. You've got to teach accuracy and comprehension, teach word recognition, and fluency will follow." Four BLTs stated that they were concerned about the emphasis on fluency in the demonstration classrooms. One BLT stated, "I have a problem with the constant push for fluency. You've got to learn it first before you become fluent."

Regardless of concerns about too much emphasis on fluency rates, all BLTs spoke of their students' progress in terms of fluency rates as measured by DIBELS assessments. Appendixes B - E display DIBELS assessments administered in the demonstration classrooms and the end of year fluency rate expectations for kindergarten, first, second, and third grade students. All measurements on DIBELS assessments rely on the speed with which students accomplish the tasks in order to determine their status as readers. The primary method used to teach fluency in the demonstration classroom is to have a student read a passage (a Read Well story, or a leveled, grade level passage from a book that contains passages designed to be similar to DIBELS passages to be used for fluency practice), and then time the students reading the passage for one minute. The AT generally provides this fluency practice and guides the students in documenting their

fluency rates on a chart so that they can monitor their growth. This is done with second and third graders primarily.

One BLT described being discouraged at the beginning of the school year because she wasn't seeing much progress in her students, but when she began monitoring their progress with DIBELS she felt much better because she saw the growth they were making. Wilson, Martens and Poonam (2005), found that teachers spend a great deal of attention and time in reading classrooms assessing discrete skills in order to report results to those to whom they are accountable. Another BLT stated that she felt a great deal of stress about showing positive results for her students and she worried that her students weren't making the same amount of improvement as students in other demonstration classrooms. Because so many 2nd and 3rd graders were continuing to lag far behind expected grade level fluency rates, one BLT felt that the students' Nonsense Word Fluency was being monitored closely by BRI. Even if the students didn't show a great deal of growth in Oral Reading Fluency, they would, more than likely, show greater growth with the measurement of Nonsense Word Fluency. The need to demonstrate growth was paramount.

Fluency instruction in the demonstration classroom was aimed at increasing speed. There was no specific instruction in the other dimensions of fluency, such as prosody. Fluency has been defined as a set of skills that includes accuracy, rate and prosody (Hudson, et al, 2005; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NIH, 2000). According to Rasinski (2006) teachers should provide fluency instruction that focuses on prosody as well as accuracy and speed in an "integrated and synergistic manner" (p. 705), using different

literary forms such as poetry, monologues, plays, monologues, dialogues, and letters, as well as a wide range of genres.

Limiting fluency instruction in the demonstration classrooms to a focus on speed represented a missed opportunity to broaden the literary experiences of students who would certainly have benefited from the vicarious experiences available through literacy events. BLTs weren't opposed to fluency instruction. They understood the connection between developing automaticity and an improved ability to attend to comprehending the text once freed from a constant struggle to decode each word. Those who expressed concerns about the fluency instruction in their classrooms, however, were opposed to the emphasis on speed at the expense of accuracy and comprehension. The passages often used by the AT for fluency instruction were generally unrelated to any other reading instruction in the classroom, and were not accompanied by any comprehension instruction. Their purpose was solely for improving reading rates. Therefore, as one BLT pointed out, the wrong message was sent to the students – that reading fast is the most important thing and that understanding what you read is secondary.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction is taught in the Read Well program through its decodable books that accompany each unit. The set of decodable books include both expository texts and narrative stories. Several of the BLTs said they liked the expository stories and felt they were good sources for teaching vocabulary. One BLT stated that her students enjoyed the books about animals and famous people like Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the students had to get through quite a few less interesting

units to get to the ones they enjoyed. The earliest units were often described by BLTs as boring and tedious. Because all the students in a group were required to pass an end of unit assessment before proceeding to the next unit, a group would sometimes spend several weeks on the earlier, less interesting, units before getting to the interesting ones. Even when the group got to the units they found more enjoyable, the length of time spent on the units (sometimes several weeks), because the students were unable to pass the end of unit assessments, sometimes made what was an interesting story boring and the students grew tired of the subject. In its entirety, with its 38 units, first grade Read Well offers decodable stories that cover a fairly wide range of subjects; however, most 1st grade students were not expected to complete all 38 small group units. The struggling readers in demonstration classrooms may only complete half of the units and, therefore, would not be exposed to some of the more interesting units and the vocabulary words associated with them.

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), described vocabulary as a three tier system. Tier one words consist primarily of basic words, such as shoe, moon, or milk. These words generally do not have to be explicitly taught to children; they learn their meanings through everyday experiences. Tier three words are those that are generally not used very much and are often specific to various content areas. Word such as habitat, peninsula, or quadrilateral are examples of tier three words. These words will generally be learned through instruction in math, science, or social studies. Tier two words are high-frequency words for mature language users. Examples of tier two words are absurd, exquisite, or fortunate. According to Beck, et al, vocabulary instruction is most productive when it focuses on tier two words. The authors contend that,

> Because of the large role they play in a language user's repertoire, rich knowledge of words in the second tier can have a powerful impact on verbal functioning. Thus, instruction directed toward Tier Two words can be most productive. (p. 8)

BLT's concerns about vocabulary instruction in the demonstration classrooms extend beyond the problem of the students' slow movement toward the units that teach interesting subjects and the vocabulary words associated with them. The vocabulary words learned in higher units fall in the category of tier three words. They tend to be words that are content specific, such as mammal or volcano. Because of the emphasis on decodable Read Well stories, the students were having very limited exposure to tier two words. Tier two words, according to Beck et al (2002), facilitate greater language growth in young students. In the demonstration classrooms, the students, already suffering from language deficits, needed much more robust vocabulary instruction.

Comprehension

It was the opinion of many BLTs that Read Well did not teach reading comprehension effectively. Within the decodable reading books that accompany the small group units, in both the kindergarten and first grade programs, there was a script for teachers, designed to teach comprehension by drawing students' attention to critical details. One of the teachers stated, "When you read 'the dog is red' and immediately ask, 'what color is the dog?' that's not teaching comprehension." Another BLT stated that she wished Read Well provided more opportunities for the students to respond to the stories and demonstrate their comprehension. The workbooks provided for each student that accompany small group units in the first grade program, according to one BLT, were

overly simple, adequate for practicing word families and handwriting, but inadequate for reinforcing comprehension.

One BLT cited the lack of authentic literature being used in the demonstration classes as a problem because the students weren't expected to make connections on their own and develop comprehension strategies. The emphasis on developing fluency rates often hindered comprehension, too, according to one BLT, because the students were required to improve reading speed, without regard to comprehension.

A few BLTs supplemented Read Well by reading aloud stories and books, noting that reading aloud to students is one of the most effective ways to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary. A few BLTs, however, felt that they didn't have much time to read aloud because there were so many other things they were required to teach. One BLT stated that she reserved Fridays for reading aloud to her first graders because there wasn't enough time Monday through Thursday.

The concern expressed by BLTs that the comprehension instruction their students were receiving through Read Well was insufficient supports the research of Tivnan and Hemphill (2005). Tivnan and Hemphill studied the effects of four different reading programs with 590 1st graders from 16 high poverty schools. The first program was a scripted program that emphasized phonics and differentiated instruction. The second and third programs were structured and oriented to teaching subskills, but not to the same extent as the first program. The fourth program utilized guided reading methods and emphasized teacher training more than the others. The children receiving instruction with the scripted phonics program showed greatest growth with word reading and word attack skills. However, according to Tivnan and Hemphill (2005),

> …the model that placed the greatest emphasis on training teachers in conducting effective guided reading groups, and which was least prescriptive about the types of early reading materials to be employed, showed the greatest success in bringing study children close to grade-level expectations in reading comprehension at the end of first-grade. Because … teachers were free to use an eclectic range of texts for read-alouds and small-group reading, they often used more challenging texts than were evident in classrooms using the other models …. (pp. 434 – 435)

Tivnan and Hemphill further noted that students who enter first grade with a limited vocabulary, a trait common with low income students, are put at a further disadvantage with scripted programs because, even when the program calls for teachers to read aloud to the class, the literacy event is so tightly controlled and the time is so rigidly allocated that lessons in comprehension and vocabulary are not as fully developed as they need to be.

Wilson, Martens, and Poonam (2005) found that, in a comparison of students in commercially produced phonics-based programs and students receiving instruction in a literature based guided reading program that teaches phonics in context, students in the guided reading program learned and discussed a wide variety of reading strategies, including phonics. Students in commercial phonics-based programs rely most heavily on graphophonic cues, often at the expense of comprehension. Wilson, et al (2005) stated,

> Reading is not a simple collection of skills; it is a complex action that occurs in a sociocultural setting with readers purposefully and intentionally using strategies and their knowledge of language and the world (tools) to engage in transacting with text. (p. 628)

According to the authors, children in phonics-based programs are less able to draw inferences and make connections than children who are offered greater interaction with literature.

Small Group Instruction

Researchers agree that small group reading instruction is significantly more effective than whole group instruction (Burnette, 1999; Cartledge & Musti-Rao, 2006; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Tyner & Green, 2005). According to Torgesen (2004), small group instruction allows teachers to carefully observe individual students, address particular individual needs, and provide responsive scaffolding for young readers. Allington (2002b) noted that small groups are particularly effective when teaching children with reading disabilities. All of the BLTs agreed that the most effective component of the demonstration classroom program was the small group instruction students received. Students not only received core instruction in a small group of six with the BLT, they also received reinforcement from the AT in a small group of six, and interventions twice a week from the IS in a group of only three students. Figure 7 is a diagram of the typical demonstration classroom as well as an illustration of how a student progressed through whole group and small group instruction with the BLT, the AT, and the IS.

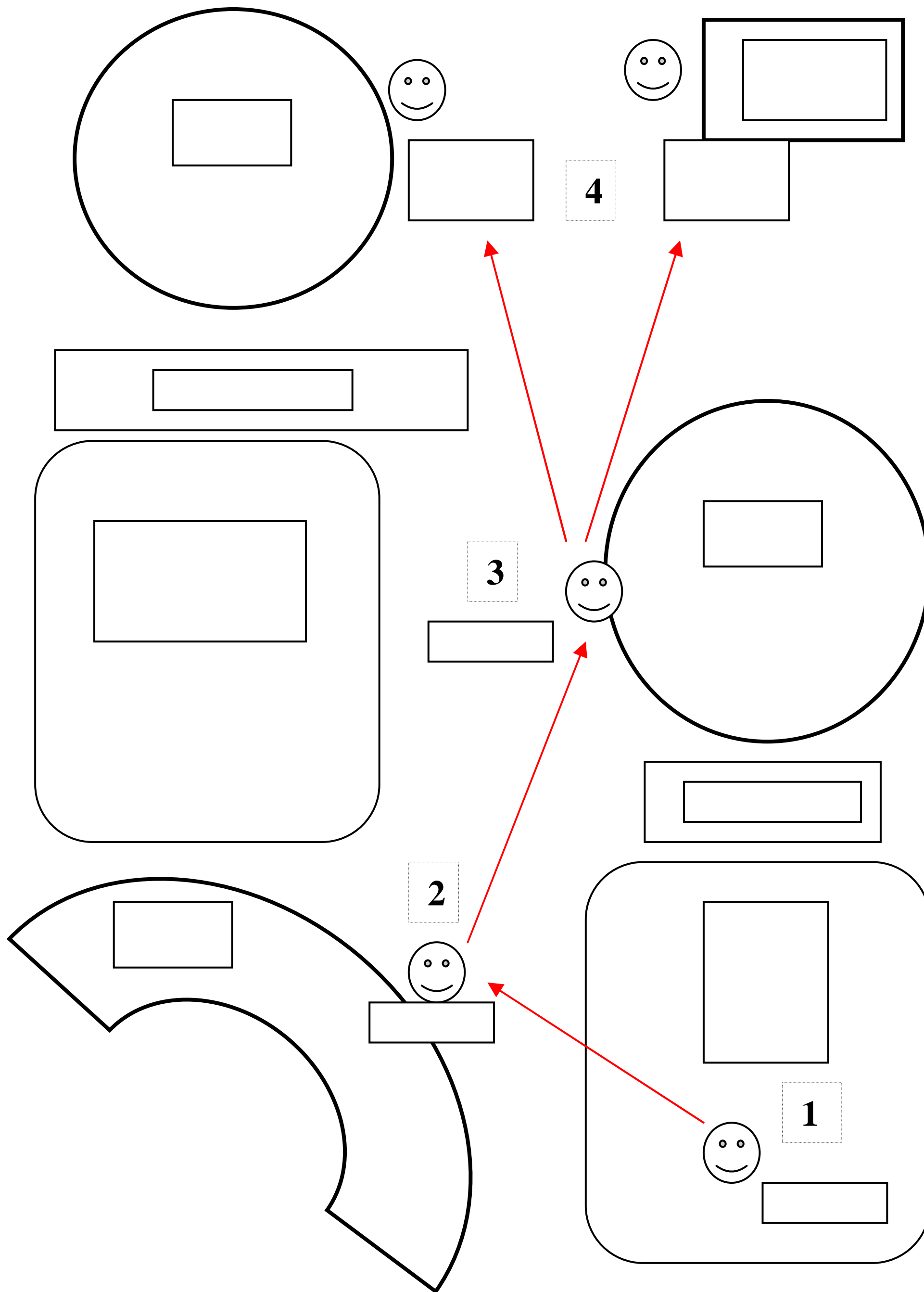

Figure 7

Diagram of a Typical Demonstration Classroom and Student Rotation

As shown on in Figure 7, students worked with the IS two days each week (in a group of three) and on alternating days did reading center activities. This high level of interaction with teachers created the intensity in instruction that these students needed to overcome their reading deficits. Additionally, several BLTs noted that their students with behavior problems benefited from having very little unsupervised time in the demonstration classroom. Several BLTs indicated that the small group format of the demonstration classroom was as important as the curriculum for the struggling readers in their classes.

Accelerated Reader

The inclusion of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program in schools that housed demonstration classrooms served two purposes. First, the AR program represented the inclusion of authentic literature in the demonstration classrooms. Second, AR was provided for the entire school, not just for students in the demonstration classrooms. Therefore, all the students in the school received the benefit of using the AR program. BRI funded the purchase of AR software and access to AR's web-based program for schools not already using the program and purchased books to be housed in the school libraries and rotated through classrooms.

BLTs appreciated the inclusion of the AR program within their schools. However, some BLTs felt that they didn't have time to oversee its use in their own classrooms. They expressed concern that, without the time to appropriately monitor the use of AR quizzes, the students wouldn't get much benefit from the program. Some

BLTs had used the AR program in the past as classroom teachers and found it an effective program for building confidence and motivation for young readers. These BLTs felt that the program was particularly helpful for their 2nd and 3rd grade struggling readers, prompting them to spend more time reading independently.

ATs were generally charged with overseeing the students as they took AR quizzes. However, BLTs took the lead in some classrooms in training their students to use the computer to take AR quizzes. One BLT stated that for two weeks she suspended using the Read Well program during her small group instruction for second and third grade students to spend the time reading AR books and guided her students through the process of taking quizzes. Other BLTs took group quizzes with their kindergarten and first grade students on the books they read aloud to them during whole group instruction. According to the BLTs, their kindergarten and first grade children were not ready to use the AR program independently. However, taking the AR quizzes as a class, with the teacher reading the questions and answer choices aloud, and asking the students to vote on the correct answer, was a good method of checking their students' comprehension and helped show the students how the AR program worked.

BRI provided the schools with five hundred dollars to be used for incentives. This money could be used to purchase small prizes, such as pencils and ribbons, or for popcorn or ice cream parties for students successfully meeting the AR point goals set for them by their teachers or the librarian. Most BLTs felt favorably about the AR program. They did not intend to use it as anything other than a reading motivation program. In some cases, where AR had not previously been in place, it had taken most of the school year to even begin to use it in their schools and classrooms. Therefore, the BLTs in these

schools weren't sure how effective it would be. In all cases, however, the BLTs felt that AR would be beneficial in that more books were being placed in the schools and students would be encouraged to spend time each day reading independently.

BLTs' Attitudes about Read Well

BLT's opinions of the *Read Well* program were mixed at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. Several voiced concerns about the use of a script, the expectation of fidelity to Read Well, and their ability to manage the various components of the program. Within 3 months, however, some BLTs reported being pleasantly surprised by how much they liked using the program and remarked on how easy the program made planning and differentiating instruction. One BLT stated, "In the beginning I couldn't imagine teaching all these different reading groups at different levels, but it's really easy. All you have to keep up with is which units the groups are in."

In October all twelve of the BLTs reported liking the *Read Well* program in general. They noted BRI's need for instructional uniformity in the demonstration classrooms and felt that the use of *Read Well* made the program more replicable. The script was useful in assuring the BLTs that they were using the program with fidelity. One BLT noted that, while she didn't feel as if she needed the teacher script to teach the program, it would be helpful to inexperienced reading teachers. Another BLT stated that her assistant teacher could probably use *Read Well* as effectively as she could. Read Well, with its explicit directions and script, falls in the category of teacher-proof reading programs. It is designed to be just as effective with new teachers as it is with experienced teachers. In spite of their approval of *Read Well*, nine of the BLTS cited specific

problems with the program itself. Additionally, eleven of the twelve BLTs discussed veering from the program's script and using Read Well differently from the directives of the teaching manual, incorporating other methods or materials.

Problems with Read Well Components

BLTs cited a variety of problems with the *Read Well* program. During the course of their interviews, while noting their approval of the program itself, primarily because it is explicit and systematic, BLTs reported frustration and concern about a number of components of the Read Well program.

Five of the BLTs discussed their concern about the introduction of particular words early in the small group units. For example, the contraction *I'm* is introduced in the first units in both kindergarten and first grade *Read Well*. Contractions are consistently introduced throughout the first grade program before the words they represent are mastered, or even introduced. Additionally, the words *said*, *sad, and Sam* are introduced simultaneously in kindergarten unit 5. This is particularly problematic because students are not permitted to progress to a subsequent unit until they can demonstrate mastery of these words on the end of unit assessments. Therefore, students tended to stay on units for extended periods of time, unable to progress further until they passed the assessments.

Many of the BLTs cited *Read Well's* reliance on decodable text, to the exclusion of authentic literature, as a problem. While the program provides literature selections to use during kindergarten whole group instruction and a list of recommended books to read during first grade whole group instruction, the texts students read during small group

instruction are solely decodable and often described as contrived and boring. BLTs did not object to using decodable text; however, they felt that their students also needed the opportunity to read a variety of other types of books and text. Reliance on *Read Well* books, according to BLTs, provided limited opportunities for children to interact with high quality literature and richer language. By limiting sight word vocabulary to those offered by the *Read Well* units, student growth was slower than it might be in their homeroom classes where reading was being taught with basal readers and only supplemented with decodable, leveled texts. One BLT stated that there seemed to be too much attention placed on subskills, and too little attention was placed on authentic reading. According to this BLT, "We're doing sounds, sounds, sounds. You've got to put that in context."

Books used in *Read Well* small group units include duet and solo stories. The solo stories are written for the students to read with the teacher or by themselves. The duet stories contain small print, which is to be read by the teacher to the students, as well as large print which is to be read by the students with the teacher, and small gray print which is the script for teachers to use as prompts of questions to ask the students throughout the stories. BLTs spoke of the frustration, particularly with kindergarten students, of trying to guide students through the duet stories and wondered if they were developmentally appropriate. Several BLTs felt they were asking too much of their kindergarteners by expecting them to track through a variety of different fonts and print. Efforts to keep the students at the right place in the text, and teaching them to track the text sufficiently to know when it was their turn to join in the reading of the larger print, often detracted from the utility of the books. At times the students were so anxious to get

to the larger print that they would read with the teacher, that they didn't really listen to the portion of the story read independently by the teacher and were, therefore, unable to comprehend the story. One BLT reported,

> My top group is fine. They do well with the *Read Well* stories, but my bottom group is just a nightmare with those units. I feel like I've wasted twenty minutes with them. There's just too much stuff for them to handle.

The teachers described students who had trouble sitting in their chairs, tracking the text, or simply maintaining interest in the books. Other students, according to the BLTs, constantly flipped through the books, looking at the brightly colored pictures, and had to be redirected frequently to the correct page. Describing her experience teaching *Read Well* kindergarten small group units, one BLT stated,

> We're trying to make these poor little kindergarteners read these books and they've got all this stuff on the page. There's a part that I have to read; there's a part they have to read, and they don't know where they're supposed to be looking.

Another BLT speculated that the status of her kindergarteners as struggling readers made the small group units more difficult to use. She stated, "These kids have a hard enough time just sitting in a chair, much less trying to keep their little fingers at the right place on the page." Two BLTs stated that they found themselves rushing through the duet stories to get to the solo stories that the students could read without the teacher's script. Another BLT said she quit using the kindergarten duet stories entirely and made copies of the solo stories to use with the kindergarten students during small group instruction.

BLTs also questioned the absolute directive of *Read Well* to remain on a small group unit until all the students in the group were able to pass the end of unit assessment. Because of this rule, groups often remained in a unit for so long that some of the students

had memorized the text of the books and, in spite of multiple lessons on the same skills, were unable to pass the assessment – sometimes because they didn't read a passage fast enough. Questions arose because of the expectation of fidelity to *Read Well* about how to teach the skills the children needed to master in the unit when the *Read Well* materials were insufficient. One BLT expressed her frustration by saying,

> We've been telling teachers for years that when a student doesn't learn a skill using one method you try a different method. What are we supposed to do when *Read Well* doesn't work? BLTs have to use *Read Well*. I keep doing the same things over and over again and it's not working. We've been on unit 5 for about 5 weeks now and they still can't pass the test.

While the need to differentiate instruction was undisputed by the BLTs, and Read Well simplified the process of providing instruction at varying levels easier, the capacity to meet the needs of individual children was restricted by the structure of the groups coupled with the program's rules regarding end of unit assessments. Table 6 and Figure 8 illustrate the problem Read Well presented for some children in the demonstration classrooms. Table 6 is an example of a class of students and their respective group placement. Group 1, with students A – F, is composed of the most fragile learners. Group 3, with students M – R, is composed of the hardiest learners in the class. Students G – L, in Group 2, function at varying levels in between those students in Groups 1 and 3.

Table 6

Example of Student Group Placement in Demonstration Classroom

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
A	G	M
B	H	N
C	I	O
D	J	P
E	K	Q
F	L	R

In the above example, students were ranked, with A being the student with the highest need for intervention and R being the most capable student. The need to place students in one of the three groups, and the requirement to keep group sizes to 6 students, created situations in which BLTs had to rely on their judgment for the group placement of some students. For example, Students F and G might have almost identical assessment DIBELS and TPRI results. However, because of the group size requirement, one of the two students would be placed in Group 1 and the other in Group 2. The same situation might be also occur with students L and M. Therefore, placement for 4 students (F, G, L, and M) was somewhat arbitrary. For those students selected to be in the lower units, the consequences of their group placement meant slower progression through Read Well units. Figure 8 illustrates typical groups progression through Read Well units.

UNIT #	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9	WEEK 10
One	1 2 3	1 2	1							
Two		3	2	1	1	1	1			
Three			3	2	2			1	1	1
Four				3		2				
Five					3		2			
Six						3		2		
Seven							3		2	
Eight								3		2
Nine									3	
Ten										3

Figure 8

Example of Group Progression Through Read Well Units
in the Demonstration Classroom

Group 1 typically moves through the units much more slowly than the other groups. In this example, Group 1 remained in each unit for 3 weeks before each student in the group passed end of unit assessments. Group 3 progressed through units at a consistent pace of one per week. Group 2's progress was a little more irregular, sometimes spending 2 weeks on a unit. The consequences for student F, who was placed in Group 1 at the beginning of the year, in spite of the fact that the level of his ability was almost identical with student G's, are evident in Figure 8. After 10 weeks of instruction, Student F is still in unit 3. His counterpart, Student G, who was placed in Group 2 at the beginning of the year, is in unit 8 after 10 weeks of instruction. Therefore, because of a group placement decision, Student F is 5 units behind Student G. Likewise, Student L, after 10 weeks, is in unit 8, while his counterpart, Student M, is in unit 10.

The mandate to teach Read Well kindergarten small group units to mastery was a problem for one BLT because, even if a student successfully completed all 20 of the kindergarten small group units, they would not have learned, to mastery, all the letters and sounds of the alphabet. This BLT cited Adams (1990), who asserted that the most important indicator of a child's future reading success is knowledge of letter names and sounds. This BLT stated, "Why is it more important that a kindergartener master the word *I'm* or *said* when they don't even know all their letters and sounds? I want to spend my time teaching my kids to master their letters and sounds, not learning to read the handful of words Read Well says they have to know even before they've learned the letter N or T."

Several of the BLTs expressed concern that the Read Well units do not give first grade students an opportunity to develop independence in decoding unfamiliar words. Each new skill and sound is taught so explicitly that the students are not equipped to take chances decoding unfamiliar words on their own. When confronted with a word outside the Read Well context students simply stared at the word, in spite of the fact they'd been taught to decode words phoneme by phoneme, letter by letter. This was a problem for first graders, but it was an even greater concern for the BLTs when using the first grade Read Well program for reading intervention with struggling second and third grade readers. One BLT discussed her concern that students are never taught to decode multisyllabic words independently. Each multisyllabic word is divided into chunks for the student in the Read Well lessons (for example, *fan tas tic*). According to the BLT, students were never expected to develop an independent strategy for decoding an

unfamiliar word. Therefore, when they were assessed using DIBELS or any other assessment, they didn't perform well.

Several BLTs, when discussing their second and third grade students receiving Read Well intervention instruction, felt that the initial placement assessment placed their students in units that were too low. For example, because students didn't know how to smooth or bumpy blend words (methods unique to Read Well), they were placed in units 1 or 4, representing early first grade instructional level. The pace of the Read Well program, therefore, exacerbated the problems of struggling readers by forcing them to spend time on skills they already knew before they could work on their true deficit skills. One BLT expressed her concern that because her students were placed too low initially that they would never be able to catch up to grade level. BLTs were not permitted to skip units in order to accelerate growth, nor were they permitted to move a group to the next unit until every member of the group had passed the end of unit assessment.

Alterations to Read Well Curriculum

In addition to describing problems with Read Well, BLTs described how they deviated from the program. Eleven of the twelve BLTs described things they did that were not related to Read Well. Several added other reading material to their lessons, from leveled reading books they'd found in a school closet and the leveled books that accompanied the basal series in the other classrooms, to sets of trade books and copies of basal reading books. BLTs also talked about veering from the Read Well script by letting the students read the teacher portions of the duet stories with them. One BLT spoke about using her experience with Saxon phonics program to teach her students to code

words with phonics symbols, creating her own materials to supplement Read Well lessons.

Several BLTs who described altering Read Well lessons worried about being viewed unfavorably by BRI administrators or being rebuked for not operating with complete fidelity to the Read Well program. Several indicated that BRI administrators did not know that they weren't completely following the Read Well script. One BLT stated that she had a "don't ask, don't tell" attitude about how she approached Read Well instruction. As long as she wasn't directly asked about fidelity to the program, she didn't feel that she needed to directly explain how she veered from the Read Well script. A few, however, spoke candidly about the ways they augmented or adjusted the Read Well curriculum and did not view it as a problem or that their alterations represented lack of fidelity to the program.

Most of the deviations from the Read Well program BLTs described were minor and not incorporated into everyday routines. Any of the changes they made were initiated based on the BLT's judgment that the students' needs had not been met with particular Read Well lessons and they felt that meeting the needs of their students was more important than fidelity to the program.

Attempts to Solve Problems with Read Well

Of the BLTs that expressed concern about making alterations to Read Well lessons, two described their attempts to gain approval from BRI administrators to veer from the program script. These BLTs were most concerned about their second and third graders, believing that Read Well was not adequately addressing their reading deficits. In

their efforts to meet their students' needs they had already begun supplementing Read Well lessons. According to both of these BLTs, one of the BLT administrators who oversaw the demonstration classrooms was amenable to the teachers' requests to supplement Read Well instruction; however, another administrator was described as "not very receptive" to any discussions about problems with Read Well and felt that fidelity to the program was paramount. These two BLTs expressed feelings of ambiguity between doing what BRI expected of them and being the best teacher to their students. One of the BLTs stated that she sometimes felt that she was being forced to choose between being a good employee and being an excellent teacher.

According to Pearson (2005), the major function of research should be to expand, not contract, the set of tools available to teachers. This research supports Coles' (2001) assertion that these pre-packaged programs place teachers in the role of middle managers rather than professionals who use expertise to judge what students need. It appeared that using the Read Well program had the effect on BLTs of limiting the range of methods and strategies they felt free to use with their students. At best they had become middle managers and, at least in the case of two BLTs, felt that they needed permission from BRI administrators to use their expertise as reading teachers to make decisions about using materials in addition to Read Well in order to meet the needs of their struggling readers.

By December, BRI administrators had softened their stance about supplementing Read Well instruction with second and third grade students, granting BLTs more flexibility in developing lesson plans. According to one BLT, this move toward greater flexibility was in response to the fact that administrators knew that most of the BLTs

were already supplementing Read Well. In spite of BRI administrators' growing acceptance of BLT flexibility in using Read Well, there remained a certain amount of rigidity to the allowable supplements. BLTs were only explicitly given permission to use a preprinted set of onset and rime cards, dry erase boards and markers, and other texts in addition to Read Well.

Read Well's Response to BLT Concerns

Although BLTs still spoke favorably about Read Well in late February, 2007, they were still identifying difficulties with several aspects of the program. Several BLTs described exchanging e-mails with one of the BRI administrators about particular concerns they had with Read Well. BRI requested that Read Well representatives attend a meeting with BLTs and ISs to respond to questions that had arisen about the Read Well program at the end of February in order to discuss the problems identified by BLTs. According to one BLT, the meeting with Read Well personnel created more issues than it solved. During an exchange about concerns that the kindergarten small group units do not teach all 26 letter names and sounds to mastery, the Read Well representatives questioned the need for mastery of letter names and sounds by the end of kindergarten and suggested that research does not support BLTs' questions about this issue. The Read Well representatives suggested that the BLTs needed to change their way of thinking about teaching reading. One BLT stated that the Read Well representatives were very dismissive and sometimes rude. They had been given, prior to the meeting, a page of questions and told the BRI group that they had consulted with the author of the program

in preparation of addressing the BLTs' concerns. Table 7 provides the questions asked of the Read Well representatives and their respective responses.

Table 7

Read Well's Responses to BLTs' Questions

BLTs' Question	Read Well Response
What do we do when we have kindergarten students who are unable to pass the unit 5 end of unit assessment, even after several weeks?	BLTs were told that they are not to deviate from the program and that under no circumstances, should they allow a student to proceed to unit 6 until they have successfully passed the unit 5 assessment. While acknowledging that unit 5 is substantially harder than the preceding units, and simultaneously introduced words that are easily confused (*said, sad, and Sam*), the representatives stated that the BLTs probably moved too quickly through the first units, prior to getting to unit 5. Although there are a total of 20 Read Well small group units, the representatives said the BLTs should celebrate when their students get to unit 5, even if they stay on that unit until the end of the year. When asked what to do when you've been on the same unit for so long the students have memorized the text, the representatives simply repeated that you keep reviewing and providing extra practice.

Table 7 (continued)

Why doesn't Read Well Kindergarten small group units teach to mastery all the letters and sounds? While it does introduce all the letters and sounds in the whole group portion of the lessons with the alphabet song and letter chants, the small group units proceed very slowly through the letters. A student who has only gotten to unit 5 will only learn 8 letters and sounds to mastery.	Read Well representatives stated that phonemic awareness was the most important thing that young readers need to acquire to be successful and that it is not as important for them to know all the letters and sounds to mastery. When one BLT pointed out that the state's curriculum framework states that knowledge of all letters and sounds is a required skill for kindergarteners, the Read Well representatives admonished the group that they should not rely on the state's frameworks to tell them what to teach their children. When asked for the rationale behind not teaching all letters and sounds in small group units, the representative said, "They did their research" (speaking of the Read Well authors). They further stated that BLTs should quit thinking of a kindergarten curriculum and a first grade curriculum separately, and begin thinking of reading instruction as a continuum. When a kindergarten child moves through the Read Well kindergarten units rapidly enough to get through the 20th unit, that child should move into the first grade curriculum regardless of whether or not he is still in kindergarten. The Read Well kindergarten program and first grade program are aligned; therefore a child who completes unit 20 in kindergarten could be assessed and probably move right into unit 16 in the first grade curriculum. However, a child who only completes unit 5 at the end of kindergarten can be assessed at the beginning of first grade and will probably begin in unit 1 of the first grade curriculum.

Table 7 (continued)

Many students get stuck on "I'm." If it's okay to move past this (in spite of the mastery rule), in what other circumstances is it okay to ignore the mastery rule? What is the rationale for teaching "I'm" in the first place? Wouldn't "I am" be less confusing, especially in low language learners?	It was conceded that it was permissible to disregard errors with "I'm" during the administration of a placement test; however, the mastery rule could not be overlooked at the end of unit assessments. When asked about the rationale for teaching "I'm," one of the representatives laughed and said, "It's a word, okay?" Again, they then responded that they were sure research had been done and agreed to ask the program authors for clarification.
When using Read Well first grade for intervention instruction for second and third graders, it seems that they move too slowly through the units and benchmark skills and spelling patterns aren't introduced soon enough. Is Read Well as intervention filling in the gaps fast enough to translate into better Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) for these grades?	Does the Read Well placement assessment place students too low? By requiring that students perform a bumpy blending/smooth blending task successfully (a new concept for students who've never used Read Well before), are students being placed in units below their actual skill level and, therefore, wasting time? One of the Read Well representatives stated, "Let me step out of my Read Well box for a minute and tell you what I did when I taught Read Well with third graders." She then went on to tell the group about supplemental teaching strategies she used in addition to Read Well in order to move her students through the units more rapidly. However, she stated that it is essential that students be able to bumpy and smooth blend correctly and that inability to perform this task (after the teacher has modeled it for them) could not be disregarded. Therefore, according to the Read Well representatives, students were not being placed too low. Regarding the concern of low Oral Reading Fluency scores, the representatives stated that we shouldn't allow DIBELS assessments to guide instruction.

Several times throughout the meeting the Read Well representatives reassured the BLTs that they just had first year jitters and that they shouldn't worry. "Trust me," one of the representatives said, "It'll be alright." Several of the BLTs expressed dissatisfaction at the end of the meeting, unsure about how they were expected to proceed. One BLT stated that she understood the purpose of the meeting was to caution BLTs to maintain fidelity to the Read Well program. One of the concluding remarks of one of the Read Well representatives was, "Fidelity is so important." However, the message of fidelity wasn't necessarily understood by others. The concluding remarks of one of the BRI administrators was that, just as the Read Well representative described how she made adjustments to the program when teaching her students, BLTs also needed to make adjustments, because that's what good teachers do.

Read Well's responses to BLTs' questions were predictable. At no point did they indicate that there might be a problem with the program, nor was there any acknowledgement that the BLTs were capable of making decisions about Read Well's effectiveness. Any difficulties in teaching the program were attributed to the BLTs. For example, when discussing the issue of students being stuck in a unit for a long period of time because the students were unable to pass the end of unit assessment, the BLTs were told that they must have gone through the earlier units too fast. Nobody posed the obvious question: Why would you keep students in a unit once they had successfully passed the end of unit assessment? Is it reasonable to think that a BLT would make the decision to keep her students in a unit, after passing the unit assessment, because she anticipates that the next unit is too hard for them? The pace of the program, particularly with low achieving struggling readers, created problems for students in demonstration

classrooms because, as one BLT pointed out, “Some kids in first grade will leave us and won’t be ready for second grade.” She was surprised by the response she received from one of the BRI administrators, who said, “We are going to have some casualties.”

When confronted with BLTs’ concerns about kindergarten small group units not teaching all the letter names and sounds to mastery, the Read Well representatives suggested that the BLTs needed to adjust their thinking about reading instruction. Again, the program was staunchly defended in spite of a solid research base about alphabetic knowledge as a foundational skill.

Most of the BLTs have experience not only as reading teachers, but also as Regional Reading Coordinators who provided professional development in reading instruction to schools across the state. They also participated in the writing of BRI’s professional development materials. They are, therefore, familiar with the research base about the alphabetic principal. Read Well’s own website cites letter name knowledge as a foundational skill (Sopris West, 2007). Chall, et al (1990) after reviewing research about early reading instruction, stated unequivocally that mastery of letter names and sounds should occur as soon as possible, even before learning to read. Adams (1990), too, contended that learning letter names and sounds is the best predictor of reading success in young children. At a BRI meeting, when asked about kindergarten instruction, Adams, who had been invited to attend the meeting and provide training to BRI staff, stated that if you teach nothing else to kindergarteners, you should at least teach all the letters and sounds (personal communication, October, 2005). According to Kame’enui (2002), alphabetic knowledge is one of the five foundations for learning to read and is defined as the ability to associate sounds with letters and use these sounds to form words.

Therefore, one BLT remarked that she was surprised that the Read Well representatives would contradict the well established research base for placing the learning of letter names and their sounds at the top of the agenda in the kindergarten curriculum.

The attitude of the Read Well representatives supported the assertion of Meyer (2003) that teachers are told to trust program developers and that questioning the effectiveness of a program is frowned upon and often futile. According to Garan (2004) teachers who question or criticize the reading program they are required to use often face retribution by administrators. While BLTs weren't concerned about retribution for questioning the Read Well program, there was a sense of futility in doing so. As the end of the meeting approached, one BRI administrator stated, "Sometimes you just have to surrender." One BLT thought this meant that she was being told to surrender to the program and maintain fidelity to it. However, in an apparent contradiction, another administrator spoke of variations from the program as something good teachers do, stating that BRI didn't want to alienate the good minds of their teachers.

The Read Well representatives' response to BLTs' concerns added to the difficulty of describing the experiences of BLTs implementing reading methods promoted by the NRP. In raising questions about teaching letter names and sounds, whether it's appropriate to require students to demonstrate bumpy and smooth blending (methods unique to Read Well) on the placement assessment, or why the program expects kindergarten students to learn to read *I'm* in the first small group lesson, the discussion was dominated by admonitions to maintain fidelity to the program. In a sense, the Read Well meeting represented the BLTs' attempt to maintain their status as the teacher of their students and, therefore, the person best able to make informed decisions about how

to teach their children. As noted by Pearson (2005) and Garan (2004), thoughtful teachers recognize that one program cannot meet the needs of all students and that teachers need to be able to make choices about which teaching methods to use and with whom.

BLTs' Descriptions of Their Role as Agents of Change Within Their Schools

BRI has always envisioned its role within Mississippi as an agent of change. By reforming reading instruction within elementary schools and altering how colleges of education prepare preservice teachers to teach reading, they believed BRI's efforts, then, would be instrumental in improving literacy levels within Mississippi. For several years BRI's Regional Reading Coordinators (RRC) attempted to affect change within schools across the state by providing professional development to kindergarten through third grade teachers and modeling reading strategies. However, reading improvement through RRCs was, while effective to an extent, not substantial enough and, in 2005, the decision was made to take a more radical approach to affect change within schools. The result was the implementation of the demonstration classroom program, with BLTs providing core reading instruction.

Other Teachers in the School

Requirements for teachers and principals to observe instruction in the demonstration classroom was intended to be the primary means for affecting change within schools housing demonstration classrooms. By requiring teachers to observe reading instruction conducted by the BLT and IS, it was hoped that the other classroom teachers would adopt the strategies and methods observed for their students during

reading instruction. Principals would learn to identify effective reading instruction by observing in the demonstration classroom and, therefore, learn to become informed evaluators of reading instruction within their schools.

Several BLTs reported that teachers were observing regularly and were pleased with this component of the demonstration classroom project. In each of these cases BLTs attributed the participation of the teachers in observations to the principal's leadership. One BLT reported that the principal requested that copies of the teachers' observation forms be sent to him, so that he could monitor teacher participation. Another principal told his faculty that he would put a "letter in the file of teachers who don't do observations and they'd have to go before the board and explain why they didn't." None of the BLTs indicated that teachers observed in the demonstration classroom of their own volition. One BLT reported that, while teachers did observe instruction in the demonstration classroom, they didn't seem to get much out of the observations. They noted on their observation forms superficial things, and tended to make observations more about the things in the room, and not about reading strategies.

In the schools where teachers were participating in observations, BLTs were not sure that the observations were having the effect of promoting instructional change in other classrooms. BLTs reported being too busy with their own classrooms to visit or observe other teachers' instruction. BRI administrators visited in other classrooms in some BRI schools and, in at least one school, provided assistance to other teachers. In several BRI schools the teaching staff in general was described by BLTs as effective. However, in all schools there were a few teachers who were described as being less than effective teachers of reading. These ineffective teachers had an impact on the work of the

BLTs in the demonstration classroom. One BLT, for example, felt that she was spending a great deal of time remediating children who had been taught by one particular teacher the previous year. According to her, the only reading problem most of these children had was simply that they hadn't been taught any reading skills during the previous year and were, therefore, trying to accomplish two years' worth of learning in one school year. Several other BLTs reported that their students, after returning to their homerooms, received very little reinforcement of what they were learning in reading. They felt that the students' growth would have been much greater if they'd had support from homeroom teachers and time was provided for them to practice reading. Several BLTs also noted that Read Well was designed to be used in a self-contained classroom in which lessons were extended throughout the day. Therefore, because BLTs only saw their students for a limited time each day, demonstration classroom children might not be getting the full benefit of the Read Well program.

In some schools teachers told BLTs that they thought their students receiving reading instruction in the demonstration classroom weren't learning essential skills required by the state curriculum. Several BLTs reported that teachers in their schools indicated that they couldn't do the kind of instruction done in the demonstration classroom because they didn't have three teachers in their rooms. Teachers sometimes believed that it wasn't so much the teaching strategies in the demonstration classroom that made the difference with students, but the fact that they had three teachers and a student/teacher ratio of 6:1. Some teachers also noted that the amount of materials available in the demonstration classrooms made it unique and, without the same materials available to them, they couldn't use the same strategies in their classrooms. One BLT

stated that she couldn't necessarily disagree with the teachers on this point. BLTs were very aware that they had resources, both in the form of materials and support, which were unavailable to other teachers.

Principals

All of the BLTs recognized that BRI's ability to make any lasting changes in the schools was dependent on the strength of the principal. BRI discovered early in its work with schools that the role of the principal is critical. Mickens (2006) conducted a qualitative study of BRI's work with schools during the 2005-2006 school year and found that the most significant factor in determining the extent to which a school benefits from BRI is the principal. She further noted that, among the barriers to BRI implementation by schools, ineffective observation and monitoring by principals contributed to the success or failure of BRI in creating a meaningful change in how teachers provide reading instruction to their students. Sullivan, et al (2005a) noted in their evaluation of the effect of BRI on the MCT reading scores that the principal's commitment to implementation was strongly correlated with reading gains. Therefore, BRI recognized that, the principal's role in the demonstration classroom program would be pivotal.

BRI established a Principal Leadership Training program for the principals of schools in which a demonstration classroom would be placed. According to Claiborne Barksdale, participation in the Principal Leadership Training program was critical because it would ensure that principals were knowledgeable about every aspect of the demonstration classroom project and would be better informed about how to conduct effective observations of classroom reading instruction. Because one of the primary

purposes of the program was to affect school-wide change, it was important that principals be able to monitor whether teachers were implementing differentiated, small group instruction and interventions within their classrooms (personal communication, February 21, 2007).

Principals met three times during the school year at three different BRI demonstration classroom sites. An educational leadership consultant worked with BRI to facilitate the Principal Leadership Training program, guiding principals through a series of observations of classrooms at the respective BRI sites, both in the demonstration classrooms and other classrooms. Through this training, principals were taught how to identify effective reading instruction, as well as how to confront problems they might observe in classrooms.

Many of the BLTs spoke favorably of the principals at their schools. One described her principal as an instructional leader who used her previous experience as a teacher to guide decisions she made as a principal. Another BLT described her principal as very likable and, because of that, teachers listened to him. Several BLTs described principals as very supportive of the demonstration classroom program. One BLT stated that all she had to do was ask for something and the principal made sure she got it.

A few BLTs, however, found their principals to be ineffective. One BLT reported that she very seldom saw the principal. Another described her principal as clueless. One BLT found it difficult to communicate with her principal, stating that he seemed to avoid speaking with her. Another stated that her principal, who was in her first year as principal, was skeptical about the demonstration classroom project. However, as the school year progressed her understanding grew, as did her support. The BLTs who did

not describe their principals favorably felt that their ineffectiveness was not limited to interactions with BRI, but permeated to other aspects of leadership within the school. In all cases where the principal was ineffective, the teachers did not observe often in the demonstration classroom.

BLT's Role Within the School

BLTs felt their responsibility within the school was to the children they taught. They did not envision themselves necessarily as agents of change for the school or other teachers, but were focused on creating change within their students. BLTs understood that part of the purpose of the demonstration classroom program was to change reading instruction within the school, but several stated that they were simply too busy to become involved with what other teachers were doing in their classrooms.

Several BLTs reported feeling isolated in their classrooms, unaware of what was happening in the rest of the school. Isolation was not considered a detriment, however. Rather, the BLTs felt that it helped them to concentrate on their work with students. One BLT stated, "I never go into the teachers' lounge and I'm kind of glad. I don't want to get involved in all the gossip at the school." Kunjufu (2002) noted that "in low-achieving schools, the most negative room in the school is not the classroom but the teachers' lounge" (p. 48). He further noted that master teachers tend to spend very little time in the teacher's lounge. Any spare time they have is spent on tasks that will help them improve their practice as teachers.

BLTs, ISs, and ATs working in the demonstration classrooms were exempt from extra school duties such as bus duty, lunchroom duty, or hall duty. Additionally, they

were only required to attend school faculty meetings or professional development that directly related to them as reading instructors. BLTs saw this as very beneficial, allowing them to spend extra time preparing for their students. However, this contributed to their isolation and, therefore, limited their roles within the schools and possibly created barriers between them and other teachers. One BLT remarked that the other teachers thought she had a "cushy job" and didn't work as hard as they did. She stated, "They have no idea how much work I bring home every day, how many hours I spend working at home."

In many of the schools the teachers appreciated the BLT's work with their students because they were given a reprieve from their more difficult students during reading instruction. A few BLTs felt they were appreciated by the teachers in the school because of the benefits to their students and were glad the students were able to receive interventions in the demonstration classroom. One BLT reported that she took care of the responsibilities associated with referring students to the Teacher Support Team (TST) and the teachers were very appreciative because of the amount of paperwork involved in the process.

Replication

Replication was an overriding theme of the demonstration classroom program. From the beginning of the pilot demonstration classrooms, decisions about its design and curriculum have been dominated by the need to develop a program that could be replicated in schools throughout Mississippi and beyond. The grand plan, according to Claiborne Barksdale, was to develop a reading reform model that he could take to the

Mississippi Department of Education's Superintendent, as well as the state legislature, and propose it as a feasible method for reforming reading instruction across the state of Mississippi. By demonstrating the effectiveness of the demonstration classroom program to the superintendent and the legislature, Claiborne Barksdale hopes to turn over the financing of implementation state-wide to the state of Mississippi, with BRI's assistance in providing materials and training teachers.

Several BLTs expressed doubt about the replicability of the demonstration classroom program. One factor that was thought to limit replication was the cost. BLTs felt that the personnel costs associated with the demonstration classrooms would make replication unfeasible in most schools. One BLT stated, "Schools can't afford music or art teachers. I can't see them putting two teachers and an assistant in one classroom." Another factor, according to several BLTs, that would make replication difficult was the work-load. They felt that most teachers would not be willing to put so much time and effort into their work, or be able to handle the stress involved in working with classes full of at-risk children.

At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year BLTs thought that BRI would expand the program in the next year by adding more demonstration classrooms in additional schools prior to asking the state to incorporate the model at their own expense. However, Claiborne Barksdale announced in early 2007 that BRI would not fund additional demonstration classrooms in the 2007-2008 school year. His plan for replication for the next school year involved more participation by the schools and districts. During the next school year, schools and districts that had demonstration classrooms would be asked to replicate the program at their own expense as part of their

agreement as recipients of BRI assistance. There was, however, some flexibility in how to accomplish replication. Schools and districts could choose from a menu of options for how they would replicate the demonstration classroom model.

Option 1: Duplication: The district and school would hire a BLT, an IS, and an AT to duplicate the model in its entirety. However, the next lowest students would receive reading instruction in this classroom, leaving the neediest students in place in the original BRI demonstration classroom.

Option 2: Departmentalization: The school could select one of their strongest reading teachers to be the reading instructor for the next lowest students. The school would also provide an AT for that class; however, an IS was optional. The Read Well program would be purchased by BRI for use by this teacher.

Option 3: Intervention Specialist: The district would hire an Intervention Specialist to work with students in need of intervention, but not enrolled in the demonstration classroom.

Option 4: Intervention Block: The school would schedule a time each day in which all students not receiving interventions in the demonstration classroom would receive interventions from the most effective reading instructors on the faculty.

Option 5: Other District School: The district would implement one or more of the other options in one or more of the district's schools (personal communication, February 21, 2007).

As meetings were held with each district and school administrators to discuss the 2007-2008 school year, the requirements and options for replication options were

discussed. While the bulk of the funding for replication was to be provided by the district, BRI would provide the Read Well program and ongoing training.

The Thoughtful Teacher

A theme that emerged as BLTs described their experiences during their first year implementing the demonstration classroom program was that of the thoughtful teacher. The dilemmas faced by BLTs as they taught struggling kindergarten through third grade students were not necessarily unique to them, but are those faced by all teachers. However, the circumstances surrounding their dilemmas were unique and, therefore, the ways in which they attempted to solve their dilemmas reflected their status as thoughtful teachers.

In describing effective teaching, Pearson (2005) used the term the thoughtful teacher. According to Pearson, more research is needed to develop an understanding of what exemplifies the practice of the thoughtful teacher. He describes thoughtful teachers as those who "place a premium on student engagement and control," and have "positive and optimistic views of student potential" (p. 98). While the use of the Read Well program precluded BLTs from having much control over how they taught reading, in our conversations it was clear that they were attempting to find a way to moderate their need to meet the expectations of BRI and the needs of their students. Their concerns that the Read Well program progressed too slowly for some of their students reflected their belief in their students' potential. BLTs questioned what to do when their students lingered on a unit for several weeks, but were still unable to pass the end of unit assessment, and they displayed skepticism that the problem was solely with the student, or themselves, and not

a design flaw with the Read Well program. Likewise, their concern that their students weren't being given enough opportunities to develop independence in decoding words, or given enough opportunities to interact with authentic text, revealed their desire to develop their students' abilities beyond the confines of the program. The BLTs' expressions of frustration with certain components of Read Well reflected Allington's (2003) findings in his longitudinal study of highly effective reading teachers. According to Allington,

> Our study of these exemplary teachers suggests that such teaching cannot be packaged. Exemplary teaching is not regurgitation of a common script but is responsive to children's needs. In the end it will become clearer that there are no "proven programs," just schools in which we find more expert teachers – teachers who need no script to tell them what to do. (p. 1)

The BLTs weren't complaining about Read Well; they were advocating for their students. By seeking greater autonomy, they were asserting their need to be able to make informed decisions about how to meet their students' needs. Additionally, the BLTs took responsibility not only for how and what they taught their students, but also for how and what their students learned.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will briefly summarize my findings within the framework of the four research questions. Additionally, I will discuss how my findings reveal the interaction between poverty, language, and reading instruction. Next I will discuss questions left unanswered by BRI's efforts to reform reading in Mississippi, and will offer suggestions for BRI as it moves forward in its quest to improve reading instruction for young children. Finally, I will discuss Mississippi's role in literacy reform.

Implementing the Demonstration Classroom Project

Teacher stress was undoubtedly the central theme of the BLTs' experiences implementing the demonstration classroom project. The stress was attributable to several factors. The heavy workload created stress for most BLTs and they compared the work to digging ditches or doing hard labor all day. Working with classes composed solely of struggling readers and children with a wide range of behavior problems, from inattentiveness to combative and angry outbursts, caused stress for many BLTs. BRI recognized the need to ameliorate the stress levels of their employees and took steps to provide assistance by arranging for BLTs and ISs to take one day off each month, allowing BLTs to exercise some autonomy in their classrooms, engaging the services of a

psychologist to provide suggestions for stress reduction, and offering incentives for those who engage in exercise on a regular basis.

BLTs consistently described a sense of purpose about their work with struggling readers. They felt that the work they were doing would have a lasting effect on their students and, possibly, could have a lasting effect on policies about reading instruction throughout Mississippi. Their sense of purpose served to motivate them to push themselves harder; however, it also was a source of stress for many BLTs. One BLT stated, “It’s the weight of everything that causes stress.” Another BLT described worrying that she was “the last hope” for her students.

BLTs consistently cited the need for more instructional time with their students. Several BLTs felt pushed to get everything done each day and expressed the desire to have more time each day with their students. Others were concerned about the amount of time they had to devote to conducting assessments with their students, as well as the other kindergarten through 3rd grade students in their schools. One BLT noted the irony that the students who needed the most instructional time received the least because of the time the BLT and IS had to spend conducting assessments.

Several BLTs described their discomfort with the way the ATs assigned by the district to work in the demonstration classroom interacted with students, often yelling or saying demeaning things to them. Therefore, they found themselves modeling how to speak appropriately with students. BRI provided professional development for the demonstration classroom ATs training them, among other things, how to interact positively with students. BLTs were intent on creating a classroom environment for their students that encouraged positive interactions and, therefore, promoted growth.

BLTs maintained high expectations for their students, understanding that, as their reading teacher, they had the ability to impact their entire lives. They viewed students' behavioral problems as challenges to be overcome and sought ways to understand the source of the problem and ways to help the child. This differentiated the BLTs from other teachers who often excluded difficult children from activities by sending them out of the classroom or isolating them from other children. One BLT stated, "I don't let anything stop me from teaching these kids." The BLTs' attitudes toward their students exemplified Thompson's (2004) description of phenomenal teachers who can succeed with children who present challenges, such as discipline problems or difficult backgrounds. BLTs maintained high expectations for their students and communicated to their students that, regardless of their problems, they can learn to read.

Working with the Children

The BLTs were not prepared to deal with the complexities of the lives of the children in the demonstration classrooms. Early in the school year they discovered that their students were at risk for many reasons and that their difficulty in learning to read was only one of their problems. One BLT summed up her experience with some of her students by saying, "We're trying to teach them to read, and they're trying to survive." The overarching theme associated with the BLTs experiences with their students is the difficult lives of many of the children in the demonstration classrooms.

Behavior problems dominated many of the BLTs' descriptions of the students in the demonstration classroom. The behavior problems the children exhibited were sometimes mild, such as inattentiveness. However, several BLTs reported more extreme

behaviors, such as angry outbursts and a propensity to fight. One BLT indicated that sometimes the behavior problems of some of her students consumed a large portion of her instructional time and she felt that her work would be more effective with the assistance of a counselor in the demonstration classroom.

BLTs expressed concern about the lives of their students. Some students exhibited behaviors associated with physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, prompting BLTs to seek assistance from counselors or social workers. Several BLTs felt that some of their students were neglected at home. While not to the extent of criminal neglect, some students wore the same dirty clothes to school for days at a time, sometimes resorting to turning their shirts inside out. Other students were chronically ill or had untreated dental problems. Students often fell asleep in class because they stayed up late watching television. Several BLTs reported that their students were exposed to violence and crime and discussed their concern about how the children were affected by witnessing disturbing events in their homes and neighborhoods. The BLTs' experiences support research findings that exposure to violence, either experienced or witnessed, affects children in lasting and profound ways, socially and academically, inside and outside the classroom (Basu, 2005; Brownlee, 1996; Reynolds, 2003).

The source of many of the problems experienced by the children in the demonstration classrooms is poverty. There is a strong link between poverty and low academic achievement (Byslma, 2004; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2006; Pellino, 2006; Zackson, 2005). Mississippi has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country (Groce, 2005; Save the Children, 2007) and African American children are more likely to live in poverty than other children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2006). The

experiences of BLTs working in the demonstration classrooms reflect the reality of many of Mississippi's struggling readers, the majority of whom are poor and African American.

Two common characteristics of many of the children in the demonstration classrooms were lack of experiences and limited vocabularies. One BLT reported that many of her students had never been to a McDonald's restaurant, seen an airplane, or traveled outside their community. The students' vocabulary was so limited that, according to some BLTs, reading aloud to them was difficult because so many words had to be explained in order for the children to comprehend the story. The limited vocabulary of the students in the demonstration classrooms supports the finding of Hart and Risley (1995) that children raised in poor homes have vastly different language experiences than children raised in middle class homes. This research supports the contention of Pellino (2006) and Bylsma (2004) that the lack of experiences of children living in poverty contribute to the achievement gap between poor and middle class children.

Absenteeism and transiency was a problem in some demonstration classrooms. One BLT noted that her students who struggled the most academically were the ones most likely to miss school for days at a time. Pellino (2006) reported that transiency is a common problem among families living in poverty because they often live in places that rent by the week, or even the day. For children living in these circumstances, frequent school transfer and irregular school attendance become the norm.

The school experiences of the students in the demonstration classrooms were often negative. Other teachers often had little understanding for, or patience with, the students, many of whom struggled with behavioral as well as academic problems. According to one BLT, "Our kids are the ones that are always out in the hall during

regular class time. They are never involved in anything." The BLTs reported that the demonstration classroom was a safe haven for their students because it was the one place at school where they were included in every activity and experienced success.

Teaching reading to students who speak primarily African American Vernacular English (AAVE) created dilemmas for some BLTs, too. They tried to balance the rules of Read Well, DIBELS, and TPRI about what constitutes an error in reading with their growing understanding about their students' dialect. A few BLTs felt that the sequencing of the Read Well program created difficulties for their students, slowing their progression until certain reading skills, such as contractions, were learned to mastery. My research supports Lobov's (1995) that children who speak AAVE often have difficulty with contractions. The BLTs' experiences with the Read Well program mirror the findings of Lobov, et al (1998) that the sequencing of programs can create barriers to students' literacy growth.

The NRP's Effect on Reading Instruction in the Demonstration Classroom

I did not anticipate the difficulty I would have exploring the BLTs' use of reading strategies and methods promoted by the NRP. Additionally, when reviewing the literature on reading research, I did not realize the profundity of NRP critics' concern that the NRP report would be used to promote pre-packaged, teacher-proof programs (Coles, 2001; Meyer, 2003; NCTE, 2002; Pearson, 2005; Rice, 2006). BRI, in attempting to use teaching strategies and methods promoted by the NRP, and design a program that was replicable, adopted the Read Well program for use it the demonstration classrooms. Ironically, less than two years prior to implementing the demonstration classroom

project, Claiborne Barksdale, in a successful bid to have phonics instruction courses added to teacher preparation programs in all Mississippi colleges of education, stated, “The lack of a solid foundation in phonics among teachers propels districts, especially for the lowest performing schools, to resort to expensive, off-the-shelf programs in an effort to fill this instructional void” (Brenner, 2005, p. 9). It’s unclear what message was sent by BRI to the education community in Mississippi when they required their own Regional Reading Coordinators, who became BLTs, to use an off-the-shelf program. However, it appeared to me that BRI did not have confidence in their personnel, who had spent several years training other teachers how to teach phonics. The logical question that followed was, “If the RRCs are not capable of teaching phonics without a program, then who is?”

My research supports Shannon’s (1983) finding that commercial reading programs have the effect on teachers of alienating them from reading instruction as they begin to treat reading instruction as the application of materials. Coles (2001) and Rice (2006) found that pre-packaged programs place teachers in the role of middle managers who are reduced to deliverers of content and skill processes. My research supports this finding in that my discussions with BLTs about how they taught reading in the demonstration classrooms became discussions of Read Well. Although the role of the BLT was to deliver the core instruction in the demonstration classroom, they tended to describe their role as teaching Read Well. Any specific instructional methods used by the BLT in the demonstration classroom were most often described as they appear in Read Well. Any methods used by the BLT that were not specifically part of the Read Well represented a lack of fidelity to the program. While there was a relaxation of the fidelity

expectations by BRI administrators at the beginning of the second semester, there was still a rigidity to the allowances made to BLTs about what they could use to supplement Read Well.

All of the BLTs reported liking the Read Well program. They found it very easy to use and made planning daily lessons easy. A few BLTs noted the irony that the most qualified and experienced teacher in the demonstration classroom was using the teacher-proof, scripted program and the IS (sometimes a first year teacher) used methods that required the most preparation and planning. In spite of their overall approval of Read Well, 9 of the BLTs found various components of the program problematic and 11 out of the 12 BLTs supplemented the program in various ways. One BLT felt that the reason BRI administrators relaxed their expectation of fidelity to Read Well at mid-year was because they knew that BLTs were already supplementing the program. Some of the supplements to the program were minor, such as reading other books with the students; others were, however, more major, such as skipping sections of the decodable books that the BLT considered developmentally inappropriate.

The problems BLTs cited with the Read Well program ranged from the introduction and mastery requirement of particular words early in the small group units to the developmental inappropriateness of the kindergarten small group units. Because of the requirement that students pass end of the unit assessments before being permitted to proceed to the subsequent unit, groups often stayed on units so long that the students memorized the text. Some BLTs felt that Read Well limited the ability of some of their students to develop at an acceptable rate. Figure 8 illustrates how some students, although scoring at or close to the same as another students, were arbitrarily placed in

slower progressing groups. Because of their group placement, their progress was markedly slower than it would have been if placed in group able to progress more rapidly through Read Well units. BRI's intention in designing the demonstration classroom around small groups of six students was to differentiate instruction. Students would progress at their ability level through Read Well units and receive intervention with the IS based on the skills they were having difficulty learning. Regardless of the intention, however, instruction wasn't truly differentiated because of the rigid design of the demonstration classroom project. The students were, in effect, tracked according to group placement. In some instances students could be moved to a different group; however, after a few months in the demonstration classroom this became impractical, if not impossible, because of the spread between the groups (see Figure 8). Some students were being left behind their ability level peers simply because of their group placement.

When discussing Read Well, BLTs cited phonics instruction as its strongest component, citing its explicitness and systematic approach. Phonemic awareness instruction, however, was generally considered to be the domain of the IS, although BLTs noted that phonemic awareness is a core element in teaching struggling readers. BLTs found Read Well's comprehension instruction to be weak. The program's vocabulary instruction focused on content specific words (Beck, 2004, describes these as tier three words). According to Beck, tier two words, such as *generous, stroll,* or *timid*, have higher utility and are more beneficial to young readers. Read Well does not include tier two words in its vocabulary instruction. Many BLTs felt that their students needed more authentic reading experiences in order to improve their comprehension and expand their vocabularies. While the inclusion of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program was intended

to promote independent student reading, it would have little effect on the novice struggling kindergarten and 1st grade students in the demonstration classroom. Additionally, BLTs did not feel they had time to sufficiently oversee its use and, therefore, its efficacy in increasing student involvement with literature was questionable.

Several BLTs expressed concern that too much emphasis was placed on fluency at the expense of accuracy and comprehension. However, fluency rates were the major measure of student progress on DIBELS, TPRI, and Read Well end of unit assessments. Therefore, although some BLTs felt that the emphasis on fluency represented a flawed way to look at reading instruction, they recognized that their effectiveness would be judged by the speed with which their students read. Therefore, they were compelled to push their students to improve their reading speed. Wilson, et al (2005) found that teachers spend a great deal of time and attention in reading classrooms assessing discrete skills in order to demonstrate improvement in student achievement for which they are accountable. Likewise, regardless of their concerns, BLTs devoted time and attention to fluency training because that was the measurement most scrutinized by BRI administrators.

In February BRI invited Read Well representatives to respond to the BLTs' concerns. Table 11 displays the questions posed by the BLTs and the Read Well representatives' responses. Read Well's responses did not resolve any of the BLTs' concerns; rather, they raised more questions. Several BLTs thought the Read Well representatives were dismissive of their concerns, telling them that they just had first year jitters. One representative said, "Trust me. It'll be alright." BLTs expressed dissatisfaction at the end of the meeting and were unsure how to proceed with Read Well.

Meyer (2003) described the experiences of a teacher using a scripted, commercial program with her primary grade class. The teacher reported that when another teacher asked a program representative at an in-service meeting about the usefulness of the program for her entire class, she was told, “Trust me. This program is good for every child in your class” (p. 3).

While BLTs were unsure how to proceed with Read Well, and had lingering concerns about several components of the program, they all agreed that small group instruction was the most effective component of the demonstration classroom. Because the students worked in groups of six, there was little time when they weren’t working with a teacher. This was particularly beneficial for students with behavior problems, who required greater supervision. Several BLTs felt that the small group format of the demonstration classroom contributed to the intensity of the instruction and was probably as important as the curriculum for their struggling readers.

Agents of Change

BRI’s primary goal has been, since the beginning, to be an agent of change in Mississippi public schools. In 2004 BRI successfully petitioned the state Board of Education to have phonics instruction included in teacher preparation programs in Mississippi colleges of education. In 2005 BRI took bold steps in implementing a reading reform model with demonstration classrooms. The cornerstone of the process through which the demonstration classroom, and, therefore, the BLT, would create a change in how a school taught reading was teacher observation of instruction in the demonstration classroom. In the schools where teachers were visiting the demonstration

classrooms, the principal took responsibility for enforcing the observation mandate. Teachers seldom were self-motivated to observe instruction in the observation classroom. However, some BLTs reported that they weren't sure the observations were effective because the teachers seemed to only be interested in the superficial aspects of the room (such as the materials on shelves), and were missing the point of learning from the instruction they observed. Teachers sometimes indicated to BLTs that they didn't think they could use the teaching strategies used in the demonstration classroom because they didn't have the same materials or three teachers in their rooms.

BRI has been aware for several years that the success of their reform efforts was dependent on the strength and commitment of the principals in the schools. Therefore, the Principal Leadership Training program was critical in ensuring that principals were knowledgeable about every aspect of the demonstration classroom project. Whether or not teachers replicated the instruction they observed in the demonstration classroom was dependant on the extent to which a principal expected replication and how closely the principal monitored reading instruction.

BLTs reported that they were unaware of whether or not teachers were using the methods or strategies observed in the demonstration classroom because they were too busy with their own classroom duties to observe instruction in other classes. BLTs did not envision themselves necessarily as agents of change for the school or other teachers. Their focus was solely on their students. Several BLTs stated that they felt isolated in their classrooms, unaware of what was happening in the rest of the school. BLTs, ISs, and the ATs assigned to demonstration classrooms were exempt from school duties such as bus duty or lunchroom monitoring. They were also not required to attend professional

development or staff meetings unless they directly affected their jobs as reading teachers. It is possible that the isolation of the BLT in the demonstration classroom and the exemption from involvement in other school activities may have created barriers between them and other teachers and impacted the effect of the demonstration classroom project in creating change in the school.

Regardless of their isolation, several BLTs reported that they felt appreciated by other teachers. In some cases teachers appreciated having a reprieve from difficult students; in other cases the teachers were glad that their struggling readers were receiving the interventions they needed. In a few cases BLTs made a point of helping teachers with the Teacher Support Team (TST) process by providing documentation of interventions and serving as advocates for students who were being referred for testing for special education services.

Many BLTs doubted that the demonstration classroom project was replicable as currently designed. They felt that the cost associated with providing two certified teachers and an AT teacher for one classroom was cost prohibitive. Several BLTs doubted whether other teachers would have the same level of commitment or be as willing to work as hard as they did. They also wondered if other teachers would be able to handle the stress involved in working with classes full of at-risk children.

The Interaction Between Poverty, Language, and Reading Instruction

Describing the experiences of BLTs as they implemented the demonstration classroom project has served to connect the dots between key aspects of teaching reading

with young children at risk for reading failure and has revealed a picture in which the way reading is taught interacts with the poverty and language.

BRI has contended from its earliest efforts in 2000 that differentiated, high-quality, research-based reading instruction could improve reading achievement in Mississippi schools. This is undoubtedly true. However, the part of the equation that complicates the reading achievement for many children in Mississippi is poverty. Unless, or until, policy makers address the issues surrounding poverty in the lives of young children with the same rigor as they approach educational issues, the effects of reform will be limited and, perhaps, short-lived. For some BLTs, issues of poverty were impossible to ignore as they worked with their students. BRI administrators, too, began considering ways they could begin to alleviate some of the problems associated with teaching children who live in poverty (for example, providing vision screenings).

Inasmuch as poverty served as a barrier to reading achievement, itb was only part of the literacy landscape for the children in the demonstration classrooms. The demonstration classrooms were attended overwhelmingly by African American children. BLTs pondered throughout the year how to thoughtfully and effectively navigate their way through issues of language and dialect, and understood the need to be sensitive to the burgeoning literacy and language skills of the young speakers of AAVE. BLTs expressed concern about aspects of the Read Well program that were counter-intuitive to their knowledge of what constitutes effective reading instruction in general for young children, and, in particular, for young African American children. While their concerns and questions were sometimes not answered satisfactorily or conclusively, they continued

in their negotiations with BRI administrators and Read Well to advocate for the best instruction for their fragile learners.

In his book *The Shame of a Nation*, Jonathan Kozol (2005) contends that scripted, teacher-proof reading programs are "targeted primarily at poor children of color … valued chiefly as responses to perceived catastrophe in deeply segregated and unequal schools" (p. 64). In his observations of schools using the *Success for All* program (which, according to one BLT, who had previously used the program, is very similar to *Read Well*), Kozol said, "Although the principals in these schools are constantly reminded to hold out high expectations for low-income children, I thought the expectations here were very low" (p. 84). The rationale for using scripted prepackaged programs is that any teacher, even those who are inept, can use them to teach reading; however, according to Kozol, the consequences of their widespread use in schools serving low socio-economic, minority children will be a deepening of the divisions in society. A teacher at one of the schools Kozol visited explained to him that there is an expression among teachers in schools serving predominantly low socioeconomic minority children: "The rich get richer and the poor get SFA" (p. 87). Kozol quotes Lucy Calkins, who said, "It would be of great concern to me and most people I know if we had an educational apartheid system with one method of instruction for poor kids and another for middle-class kids" (p. 87).

Delpit (1995) expressed concern that struggling readers and students in lower socioeconomic communities are subjected to a curriculum that is far narrower than what is provided for middle class students. Teachers often assume that poor students are not able to learn as easily as non-struggling, middle class students and "teach down" to them, with the end result of teaching less to them when, in reality, these students need to learn

much more. This is not a new concern. Delpit cited a 1933 study by Carter G. Woodson of the education of African Americans in the rural south. Delpit stated:

> The teaching of arithmetic in the fifth grade in a backward county in Mississippi should mean one thing in the Negro school and a decidedly different thing in the white school. The Negro children, as a rule, come from homes of tenants and peons who have to migrate annually from plantation to plantation, looking for light which they have never seen. The children from the homes of white planters and merchants live permanently in the midst of calculation, family budgets, and the like, which enable them sometimes to learn more by contact than the Negro can acquire in school. Instead of teaching such Negro children less arithmetic, they should be taught much more of it than white children. (p. 173)

Reading programs designed to meet the needs of struggling readers and children living in poverty should not narrow their curriculum, but, rather, should provide a great deal more experiences with print. Children from middle class families often enter kindergarten with rich literacy backgrounds and experiences. Learning to read is much easier because much of what they need to know foundationally about reading has already been learned at home and in preschools prior to entering kindergarten. It shouldn't be assumed that because poor children come to school with few experiences and literacy skills that they can't learn at the same rate as other children or that they can't benefit from an enriched curriculum. In reality, Delpit (1995) contends, that is exactly what they do need. Chall, et al (1990) found that low-income children should not have a separate reading program than middle class children. They stated,

> Perhaps the strongest reason for not having a separate reading program for low-income children is that different programs tend to separate children from others not like themselves. For broad educational, social, and civic reasons, being part of a larger community is more beneficial for low-income children and for society. Moreover, if their instruction proceeds at a slower pace because they are in a different program, it will be even more difficult for them to catch up. (p. 149)

Chall, et al, note that low-income children have a greater need for vocabulary instruction; however they state,

> Our low-income children's need for greater vocabulary knowledge is thus similar to that of middle-class children. It is not a difference in kind, only a difference in amount. Thus, the needs of low-income children are not really special needs; they are the same needs as for most children. Because the low-income child's family may not provide as much stimulation in language and literacy, the school must take on more of this responsibility. (p. 149)

The BLTs were deeply committed to their students. They were also loyal BRI employees, sharing Claiborne Barksdale's vision for improving literacy levels among Mississippi students. Their acceptance of the Read Well program, while I believe genuine, reflected their desire for a cohesive effort and their understanding of the need for uniformity among demonstration classrooms across the state. Given the choice, most of the BLTs would probably choose to keep Read Well as core curriculum. However, they would probably choose to use it as a set of materials and not as a program and maintain control over how, when, and with what emphasis lessons are delivered. The BLTs' expertise and knowledge about how to teach children to read added credibility to their declaration that Read Well's phonics lessons are explicit, systematic, and effective. That same level of expertise and knowledge, however, also gave them the justification to critique Read Well's comprehension instruction, sequencing, pace, and rules and, therefore, their questions about the program should be respected. While BRI provided a forum for BLTs to raise their concerns about Read Well, only Read Well representatives were invited to discuss the questions about the program. Therefore, it is understandable that there was no resolution to BLT concerns and they were left confused about how to proceed with Read Well.

In 2003, in her evaluation of the early work of BRI, Osborn, recommended that BRI appoint an advisory counsel composed of experts in the field of reading who could provide guidance and advice for the institute. Claiborne Barksdale did not appoint an advisory board and, in 2005, dissolved BRI's board of directors because he felt that it was a waste of their time (personal communication, February 19, 2007). Without a board of directors or an advisory counsel, policy decisions were made solely by Claiborne Barksdale, and the two administrators overseeing the demonstration classroom project, with input from Dr. Boyd. An advisory board would probably have been helpful in resolving issues related to Read Well and other concerns about teaching struggling readers, without relying on program representatives for advice (who obviously have a vested interest in maintaining control over the demonstration classroom curriculum).

Questions Unanswered by the Demonstration Classroom Project

As noble as the demonstration classroom project is, and as much as it has improved the reading achievement of struggling readers, there are still questions left unanswered about how to effectively raise literacy levels among Mississippi students. First, although it may be true that the students receiving reading instruction in the demonstration classrooms made great gains on DIBELS and TPRI measures, the claim cannot be made that their improvement was due to the instruction they received in the demonstration classroom. We do not know if these students wouldn't have made the same improvement if they'd remained in their homeroom class for reading instruction. Common sense would indicate that the instruction they received in the demonstration classroom helped these children immensely, but it cannot be said with scientific certainty.

BRI collects TPRI and DIBELS data at the demonstration classroom schools and analyzes the data in order to compare the improvements made by students in the demonstration classrooms with students receiving reading instruction in their homerooms. Generally, there is a demonstrable difference, with demonstration classroom students making greater gains in assessment scores. However, the measures used to demonstrate improvement, DIBELS and TPRI, are very specific measurements of subskills, such as phoneme segmentation and nonsense word fluency. BLTs and ISs incorporate these subskills in their instruction and, for the most part, other teachers do not. DIBELS does not measure reading comprehension at all, but relies on measurements of how fast children read passages or perform subskill tasks. Other teachers do not emphasize fluency to the extent it is emphasized in the demonstration classroom and, therefore, it would be expected that demonstration classroom students would outperform other students on these measures.

In light of the questions raised about the Read Well program, it is unclear how much benefit it adds to the demonstration classroom. The BLTs bring to their role considerable knowledge and expertise. Could the BLTs have been just as effective teaching their struggling readers without a scripted program? This question could have been answered had BRI assigned some BLTs to use Read Well and others to use the basal series already in place in the schools housing demonstration classrooms. It may very well be that Read Well adds value to the BLTs' work. However, that claim cannot be made with any certainty.

The instruction delivered in the demonstration classrooms is aligned with the findings of the NRP in that BLTs, ISs, and ATs spend the bulk of their time teaching

subskills and emphasize phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. Comprehension and vocabulary instruction receive the least amount of attention in the demonstration classroom. The schism between the proponents of the phonics approach and proponents of the whole language approach primarily revolves around how reading is defined. The phonics approach defines reading as a set of subskills; the whole language approach views reading as a meaning-based process, in which literacy develops in the same way language develops. According to Yatvin (2000), the NRP report represented the philosophical view aligned with the phonics approach to reading instruction and, because of its widespread acceptance and narrow set of findings, has profoundly affected reading instruction and research. Additionally, Yatvin contends that one of the flaws of the NRP report is that it does not provide a definition of reading. The experience of BLTs reflects this definitional ambivalence about the nature of reading. Is reading a set of subskills, or is a student successful as a reader only when he can read text accurately and with comprehension? The BLTs' concerns about the lack of authentic text provided for their students in the demonstration classroom and the emphasis on fluency rates at the expense of accuracy and comprehension indicates their understanding of reading as more than a set of subskills. Therefore, while BLTs provided instruction that would probably be deemed appropriate and effective by proponents of the NRP report, the BLTs expressed questions about whether the strong emphasis on subskills would accomplish the ultimate goal of developing readers able to comprehend grade level text.

Will the benefits children receive from the instruction they receive in the demonstration classrooms be lasting? Because BRI's reading reform efforts are limited to kindergarten through 3rd grade, it is unclear whether the instruction children receive in

the demonstration classrooms will equip them to avoid the 4th grade slump common to low socioeconomic students (Chall, et al, 1990).

The Thorny Thicket Revisited

BRI should be commended for launching their ambitious efforts in attempting to improve the literacy rates of Mississippi children. The founding of BRI coincided with a number of reform efforts at both the state and federal levels, such as the Mississippi Reading Reform Model, the No Child Left Behind Legislation, and NRP's meta-analysis of reading instruction. BRI has provided valuable assistance to many schools in Mississippi, by providing books, materials, professional development, and tutors. Whether promoting reading reform through Regional Reading Coordinators or lobbying for phonics instruction in Mississippi's colleges of education, BRI's effects have been felt across the state. BRI has evaluated its impact along the way and has altered its approach based on its analysis of data related to student improvement within the schools receiving BRI grants.

The arena of reading instruction is, as described by Osborn (2003), a thorny thicket. There are no simple answers or quick fixes. BRI has contended from the beginning that solid reading instruction, with a firm foundation in phonics instruction, will solve most of the problems students have learning to read. Its work has focused on kindergarten through 3rd grade because BRI believes that once children are taught the fundamental skills of reading in the early grades, they will proceed on into the upper grades equipped as successful readers, able to read to learn at grade level. The demonstration classroom project was designed to prove the validity of this belief. By

tracking the reading achievement of students who received reading instruction in demonstration classrooms from kindergarten throughout elementary, middle, and high school, BRI hopes to demonstrate the power of high quality reading instruction in the early years.

The thicket, however, is full of thorns. The students in the demonstration classrooms often lived very difficult lives. The consequences of poverty hindered their ability to learn in a number of ways, from a lack of experiences and limited vocabularies to high rates of absenteeism and behavioral difficulties. Children in the demonstration classrooms exhibited signs of neglect and abuse and were exposed to violent, troubling events. BLTs were committed and confident that they could teach their students to read, but they were troubled by the problems their students experienced in their everyday lives.

BRI's reading reform model is unique and there is little doubt that they have provided a valuable service to the children in the demonstration classroom. Their intention to create a model that could be replicated in other schools across the state may be thwarted by the expense involved in staffing demonstration classrooms. The BLTs, too wondered whether or not other teachers, who would be employed by school districts rather than by BRI, would have the same level of dedication or be willing to work as hard. There are certain benefits associated with being employed by BRI that teachers would most likely not have if they were employed by public schools. BLTs employed by public school districts would be subject to the rigors of the accountability systems, teacher evaluations, rules, regulations, and requirements of school districts. I found that the BLTs were motivated by their loyalty to BRI to work through their problems with components of Read Well that created problems for them. I question whether BLTs

employed by school districts might not be as willing to make accommodations for Read Well's rough spots. Or, on the other hand, and more troubling, they might doggedly implement Read Well with fidelity in spite of its flaws, to the detriment of their students, unable or unwilling to make instructional adjustments or supplement the program.

Suggestions for BRI and Future Research

BRI will, no doubt, evaluate their first year implementing the demonstration classroom project and will make adjustments to make it more effective. I believe their efforts in reforming reading instruction in Mississippi would be accomplished more effectively and efficiently if they designed, with the assistance of reading researchers, research studies to demonstrate which components of the demonstration classroom project have the greatest potential in promoting literacy growth. For example, if some demonstration classrooms used a basal series as core instruction and served as a control group, Read Well's effectiveness could be evaluated with more certainty. The high cost of staffing the demonstration classrooms could be evaluated, too, by setting up a classroom with only a BLT and an assistant teacher (and possibly computers for instructional reinforcement) to determine if the same results can be achieved without an IS. The cost associated with well-designed research would be beneficial to BRI as well as to the educational community.

This study illuminated factors that influence the ability of at-risk children to learn to read. While there is an established link between poverty and lower academic achievement, as well as a link between abuse and neglect and problems in school, there is a need for research to inform teachers, administrators, and policy makers about how to

ameliorate the effects of poverty and neglect within the classroom and optimize the learning experiences of children. This study also reveals the need for research on how to teach reading more effectively to struggling readers who are also speakers of African American Vernacular English. BLTs became aware that their students' ability to move through the Read Well program was affected by dialectical features and were concerned that some students were moving at a pace too slow to enable them to obtain grade level status by the end of the school year. Future research should address ways to promote literacy growth among African American struggling readers.

This study illuminates the important role of teachers in reading reform. The demonstration classroom project posed many challenges for the BLTs and their responses revealed their ability to thoughtfully confront these challenges and maintain their focus on meeting the needs of their students. Several BLTs felt that BRI's ability to replicate the demonstration classroom project was constrained by the limited number of teachers who would be willing to work as hard or be as dedicated as them. Future research should explore which attributes teachers need to possess in order to successfully work in challenging situations with children who are deemed at risk for failure. Additionally, future research should examine the ability of higher education to train teachers to work in schools serving low socioeconomic populations.

The Read Well program was an important component of the demonstration classroom project. However, it was also the source of debate and discussion among BRI administrators and BLTs. The educational community would benefit from further research into the efficacy of reading programs compared with reading instruction that gives teachers more control over reading instruction. Do other scripted commercial

programs present the same difficulties as Read Well with regard to pacing and content? Do other scripted commercial programs present difficulties for speakers of AAVE?

Research is needed to examine how teachers use commercial reading programs. My research revealed that, in spite of professing to like the Read Well program, 11 of the 12 BLTs altered the program in various ways. Studies examining program fidelity would be beneficial to policy makers, administrators, and program designers. Questions about program fidelity often target teacher compliance with administrative mandates. Therefore, developing a true picture of program fidelity might be difficult. However, in light of the claims made by program designers about the effectiveness of their programs, a study of program fidelity is warranted in order to determine how much of a program's success is due to teachers' fidelity to the program and how much is due to the teachers' alterations to the program in order to meet the needs of their students. While it might be assumed that an excellent teacher can teach with any program or set of materials, can a program make instruction more effective with an average or mediocre teacher or overcome the deficits of an inadequate teacher?

Concluding Thoughts on Mississippi and Reading Reform

All of the demonstration classroom schools served populations that were predominantly African American and low-socioeconomic. Their demographics reflected the dual education system that still exists in Mississippi. The role of race and poverty remain at the forefront of many of the state's problems. In 2001 James Barksdale joined then governor, Ronny Musgrove, and former governor, William Winter, in a campaign to change the Mississippi flag, which features the confederate battle flag, a symbol for many

of racism (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2001). A statewide vote defeated the effort and Mississippi's flag remained unchanged. According to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, while Mississippi has changed, racism still exists, as it does in many other parts of the United States. According to Henig, et al, (1999), Americans often downplay the role of racism in education reform, or are timid about raising issues that can be "potent, painful, and potentially divisive" (p. 7). This study highlights the role of poverty and race in schools serving children who struggle to read. It is impossible to discuss the problem of low literacy rates among young school children in Mississippi without also discussing how poverty impacts their ability to learn. Likewise, it is impossible to discuss reading instruction in Mississippi schools without discussing the role of dialect on learning to read. My study suggests that it may be impossible to reform reading instruction in Mississippi without addressing the plight of children living in poverty or learning to be culturally sensitive to the dialect of many Mississippi children.

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APPENDIX A

CURRICULUM VITAE

DEBORAH DUNCAN OWENS

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EDUCATION

2007 (anticipated) Doctor of Philosophy
Major: Curriculum and Instruction
Minor: Reading
Mississippi State University
Dissertation Title: *Reforming Reading Instruction in Mississippi through Demonstration Classes: Barksdale Literacy Teachers' First Year Experiences*

1998 Master of Science
Major: Elementary Education
Mississippi State University – Meridian

1995 Bachelor of Science
Major: Elementary Education
Mississippi State University

National Board of Professional Teaching Standards *Certification as Early Childhood Generalist (2005)*

EMPLOYMENT

7/06 –present Title: Barksdale Literacy Teacher, Barksdale Reading Institute, University of Mississippi. Lead literacy instructor in a demonstration reading classroom at Marshall Elementary School (Jackson, MS) providing reading instruction for at-risk K-3 students. Duties include implementing and modeling research-based reading instruction in a demonstration classroom; providing core instruction for students at risk for reading failure; modeling differentiated, small group, instruction for elementary school teachers and administrators; administering reading assessments; providing professional development in reading instruction for K-3 students; supervising intervention specialist and teaching assistant; collaborating with Barksdale Reading Institute instructors throughout the state regarding teaching methodologies.

7/05 – 7/06 Title: Pilot Barksdale Literacy Teacher, Barksdale Reading Institute, University of Mississippi. Lead literacy teacher in 1 of 4 pilot classrooms in Mississippi at Earl Travillion Elementary School, Hattiesburg, MS.

7/04 – 6/05 Title: 2nd Grade Classroom Teacher/Barksdale Reading Institute Liaison, Philadelphia Elementary School, Philadelphia, MS. Duties included teaching a self-contained 2nd grade class; supervising reading instruction in K-3 classrooms for implementation of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model; collaborating with Regional Reading Coordinator in facilitating weekly professional development/peer coaching meetings for K-3 teachers and teaching assistants; implementing Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program for the elementary school and area preschools.

1/02 – 6/04 Title: Reading Teacher/Barksdale Reading Institute Liaison, Philadelphia Elementary School, Philadelphia, MS. Duties included providing reading interventions for K-6 students; serving as the school's liaison with the Barksdale Reading Institute; supervising after-school and extended school year programs; coordinating professional development activities with Regional Reading Coordinator at area preschools.

6/01 – 12/01 Title: Research Assistant, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS. Duties included assisting Dr. Dwight Hare in a study funded by the Spencer Foundation examining professional development practices in southeastern United States; collaborating with researchers from other universities participating in the study; conducting interviews with teachers and administrators; collaborating in writing scholarly papers and reporting findings.

8/96 – 5/01 Title: Reading Lab Teacher, Philadelphia Elementary School, Philadelphia, MS. Duties included providing remedial, as well as enrichment, supplemental reading instruction for 3rd – 6th grade students.

UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2000 Instructor, Mississippi State University, Meridian Campus: taught "Writing for Thinking" for 50+ students (fall, 2000)

PUBLICATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

2007 Pentimenti from the Past: Mississippi Schools in the Post Civil Rights Era. *Paper Submitted for Anual Conference of the Scholars in Critical Race Studies Working Group: Race and Post-Civil Rights South, Memphis, TN.*

2006 Thoughtful Teachers, Powerful Learning: A New Model for Developing Early Literacy in Mississippi. *Presentation accepted for the 2007 National Urban Alliance for Effective Education's Teaching for Intelligence: Believe to Achieve Conference, Birmingham, AL.*

2006 Mississippi's Response to Brown vs. Board of Education: Looking at the Past to Understand the Present. *Presentation accepted for the Third Annual Civil Rights Education Conference, Oxford Mississippi.*

2006 The Thoughtful Teacher and Reading Reform: Case Studies from Mississippi. *Paper accepted for the 2007 National Board of Professional Standards National Conference and Exposition.*

2006 Civil Rights Education and Accountability. *The Wellspring Newsletter for the William Winter Center for Racial Reconciliation, 3*(2).

2006 Grade Level Instruction: Differentiated Reading Instruction in K-3. *Powerpoint presented at the 2006 Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference,* Oxford, MS.

2005 Managing the Writing Process: It's All in the Bag (2005). *Professional development for the faculty of Earl Travillion Elementary School, Hattiesburg, MS.*

2004 Y-RAP (Young Readers Art Project): A Pragmatic Solution for Reluctant Readers. *Reading Improvement,* 41(4), 235-240. Co-authors: Bryan, L. and Walker, L.

2004 The Missing Professional Development-Accountability Link: Real Data Analysis. *Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association.* Co-authors: Hare, D. and Turchi, L.

2004 The Impact of High-Stakes Accountability on Teachers' Professional Development: Evidence from the South. *A Final Report to the Spencer Foundation* (in association with the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality).

2002 Impact of Accountability on the Professional Development of Teachers: Evidence from Case Studies in Six Southern States. *Paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association*. Co-authors: Turchi, L., Johnson, D., and Montgomery, D.

2000 2-4-6-8, How Can We Motivate: Justification and Suggestions for Motivating Children to Read. *Paper presented at the 60th Annual University of Southern Mississippi's Reading Conference.*

2000 Young Readers Art Project (Y-RAP). *A poster presentation for the 2000 Annual Convention of the International Reading Association, Indianapolis, IN.*

1998 Extension Lab: A New Way of Looking at Teaching and Maximizing Student Learning. *Workshop for Jackson Public Schools, Jackson, MS.*

1998 Expansive Reading Instruction Across the Curriculum. *Workshop conducted for Southeast Middle School, Meridian, MS.*

1998 How Can Schools Offer Gifted Experience to All Students? *Presentation at the 3rd Annual Winter Conference of the Program for Research and Evaluation of Public Schools, Jackson, MS.* Co-presenters: Shumaker, F. and Ball, D.

1997 Integrated Learning through Thematic Units (1997). *Workshop conducted for the East Mississippi Center for Education, Meridian, MS.* Co-presenter: Bryan, L.

1997 Learning Centers (1997). *Workshop conducted for the East Mississippi Center for Education and Development, Meridian, MS.* Co-presenter: Bryan, L.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

2006 Participated in the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation Strategic Planning Session to establish long-term goals in civil rights education, Jackson, MS.

2005 Organized the Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman Living Memorial Civil Rights Education Summit (June, 2005), Philadelphia, MS (a collaboration between the Philadelphia Coalition and the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation).

1999 Originated *Reading Parents as Literacy Support (Reading PALS)* at Philadelphia Elementary School – a parental involvement program which trained and facilitated parents' involvement in the school, organizing literacy events and parent "read aloud" days.

AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL INTEREST

READING INSTRUCTION
- teaching struggling readers
- reading intervention
- differentiated instruction
- teaching teachers to teach
- small group instruction
- reading assessment

PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY AND EDUCATION

EDUCATION REFORM

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

APPENDIX B

DIBELS' KINDERGARTEN END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

DIBELS' KINDERGARTEN END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

ASSESSMENT	RATE/READER STATUS	
Letter Naming Fluency	Less than 25 letters correct per minute	At Risk
	29-40 letters correct per minute	Some Risk
	More than 40 letter correct per minute	Low Risk
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	Less than 10 phonemes correct per minute	Deficit
	10-35 phonemes correct per minute	Emerging
	More than 35 phonemes correct per minute	Established
Nonsense Word Fluency	Less than 15 letter sounds correct per minute	At Risk
	15-25 letter sounds correct per minute	Some Risk
	More than 25 letter sounds correct per minute	Low Risk

APPENDIX C

DIBELS' FIRST GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATION

DIBELS' FIRST GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATION

ASSESSMENT	RATE/READER STATUS	
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	Less than 10 phonemes correct per minute	Deficit
	10-35 phonemes correct per minute	Emerging
	More than 35 phonemes correct per minute	Established
Nonsense Word Fluency	Less than 30 letter sounds correct per minute	Deficit
	30-50 correct letter sounds per minute	Emerging
	More than 50 letter sounds correct per minute	Established
Oral Reading Fluency	Less than 20 words correct per minute	At Risk
	20-40 words correct per minute	Some Risk
	More than 40 words correct per minute	Low Risk

APPENDIX D

DIBELS' SECOND GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

DIBELS' SECOND GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

ASSESSMENT	RATE/READER STATUS	
Oral Reading Fluency	Less than 70 words correct per minute	At Risk
	70-90 words correct per minute	Some Risk
	More than 90 Words correct per minute	Low Risk

APPENDIX E

DIBELS' THIRD GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

DIBELS' THIRD GRADE END OF YEAR FLUENCY RATE EXPECTATIONS

ASSESSMENT	RATE/READER STATUS	
Oral Reading Fluency	Less than 80 words correct per minute	At Risk
	80-110 words correct per minute	Some Risk
	More than 110 Words correct per minute	Low Risk