

**EARLY READING INTERVENTION  
AT CRESTVIEW SCHOOL**

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Dedication:

To my children Rebecca, Sean and Jackson

My greatest source of joy, discovery and self-awareness  
during this journey of lifelong learning

## Abstract

This project examines the assumptions, perceptions, and practices that currently exist with relation to the early reading intervention program (Reading Recovery) offered through the learning assistance program at Crestview Elementary School. Of particular interest in the study were the attitudes about the implementation of this program from the perspective of the teachers who receive children into their classes in years following their intervention, the teachers who refer the students for further remediation, and the learning assistance teacher. As well, the study focused on the long-term effects of early intervention on students' school careers. The progress of all students who have passed through a specific early intervention program (Reading Recovery) in grade one was tracked through subsequent years and other forms of remediation. Quantitative data came from archival assessment results recorded by the school district for a period of six years. Study results revealed rates of completion, long-term retention rate of grade level reading ability, current school attended and teacher attitudes. The study concludes with suggestions for changes to school culture that focus on an overall system restructuring, classroom support, and ongoing monitoring of Reading Recovery students.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Description .....	1
Personal Narrative .....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	9
Early Reading Intervention .....	9
Reading Recovery.....	12
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	28
Mixed Method Research Design .....	28
Description.....	28
Literature Review .....	30
Methodology .....	31
Data Analysis .....	33
Discussion .....	35
Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....	37
Phase I: Quantitative Data.....	37
Case Study.....	37
Phase II: Qualitative Data .....	41
Personal Narrative .....	41

Interviews.....	45
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	57
Recommendations for Improvement.....	62
Overall system restructuring .....	62
Classroom support.....	67
Ongoing monitoring of RR students.....	69
Next Steps .....	70
References .....	73
Appendices .....	77
A: Mixed Method Research Blueprint.....	77
B: Interview Blueprint .....	78

## List of Figures

1: Gender of Reading Recovery Students .....	37
2: Current Location of Former Reading Recovery Students .....	38
3: Student Achievement .....	39
4: Current Student Reading Achievement for Discontinued Students.....	41

## Chapter 1: Description

### Personal Narrative

In *Researching Lived Experience*, Max van Manen (2001) describes the “starting point of phenomenological research is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you” (p. 40). I first became deeply interested in the topic of early reading intervention programs when it was brought to my attention, as principal, that there were several students who had gone through Reading Recovery intervention in grade one at our school and who were subsequently shuffled into other reading remediation programs the following year. This practice ran counter to the Reading Recovery philosophy which insists that a student who has completed the program will possess the necessary reading skill level to be successful in the regular classroom setting. As the school year went on, I discovered an increasing number of students who had been involved in Reading Recovery and then proceeded into the learning assistance program for further reading remediation. I became intrigued. Van Manen (2001) describes how “one does not pursue research for the sake of research” (p. 1). As a part of my role of educational leader for my school, a purposeful research question had fallen into my lap. How was this happening? Why was this happening? As a school, what could or should we be doing differently?

Barth (1990) cautions the principal who takes on the role of the “educational leader” in the school, as “many principals unwittingly find themselves to be inhibitors not facilitators of teacher growth” (p. 51). Instead, in order to facilitate educational change, principals need to become “lead learners”. This role in itself can be an onerous one as, often, “if principals do engage in a learning experience and learn

something . . . they are then faced with having to *do* something with it” (Barth, 1990, p. 70). I needed to be willing to take on the responsibility for what I might learn during this research even though I would probably be rewarded for my “efforts at learning by additional work” (Barth, 1990, p. 70). There is a fine line to be taken when you are both a participant-observer *and* the principal. “In order not only to flourish, principals need to be able to discuss promising school practices without fear of violating a taboo; they need to learn to share problems without worrying about appearing inadequate” (Barth, 1990, p. 74). To add my own thoughts to that sentiment, a greater risk in my mind was suggesting that my teachers were inadequate. I had to be aware that because I was the principal, knowing too much about the question could muddy the research. I was bringing my own biases, my hunches and assumptions to the research before I even began to gather any data. I had to be careful not to engage in focused conversations about the project with other teachers before I interviewed them, as I didn’t want to influence their interviews. As researcher, I needed to “bracket”, or suspend my beliefs about the topic (Van Manen, 2001, p. 46).

In the beginning I had a concern that the response to my research might be “so what?” Sergioivanni (1992) writes about the “mindscapes” that we all hold, those “mental pictures in our heads about how the world works” (p.8) which provide the basis for decisions we make. He describes how the heart -- what one values and believes, leads to those mental pictures; the head, which further directs the hand -- your decisions, actions and behaviours. If my mindscape about my research was different than other teachers at my school, then “different realities [could] lead people to behave quite differently” (Sergioivanni, 1992, p. 8). Something that I might have felt fundamentally critical may



have been of little interest to my teachers as they dealt with more pressing daily issues. Barth (2001) is a firm believer in school reform from the inside out. He believes that “the school that becomes a self-renewing enterprise will shape its own future. The constructive leader for such a school identifies and then introduces these conditions into the culture of the school” (p. xxiv). The challenge for me then, was to endeavour to be a constructive leader, to allow and create the conditions for self-renewal. Barth (2001) recognizes that “our profession desperately needs school-based reformers” (p. 5), as school reform is most effective when the catalyst for change comes from within as opposed to arising from outside.

As I considered challenging the norms of my school, I was reflective of the warning Barth (2001) delivers: “probably the most important -- and most difficult -- job of the school-based reformer is to change the prevailing culture of a school” (p. 7). The data that I intended to review came from a time before I was the principal of the school; in fact, all the teachers at my school were there before I came on staff, or arrived the same year. I needed to remind myself that by examining the attitudes and belief systems around early reading intervention, I was also questioning school norms.

Barth (2001) describes the prime responsibility of the “school-based reformer is to take fresh inventory of habituated practices in our school’s culture” (p. 13) and to then examine those practices in order to determine whether or not they are having any effect, positive or negative, on the learning of the people in the school. Because the teaching staff at my school was relatively stable, I believed that behaviour around early reading intervention was probably already habit, and I recalled Barth’s (2001) advice “if you continue to do as you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got” (p. 22).

In an article written on preventing early school failure, Slavin et al. (1992) describe the growing acceptance that early intervention programs are preferable to later remediation. In a report submitted to the United States Congress in February 1999 written by The National Reading Panel on the topic of teaching children to read, one of the recurring themes arising from several regional meetings was the importance of early identification and intervention for at-risk children (p. 2). I felt that at some fundamental level at my school we were missing the point of early intervention and, rather than simply expressing my concerns, I should embark on a more systematic approach to gathering information which could then be used to facilitate positive change for students at our school site. “Knowledge of local context also makes it possible for principals to go beyond questioning to challenging program regularities” (Reitzub, 1995, p. 2). This thinking led me to the need to acquire knowledge about the context and purpose of reading intervention programs in order to challenge our collective way of thinking at the school site. I anticipated my project would be a catalyst, not a prescription, for change in our school. Barth (1990) reminds us that no “teacher, principal . . . can be a serious agent of change within a school, operating only from someone else’s prescription or vision. Implementing the ideas and ideals of others will always be a halfhearted enterprise” (p. 178). Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that people aren’t driven by self-interest alone; “we are also driven by what we believe is right and good, by how we feel about things” (p. 23). With that in mind, I hoped to use my project as a tool to open up dialogue and reflection about practices at our school.

I often struggle with the duality of my role as principal: I am at the same time both educational leader and budget manager. Sometimes the two roles conflict with each

other, and it would be foolhardy to suggest that a part of my research was not driven by financial concerns related to having a teacher work for a significant portion of each day in a one-to-one situation, which is the tutor model of Reading Recovery. Slavin et al. (1992) reviewed several types of early schooling programs and note “one important common feature of these programs is that they are expensive” (p. 2). They further assert that “even very expensive early interventions can be justified on cost-effectiveness grounds alone if they reduce the need for later and continuing remedial and special education services, retentions, and other costs” (Slavin et al., 1992, p. 3). Above all, the premise that “all children can learn” (Barth, 2001, p. 28) must be the guiding principle in this decision-making.

As I began this path of personal research, I needed guidance. The question arose: “How does one become a reflective practitioner?” Barth (2001) describes four processes that the school reformer needs to engage in during this journey, namely: observation, writing, conversation, and embracing differences (p. 65). To make observation meaningful, we must not just observe our results; “to reflect on practice we must observe practice” (Barth, 2001, p. 66). This truism seems so simple yet, at the school level, we usually reflect on results and then try to uncover how we got to the results. In order to be truly effective, we must spend some time reflecting *in* practice, rather than just *on* practice.

Writing creates meaning for “when one writes, one thinks, one necessarily reflects” (Barth, 2001, p. 67), which leads to responsibility for writing the words. “Writing about practice is closely related to improving practice, for with written words come the innermost secrets of schools and of their schoolmasters” (Barth, 2001, p. 67). If

we write about our experiences in schools, then we naturally reflect on them. Even the process of deciding which words will go on the paper reflects a decision we make about what we want to make known. The many decisions that I have made in the crafting of each written word of this personal narrative about my school reflects a decision and a corresponding responsibility to my school which I must accept. “By writing about practice, each of us knows more about what we do and about what we know” (Barth, 2001, p. 68). There is always risk associated with the written words. “Writing about the school’s non-discussables makes it likely they will be discussed and reflected on” (Barth, 2001, p. 68).

Engaging in conversation is another necessary step in the process. It was my hope that my research would prompt conversation in safe venues, where the opening up of the group’s thoughts through the written words of my thesis would allow for more productive conversation around how we do business. I believed that dialogue was a higher level of conversation. I hoped to use data to dialogue about sensitive issues and help to create a safety net. I felt that if we engaged in dialogue about data instead of people, there would be a freedom to be more objective and to share ideas and perceptions with less fear than might be associated with having one’s personal practice examined.

In examining differences amongst staff, there is always the potential for fear. Educators need to embrace differences and share key learning among themselves, rather than letting differences create barriers. Barth (2001) suggests, “the existence of differences often suggests uneven quality and performances” (p. 72). This does not necessarily hold true, yet in a profession where autonomy is paramount, there is always the risk that if you share your “tricks of the trade” with others, they will be criticized

rather than valued. Teachers have individual styles that reflect their personality, their values and beliefs and their mindscapes. “Teachers become very committed to their personal theories about methods of instruction; they defend them passionately at times, and resist their revision” (Clay, 1991, p. 237-8). As with any collection of educators who vary in terms of education, experience, age, gender, and grade level, my staff was no exception but I proceeded on the assumption that differences in style could be strengths if the differences were valued and we all shared a common vision. We do not all have to teach identically if our goals are shared.

I was of the opinion that a review of a school-based program should be done on a collective, rather than an individual basis. In summarizing a publication by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Gaffney and Paynter (1994) offer the promise that:

Making an informed decision to implement a powerful intervention may not only transform the system but alter the way the participants in that system view the system, themselves, and others and challenge beliefs about change and the rate at which change is possible. (p. 29)

The effects of such reviews can be positive and benefit everyone or, if handled insensitively, could be detrimental.

An important distinction to note regarding my project is that the focus was on students who did not have a learning disability in the area of literacy development. That component alone added an entirely different slant to the research. My main concern was with the student who “should” have been able to be successful in the regular classroom setting, but was found later receiving remedial reading assistance from the learning assistance teacher. The founder of Reading Recovery, Marie Clay (1993) reports “after

leaving the programme almost all the children have been able to move forward with average children in their classes over the next three years” (p. 8). Unfortunately, my gut reaction to this statement was that this was not what was happening at Crestview School. This raised unsettling questions for me. I hoped that examining the data and the context of the data, as well as examining the perceptions and attitudes of teachers about reading intervention would address some of my questions and lead to some possible solutions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Early Reading Intervention

It is widely accepted that when it comes to reading instruction “we know that many different methods and approaches are desirable to meet the needs, strategies, and motivations of different children at different times and in different situations” (Flippo, 1999, p. 26). The basic intention of early reading intervention programs in schools is to provide that extra “boost” that some early readers need so they can have a successful school experience. This program is not just an alternate course of action. The “promise of [this] intervention is that it seeks to impact existing conditions in such a dramatic way as to change the subsequent course of events” (Gaffney & Paynter, 1994, p. 24). Gaffney and Paynter (1994) explain that intervention is structured not to remediate the deficit, but “to produce accelerated change” (p. 24); the students not only catch up to their peer group, but also develop the skills necessary to sustain “performance over time” (p. 24).

Intervention is preferable to later remediation “because students who have failed are likely to be unmotivated, with poor self-concepts as learners” (Slavin et al., 1992, p.2). Slavin et al. (1992) find that “many children are referred to special education programs largely on the basis of reading failure, and then remain in special education for many years, often for their entire school careers” (p. 2). They further observe that “success in the early grades does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling” (Slavin et al., 1992, p. 3). One of the concerns about pullout intervention programs is that they often offer more of the same instruction offered in the classroom that did not work originally.

Even when the remedial class included methods tailored to each child's learning style, the students did not catch up to grade level in reading. The students needed more than could be accomplished in a short remedial period several times a week. (Gaskins, 1988, p. 143)

Clay (1993) asserts, though, that “by the second year a small number of children who need special supplementary help can be identified” and, therefore, “individual teaching for some children (is) recommended” (p. 6). She claims “research has shown that a large percentage of children who were the poorest readers in their schools after one year at school responded quickly to such an approach” (Clay, 1993, p. 7). She also describes how within all education systems, “some children do not learn well among other children . . . but respond to individual help” (Clay, 2001, p. 291). Slavin et al. (1992) recognize that of all the strategies they reviewed, “the most effective by far for preventing early reading failure are approaches incorporating one-to-one tutoring of at-risk 1<sup>st</sup> graders” (p. 6), and more specifically, “the largest and longest-lasting effects have been found for the three programs that use teachers as tutors” (p. 6).

Establishing an intervention program at the school level is not a light undertaking. Because of the complexity of the structure of quality early reading intervention programs, “adopting a complex intervention is a problem-solving process that requires understanding of the conceptual congruity of all aspects of the theory, intervention and training underlying the innovation” (Gaffney & Paynter, 1994, p. 24). Implementing an intervention cannot be done quickly or without substantial preparation, including the need to develop “accompanying structures” (Gaffney & Paynter, 1994, p. 24) that will support



any sort of meaningful change. In an independent study of the factors that influence student literacy development, Dr. Kenneth Rowe (1995) conducted a complex longitudinal study on a large sample of students (5000) in Australia. In those schools in which students had maintained high levels of reading achievement, there was consistent evidence of well established procedures for the early detection of non-readers, quality teachers who are well organized and participate frequently in in-service, professional development programs, a whole-school focus on teaching and learning, well developed school community relationships, orderly school environments, effective use of external consultants, and the use of strategies that emphasize the importance of reading (p. 89)

Gaffney and Paynter (1994) describe some of the most fundamental system changes to support an effective intervention as the “changes in a teacher’s knowledge, skills, and behaviors that must be sustained over time” (p. 24). This specifically refers to the intense training of the teacher who is to deliver the program to the child. There also needs to be general acceptance within the organization of the value of the structural change. The intervention structure must be compatible with the organization it is joining. “An educational intervention, by definition, serves a specific population that is embedded within the general enterprise of schools and is compatible with this enterprise but not central to it” (Clay, 1993, p. 130). To be successful in any system, “an innovation likely to survive will be one which is cohesive both internally (in terms of theory, training, program design, evaluation) and with the host system (i.e. it must be workable, contributing, cost-effective, and a winner with the stakeholders)” (Clay, 1994, p. 130).

### Reading Recovery

My school district selected Reading Recovery, developed by Marie Clay, as the early intervention program best suited for a particular group of lowest achieving students. “Reading Recovery is an early intervention program designed to reduce dramatically the number of children with reading and writing difficulties that persist throughout the school” (Clay, 1994, p. 121). The Reading Recovery program identifies those children who are not demonstrating the anticipated skill levels by the beginning of their grade one year. These children receive a thirty-minute per day intervention session of one-on-one teaching by a certified teacher. Teachers develop detailed profiles of each child, looking carefully at each separate reading skill. They assess where weaknesses and strengths are, and provide a specific, detailed, and concentrated program to bring each child to the average level of the class. This usually takes twelve to twenty weeks. “Accelerated learning is possible because Reading Recovery teachers base their instruction on carefully documented daily observations of what each child already knows about reading and writing” (NDEC, 2002, p. 4). The program is discontinued when, in the teacher’s judgment, students have acquired basic reading and writing competencies that they are unlikely to lose. Because Reading Recovery is designed to treat a specific group of children after they have already been exposed to literacy learning and before the onset of more serious difficulties, it is defined as “secondary prevention” (Clay, 2001, p. 248).

Reading Recovery teachers undergo intensive training in order to become qualified to teach the program. This is an important element of the method. Reading Recovery teachers receive a year of training from a Teacher Leader who must attend a university program in order to be qualified. Reading Recovery teachers in their training

year work individually with at least four children daily, while also attending weekly training sessions with other Reading Recovery teachers where they observe individual lessons taught behind a one-way mirror. Following the lessons, the teachers engage in reflection, analysis and discussion (NDEC, 2002, p. 11).

Each Reading Recovery student receives a daily thirty-minute one-to-one tutoring session with the Reading Recovery teacher. Each lesson is tailor-made for individual students, moving forward from where they are and not wasting time reteaching known skills. Each lesson consists of rereading familiar stories, working with letters and words, writing a story, reconstructing a story, and reading a new book. “Each Reading Recovery lesson incorporates five common components . . . phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, and text comprehension” (NDEC, 2002, p. 4).

Five status categories describe students at the end of their series of lessons. The five categories are:

- Discontinued: The child has successfully completed the program and re-enters the classroom program without further remediation.
- Recommended action: The child was recommended for further evaluation and special education supports.
- Incomplete program: The school year ended before the child had time to complete the program.
- Moved away while being served
- Other: Used to describe circumstances where the child is removed from the program for unusual reasons.

The discontinuation of the student must be discussed in greater depth. Under the conditions of the Reading Recovery program, a student is considered to have achieved success based on two sources of information. First, the opinions of both the classroom teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher help determine whether the child is reading at or above the average performance of age/grade peers. Then these opinions are further checked against a discontinuation process where students are tested. The decision to discontinue the student is based on the following criteria:

1. The extent to which the child has developed a self-sustaining learning system so that he or she can benefit from classroom instruction without the need for further intervention.
2. Results from exit testing by an independent observer (ie. A teacher other than the child's Reading Recovery teacher) that indicate the child is reading close to his/her average performing peers.

Reading Recovery outcomes have been measured against data collected since the creation of the program in 1978, first in New Zealand where it was originally developed and, now, from its expanded offerings in Australia, United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Over time, data gathered for North America Reading Recovery students indicate that “77% of students who complete the full series of lessons . . . were able to read and write at grade level” (NDEC, 2002, p. 6).

My school has been offering Reading Recovery to selected students in grade one for the past six years as a method of early reading intervention. What Clay (1991) defines as improvement in reading literacy is “a gradual increase in effective processing strategies” (p. 2). The purposes of her reading instruction methods are “to develop the

child's strategies for working independently with text, to increase the child's processing power" (Clay, 1991, p. 2). The goals of Reading Recovery are "to temporarily lift their pace of learning, to permanently lift their levels of achievement, and to build a sound foundation for subsequent literacy learning" (Clay, 2001, p. 217). She further explains that Reading Recovery teaches students how to learn from their own efforts, to draw on the strengths, knowledge and skills they possess when they are no longer in the program.

In a speech delivered to the Northeast Early Literacy Conference and Reading Recovery Institute in Boston, Don Holdaway (2002) offered high praise for the efforts of Marie Clay and the Reading Recovery program:

Reading Recovery brings together that vast and learned body of research, unparalleled in the field of literacy, into a pragmatic system of instruction that may properly boast of documented success in its undertaking to remedy early literacy failure in a way which no other international program of intervention approaches. (p. 21)

Holdaway asserts that the Reading Recovery program "supports the learning integrity of clients and has the effect of accelerating their progress, maximising their skill and sustaining their sense of personal dignity" (p. 21). He highlights the benefits of the program to be that "it supports the absolutely critical role that self-correction plays," "close observation of the program with individual children over several months," "the processes and creation of authentic texts" and "scaffolded support" (p. 22). He asserts that, ultimately, the pinnacle of success of the program lies with the meticulous training of the teachers in order to qualify them to deliver the instruction.

Holdaway (2002) further states that credibility is lent to the Reading Recovery program because it was “gradually formulated with careful pragmatism through extensive trial and error and massive detailed research” (p. 23). It has been carefully documented to be successful in the setting of the six-year-old student intervention.

However, Reading Recovery is not without its critics, both academic and political. Reading Recovery instructional strategies are based on Clay’s assertion that children need to acquire the ability to use multiple cues to solve problems while reading and to engage in the specific strategies of crosschecking, predicting and confirming. In a research project conducted for the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (1999), researchers Chapman, Tunmer and Prochnow assert that “a potential criticism of the instructional philosophy of Reading Recovery is that it stresses the importance of using information from many sources without recognizing that skills and strategies involving phonological information are of primary importance in beginning literacy development” (p. 3). They further discovered that those students with the greatest gains in phonological processing were also the ones who were most likely to maintain their growth over time and those students who continued to have deficiencies in phonological processing would continue to experience difficulties in reading, regardless of their success in the Reading Recovery program. Several students showed that participation in Reading Recovery did not eliminate or reduce phonological processing deficiencies. Chapman et al. (1999) describe in their research a group of Reading Recovery students who had completed the program, but “one year later their reading was around one year below age appropriate levels” (p. 2).

Ashdown and Simic (2000) provide some additional points to consider in implementing the Reading Recovery program. In referring to research work conducted by Shanahan and Barr (1995), they note that many students will leave the program with “well-developed strategies, including phonemic awareness and spelling knowledge” (p. 30). However, they caution that there may be “some problems in reporting approaches that may inflate the learning gains of Reading Recovery children” (Ashdown & Simic, 2000, p. 30). Of considerable concern is that there is a need for “clearer specifications of success, the documenting of outcomes on all students receiving Reading Recovery, and more rigorous research studies” (Ashdown & Simic, 2000, p. 30).

Reading Recovery proponents consider their standards of on-going research and reporting of student results in their program as an internal validity that promotes credibility. Gaffney and Paynter (1994) explain, “the documentation of the results of the intervention is a significant factor contributing to the continuation of Reading Recovery and its visibility” (p. 28). They describe how results are used to develop annual reports of each Reading Recovery site, which include data on the progress of the children served at the site. These data are collected across the country and collated for reporting. In the United States, the National Data Evaluation Center (NDEC) collects “descriptive and standard pre- and post-test assessment data annually on every RR student in schools” (Clay, 2001, p. 254). While the data are collected and reported, it is only in reference to children’s progress in their grade one year.

It has been well documented that the Reading Recovery program can yield impressive results in the year of the child’s intervention. There have been no attempts by the Reading Recovery program to track student progress over subsequent years, where

some educators start to see the gap between Reading Recovery students and their peers emerge and grow. Several independent studies have been used by the Reading Recovery organization to show positive connections, yet the program itself does not attempt to continue to gather data on its cohorts beyond their intervention year. Clay's position on long-term research is this: "to conduct research extending more than three years beyond RR seemed to me unrealistic because as a developmental psychologist, I could anticipate the statistical effects of the increasing number of intervening variables" (Clay, 2001, p. 263).

An analysis of the effectiveness of Reading Recovery could not be conducted without also considering the cost effectiveness of the program. One-to-one tutoring with a teacher is a very costly venture. Clay (1994) asserts:

The program is designed as an intervention in an education system and, despite the fact that the instruction is individual, it has the potential to be cost-effective because at least two-thirds of those who enter the program can be returned to average levels of performance in all five countries where it operates. (p. 121)

Reading Recovery supporters believe that increased costs in the short term (at the time of the student's intervention) are offset by the decreased costs in the long term (a reduced need in further reading remediation). Clay (1994) states the Reading Recovery program can be considered a cost-saver because "if an educational system can clear 90 percent of the poorest performers from the classrooms, the system is then freed to devote special resources to the very small residual group with persistent reading or writing difficulties" (p. 121). A report written by the North American Trainers Group (2002) entitled *What Evidence Says About Reading Recovery*, notes "it is inappropriate to label a program as



expensive or not cost-effective without extensive research comparison with other programs that target the same student population and seek to achieve the same results” (p. 3).

Clay herself identifies some of the common criticisms of Reading Recovery in a paper written in 1994. Special Educators often fault the program as one which employs some of the characteristics of Learning Assistance programs which, in turn, are criticized for such characteristics as withdrawal programs (from the classroom setting), labeling, and the problems associated with differentiated diagnosis. Learning Disability professionals criticize the program on the basis that children with learning disabilities are offered the program yet it does not possess all the necessary characteristics of a program designed for someone with a learning disability. Specifically, it doesn't attempt to improve the mental processing support that students with learning disabilities require, nor does there exist a pre-determined curriculum that will be delivered.

Researchers make up a rather large group of critics against Reading Recovery. Educational researchers question the gathering of hard evidence that the children are actually learning. Clay (1994) counters “teachers keep daily records in a form which provides a detailed memory of each child's progress” (p. 133). The researchers also question whether results can be replicated. Clay (1994) explains that field trials completed in different schools in different countries yield the same results, stating, “their end-of-year results supported the first year's success” (p. 133). The ability of the program to extend into different ethnic groups was supposedly tested with Maori, Pacific Island and European children. Clay (1994) asserts that although there were some adjustments made for “life circumstances” and “quality of teaching programs”, the results of these

groups were “still within the average band for their class level” (p. 133). Of greatest interest to me in my research, is the question posed by educational researchers about the longitudinal studies related to Reading Recovery success. Researchers ask questions such as “What follow-up studies have been done?” and “What control group studies have been done?”

In discussing follow-up studies, Clay (1994) refers to four specific studies. A follow-up study which was completed in New Zealand showed the “rates of progress were, as predicted, comparable to the untutored children in the same classes” (Clay, 1985, p. 133). These data were collected for the year immediately following their intervention year. Researchers further pose, “were the gains maintained as school work increased in difficulty?” Clay (1994) refers to two studies, one in New Zealand (Clay & Watson, 1982) and another in Ohio (Pinnell, DeFord, & Lyons, 1988) that were both three-year follow-ups of intervention students. She states, “standardized tests of reading and writing show mean scores with the average band for age or class” (Clay, 1994, p. 133). In another study done in Australia (Rowe, 1990) on reading achievement of a large sample of older students (nearly 5000) the researchers found within its sample 147 students that had been Reading Recovery students. These students’ scores were “generally lower than their non-Reading Recovery-exposed peers” (Clay, 1994, p. 133) but not in the lowest range of scores measured, suggesting that this group had benefited from their participation in Reading Recovery.

Most of the research designs used to determine the effectiveness of Reading Recovery have sought to answer questions for the education system rather than the researchers. Clay (1994) describes a study using children who had not taken Reading

Recovery as the control group, where those children come from the same school or class as the Reading Recovery group. This control group is not a valid comparison, as these classmates did not need the tutoring: they were not the lowest scoring students in the grade. What such studies did show, though, was that the “lowest performers in the age cohort could be moved from a level where they were in the tail-end of the achievement distribution to levels around average for the age group” (Clay, 1994, p. 134). Questions about whether or not these students ever reach average levels of performance, or maintained their accelerated rate of progress also drive further research studies. Predictably, when the children returned to their regular classrooms, their progress resumed a rate of growth similar to the rate of their age peers. It would be impossible to predict if those students would have made the same progress if they had remained in the regular classroom program. Clay (1994) explains: “from the purist’s viewpoint of scientifically establishing the relationship of treatment to results, this has been considered but seemed so unlikely that a no-treatment control group has not been tested” (p. 135). Clay (1994) sees the primary purpose for educational research about Reading Recovery would be to satisfy different types of researchers, both in the educational and political world, to explain and clarify misunderstanding about the program, targeting the information for parents, educators, the media and politicians.

A more recent public criticism of the Reading Recovery organization came in the form of an Internet letter that was widely distributed to the members of the US Congress and the education community in May 2002. The letter was distributed by “an international group of researchers who study reading development and interventions with struggling readers” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). They indicated that they had written the letter

to respond to “a number of questions that have been raised by educators, policymakers, and parents about the effectiveness of Reading Recovery” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). Their goal was not to discredit the Reading Recovery program, but rather to “outline its weaknesses to suggest how it can be improved” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). This letter first prompted a response letter from over 200 reading researchers and educators from outside Reading Recovery entitled *A Broader View of the Evidence: Reading Recovery as an Example*. It was followed by the North American Trainers Group, an organization that includes researchers and academics from Reading Recovery’s 23 university training centers in the United States, producing a lengthy report entitled *What Evidence Says About Reading Recovery* to counter the allegations made in the Internet letter. It was noted by the NATG that while the Internet letter “purports to be an academic debate, its motivation appears to be political” (NATG, 2002, p. 9). The timing of the letter’s release corresponded with budget development and grant applications occurring at state and school district levels across the United States.

The Internet letter posed four general criticism areas, along with suggestions for improvement, stating; “we believe this should be done for any program that is widely used to address reading difficulties” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). Each criticism is presented here briefly.

“Reading Recovery is not successful with its targeted student population, the lowest performing students” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). The researchers cite problems with the manner in which data are collected by the Reading Recovery program to support their claims of success, stating that the results of the lowest performing students in the program (25-40%) are not included in the data, as opposed to research conducted by the

National Institute for Child Health and Human Development and the Office of Special Education Programs which includes data on all children involved in the program. Their research finds that “for the poorest readers, empirical syntheses of ‘in house’ and independent studies indicate that Reading Recovery is *not* effective” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). Their premise is that the very poorest readers who go through Reading Recovery have almost no significant gains at all. They also suggest that “there is also evidence that students who do complete the Reading Recovery sequence in first grade lose much of their gains” (NATG, 2002, p. 64) quoting research by Hiebert, 1994; Shanahan and Barr, 1995; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998, Tunmer and Chapman, in press.

“Reading Recovery is not a cost effective solution” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). The researchers cite the design of one-to-one intervention to be highly cost-ineffective, further comparing Reading Recovery to other early interventions administered to a small group. They conclude “there was no advantage of one-to-one instruction over small group instruction” (NATG, 2002, p. 64). Their findings indicate that there are other intervention programs which are preferable over Reading Recovery because they are “demonstrably efficacious, impact more students because they do not require 1:1 tutoring, are easier to implement, and do a better job than Reading Recovery of improving student reading skills because they do not drop students” (NATG, 2002, p. 65).

“Reading Recovery efficacy studies do not use standard assessment measures” (NATG, 2002, p. 65). The researchers fault Reading Recovery for using its own “in house” assessment tools as reference for student achievement opposed to more standardized measures. They state that the use of these nonstandard measures makes “the outcomes inflated and unconvincing to the research community” (NATG, 2002, p. 65).

“Reading Recovery does not change by capitalizing on research” (NATG, 2002, p. 65). The letter claims that Reading Recovery developers are resistant to making changes to Reading Recovery following research findings into making it more educationally-effective and cost-effective. Citing research that has been conducted in New Zealand, the country of the programs origin, “senior Reading Recovery administrators have also overtly blocked attempts by graduate students to independently examine aspects of Reading Recovery” (NATG, 2002, p. 65). The New Zealand Ministry of Education commissioned a report that included a recommendation that “Reading Recovery place greater emphasis on explicit instruction in phonological awareness and the use of spelling-to-sound patterns in recognizing unfamiliar words in text” (NATG, 2002, p. 65-66) and further noted that this recommendation was ignored.

The letter concludes with three specific recommendations for the Reading Recovery program: “(1) increased group size; (2) *explicit* instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness; and (3) use of standardized outcome measures and continuous progress monitoring” (NATG, 2002, p. 66). The researchers also note that because the needs of the very poorest readers are not met through Reading Recovery, the program actually eats up funds, money that could be diverted into other programs that would benefit more students. Their closing line summarizes their position that “Reading Recovery leaves too many students behind” (NATG, 2002, p. 66).

The response letter from the international researchers not directly associated with Reading Recovery counters this “one-sided and biased” attack (NATG, 2002, p. 70). While they don’t directly refute the claims made in the Internet letter, they address the inappropriateness of the original letter, explaining that educational dollars belong to

citizens, not to a small group of researchers who have a particular point of view. They raise the following arguments:

1. A scientific stance requires a complete, evidence-based analysis of any educational program.
2. Policy makers have the responsibility to consider evidence from a wide range of perspectives and validated research models.
3. Responsibly and rigorously collected evaluation data provide legitimate and strong evidence of program success.
4. An early intervention program like Reading Recovery is one part of a comprehensive literacy effort. (NATG, 2002, pgs. 70-71)

They conclude by stating that they “*do not* suggest that Reading Recovery or any other program be mandated or given preferential treatment” (NATG, 2002, p. 71).

The report written by the North American Trainers Group, a group of Reading Recovery researchers and educators, directly responds to the criticism launched in the Internet letter. They believe that “the Internet letter chooses to ignore all of this easily available information in an attempt to undermine public confidence in Reading Recovery” (NATG, 2002, p. 1). A brief overview of the response to each of the four criticisms follows.

1. “Reading Recovery is highly successful with the lowest-performing first-grade students” (NATG, 2002, p. 2). While citing several studies that support this claim, the group specifically notes “the Internet letter emphasizes the small number of students who did not make progress while it ignores the fact that the majority of students made substantial progress” (NATG, 2002, p. 3).

2. “Cost-effectiveness is a complex concept in education” (NATG, 2002, p. 3). Most of the claims to discredit this argument relate to the use of three unpublished thesis studies as faulty evidence. Overall, they felt that there was an overwhelming body of evidence to support the practice of one-to-one tutor effectiveness, which is the major criticism of the costliness of Reading Recovery.
3. “Reading Recovery uses standard assessment measures” (NATG, 2002, p. 4). While the authors do readily admit that they use in-house assessment measures, they point out that “some studies, however, have used standardized measures and state assessments to explore subsequent performance of former Reading Recovery children” (Askew et al., 2002; Brown et al., 1999; Schmitt & Gregory, 2001) (NATG, 2002, p. 4 –5) and these studies do show that Reading Recovery students do maintain and improve their gains.
4. “Change is an integral part of the Reading Recovery design” (NATG, 2002, p. 5). The Reading Recovery group insist that Reading Recovery is continually reviewed and revised and has made significant changes to its program since 1978, including an increased role in phonemic awareness, clearer directions for teachers to help students use letter-sound relationships, comprehension strategies, differentiation in instruction and teaching fluency and phrasing.

Overall, the publication points out that there is “substantial scientific evidence to support Reading Recovery’s effectiveness with lowest-performing first-grade students” (NATG, 2002, p. 7). While they do acknowledge that Reading Recovery is not the only solution to reading problems, they ask for it to be considered as an early intervention option for state and national officials to consider.



The debate over the merits of Reading Recovery is ongoing. There is a multitude of literature available to read on either side of the issue, published by numerous countries; the Reading Recovery debate is a global one. As long as literacy remains a global concern, the quest for the most effective intervention will continue to be a priority for early school educators.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Mixed Method Research Design

I set up my project using an Explanatory Mixed Model Research design as described by Creswell (2002). There are four main sections to the project, namely: Description, Procedure, Data Analysis, and Discussion that I have separated into the traditional five-chapter research project model. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used in a Mixed Model design. A visual representation of the model is displayed in Appendix A: Mixed Model Research Blueprint.

Description. The Description section starts with a personal narrative introducing the context of my research from my perspective as principal, during my first year in that role at Crestview School. I used narrative inquiry throughout my project as a way to link my experiences as participant-observer and researcher with that of school principal. Narrative is “a way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). This deepened the purpose of my project to allow me to be more reflective in my practice. Through analyzing my own reflections, I anticipated that I would uncover personal biases and opinions that I held during the research process. The model of narrative inquiry is of an explanatory nature, which enabled me to make connections “between events in a causal sense and to provide the necessary narrative accounts that supply the connections” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 16). Van Manen (2001) describes how the method is chosen as the best means to support the question -- it also reveals a lot about the researcher - - [her] motives and the paradigms. I hoped that by examining narrative data, I could confirm my personal bias about what I believed to be

true (p. 2). As I engaged in this research, I continually pondered, “will my method lead me to find my answers?”

Van Manen (2001) describes phenomenology as “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p. 10). My research was phenomenologically based in two ways: in one sense I was trying to make sense of my own lived experience – as a principal, as a researcher, and as the principal AS researcher and, on the other hand, I was trying to make sense of the context that the teachers and their students found themselves in. Van Manen (2001) further explains that phenomenology does not give you power or control over the world – instead, it “offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9). I realized that my role as participant-observer in this research raised the issue of subjectivity. “Subjectivity means that we are strong in our orientation to the object of study in a unique and personal way” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 20). As we commit ourselves to paper, we see ourselves mirrored in the text. “Now the text confronts us” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 127) and in doing so, the “writing of the text IS the research” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 129). Nevertheless, researchers must professionally distance themselves somewhat in order to develop some understandings beyond the belief system they already hold; otherwise, there is no purpose in conducting the study.

Throughout this project, my role was similar to that defined by Yin (1993) as “a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer” (p. 87). I understood I ran the risk of littering my project with bias, but I felt I could also develop it as an area of strength, and incorporate my personal narratives into as much of the project

as was useful in order to reflectively assess the meaning that I was making of my findings.

One of the weaknesses with narrative inquiry is that “the distinction between fact and fiction is muddled” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 179). The narrative in this project was my own personal narrative, in which case, my writing was less a case of fact or fiction, and probably more a case of perception, whether accurate or not. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) caution that the narrative inquiry process includes a high level of “personal and interpersonal” (p. 181) content, a degree of “narrative smoothing” (p. 181), and the impulse of the author to be overly critical in an attempt to compensate for the highly subjective nature of the method (p. 182). Riessman (1993) suggests that narrative inquiry is not suitable for studies of large groups of people because of the time demands (p. 69). She also describes a concern of the “tensions in narrative studies between generalization . . . and close attention” (Riessman, 1993, p. 70). There is also the difficulty in merging narrative inquiry with other methods of qualitative analysis as the “interpretive perspective that under girds narrative is very different than the realist assumptions” of other forms of analysis (Riessman, 1993, p. 70).

Literature review. A literature review on early reading intervention theory and a review of Reading Recovery, the main early reading intervention program currently in place at Crestview School, are also included in the description section and isolated as chapter two. Following the advice of Creswell (2002), based on the structure of a mixed-method research model, literature was reviewed where it best suited the method being used. The literature review chapter focused on early reading intervention and the Reading Recovery program because it “help[ed] to establish a rationale for the research questions

or hypothesis” (Creswell, 2002, p. 32) for the quantitative data that is reported on in phase one of the data analysis section. The literature was also used to provide the context for understanding the quantitative data that was uncovered. Further literature was used in the analysis of personal narrative and in the discussion sections, as it supported the qualitative methods used in the study.

Methodology. Chapter 3 is the chapter that describes the procedure used for my research. The Explanatory Mixed Research model that I used as detailed by John Creswell (2002) in *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, consists of two phases. Phase I is a quantitative section, consisting of a case study developed from quantitative evidence collected from archives and documents. Phase II is a qualitative section that attempts to explain the quantitative data by way of creating context. This section consists of active interviews with teachers at the school as well as a personal narrative of the meaning that I made during the process through my role as participant-observer. The active interview is an interview method that does not strictly follow a pre-determined script, but rather adjusts with the direction that the interviewee goes in, increasing the diversity of the responses.

Greene and Caracelli (1997) define a method of research as “a procedure for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 7) that includes questionnaires, interviews, observations, and archival records. These methods yield results that can be either quantitative or qualitative. This enables them to be combined into a mixed-method form of inquiry. “Mixed-method inquiry intentionally combines different methods - that is, methods meant to gather different kinds of information” (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7). The mixed-method was suitable for my study as it allowed me to examine numerical

results and to frame them in a cultural context. Using different methods within the same study allows the researcher to counteract some of the limitations and biases associated with each method. It also increases the validity of the study as “all methods and claims to know are fallible; using multiple diverse methods helps to address this” (Greene & Caracelli, p. 7). Greene and Caracelli (1997) note that “mixed-method designs can fruitfully strive to combine the characteristics of different inquiry traditions, resulting for example in inferences grounded in participants’ lives but with credible claims about generalizability” (p. 55).

More specifically, this type of mixed-method research is classified as “across methods triangulation (involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches)” (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 1998, p. 42), with triangulation being defined by Denzen (1978) as a combining of data sources to study the same social phenomenon (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 1998, p. 41). Triangulation counteracts the weakness of particular research techniques and enhances the validity of the findings. My research method could be primarily defined as “methodological triangulation (the use of multiple methods to study a research problem)” (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 1998, p. 41).

In this study, both types of data (quantitative and qualitative) were collected at the same time and “examined in a complementary manner” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 42). One collection was not dependent on the other, though the qualitative data from teacher interviews was expected to give context and yield some possible understandings about the quantitative data. This research method goes beyond mixing just the method part of the research, into the analysis and discussion, creating a broader use of the mixed-

method research model, to be defined by Tashakkori and Teddlie as a “mixed-model study” (p. 52).

As I have discovered during my research, I must define myself as a pragmatist – the paradigm through which I see the world. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) the pragmatist researcher asserts that there is an external world independent of our minds, and that they are unsure if one explanation of truth can be determined once and for all. They define truth as a normative concept, dependent on the current conditions. As a research paradigm:

pragmatism is appealing . . . because it presents a very practical and applied research philosophy: study what interests and is of value to you, study it in the different ways that you deem appropriate, and use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system. (Tashakorri & Teddlie, 1998, p. 30)

Data analysis. Within Chapter 4, the data analysis section, I attempted to create meaning from the themes that developed through the methodologies. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were appropriate for this study. Quantitative data were collected in a database from archival statistics recorded about the students who had received Reading Recovery and their subsequent Diagnostic Reading Assessment scores. A characteristic of mixed-method research allows quantitative data to be analyzed through qualitative methods. I examined the quantitative data to look for overall results, themes and trends in the data, which could have been supported or refuted by other qualitative data in the study. Those data were reported visually in charts and graphs. I collected qualitative data from teacher interviews and personal narratives. Teacher

interviews were taped and transcribed. Then, portions of the interviews and narratives were selected for detailed analysis. These were coded for emerging themes and patterns.

Case studies have become a widely accepted methodology in the social sciences, growing in credibility since their questionable beginning. The case study method receives criticism for its lack of consistent variables, nontransferable learning, and the risk of observer bias. Theories which are based on a narrow set of propositions can be proven by the bias of the observer, particularly if the researcher is in the participant observer role, such as I was during my study. I tried to limit the risk of this bias, as I strictly used the case study component in my project for the purposes of collecting quantitative data. Yin (1993) warns of another weakness in analyzing archival records in a case study: the researcher needs to keep in mind that the data were collected for an audience other than the case study, so one must continually ask: Who was the intended audience? How does this bias the message?

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) explain that “all interviews are interactional events” and are, therefore, “a product of the talk” (p. 2). Accordingly, there is always the risk of a potential source of bias, error, misunderstanding, or misdirection on the part of the interviewer. The interviewer role is daunting. “Interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly lie within respondents” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 3). There is a need to keep personal bias or preconceived propositions in check. The structure of my interview was guided by focus questions that were open-ended, so that I could gather both data and underlying subjective meaning. The interviews were not restricted to the structured questions, as an important role of the interviewer is the ability to “accommodate the contextual shifts and reflexivity” from the



respondent (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 55). They advise, “interview schedules should be guides at best, not scripts” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 56). Another caution regarding the interview process is the risk that the transition statements used by the interviewer between sentences can cause the respondent to assume a different interpretive position.

Discussion. Chapter 5 consists of discussion of the themes found during the data collection. Discussion of the themes led to a summary of the findings in all sections of the research, a personal examination of my own beliefs and meaning-making through personal narrative, which resulted in subsequent recommendations for reading intervention practices at Crestview School. As this type of project is also a form of action research the next steps in an ongoing process of school improvement was to share my results and recommendations with my staff, in order to make collective decision-making around our practice. My hope was that this experience would launch our staff into a “collective study and search for improvement” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 3), which we could pursue through an action research model.

Calhoun (1994) defines action research in education as a cyclical process of improving our teaching and learning (p. 2). For the purposes of my project, I conducted an individual type of action research. The limitations of this method are that I was the central researcher. While I was asking fellow educators for input, I initiated the research based on my interest, and the process of interpreting data and making recommendations was coming from me. While this was sufficient for my purposes, it falls short of the collaborative action research that I hope will grow from this experience. I believe that for

any change to occur in regards to reading intervention programs, we as a staff must be involved in a collaborative action research project (Calhoun, 1994, p. 10).

As I engaged in the research, I was reminded how the methodology chosen for the research is a reflection of the personality of the researcher personality, his or her beliefs and values, and interests and experience, just as the words one chooses to put on the page are a reflection of the researcher as author. I chose the mixed method design as it would allow me to investigate various sources of data, not being content to base important decision-making around school renewal and staff development on limited data.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### Phase I: Quantitative Data

Case study. I began gathering quantitative data on all the students who had been involved in a Reading Recovery intervention in their grade one year at Crestview School. Between the years of 1998 and 2003, forty-one students received this program from a teacher based at Crestview School. During that same period, these students received the program from six different Reading Recovery teachers, three of who had received training before coming to Crestview, and three of who had received the training at a cost to Crestview School.

I began the analysis by looking at the group of students who received the training to get an overall impression of their group identity. I was at first struck by the demographics of this group of students. As indicated in Figure 1, the majority of students who received Reading Recovery were male (71%).

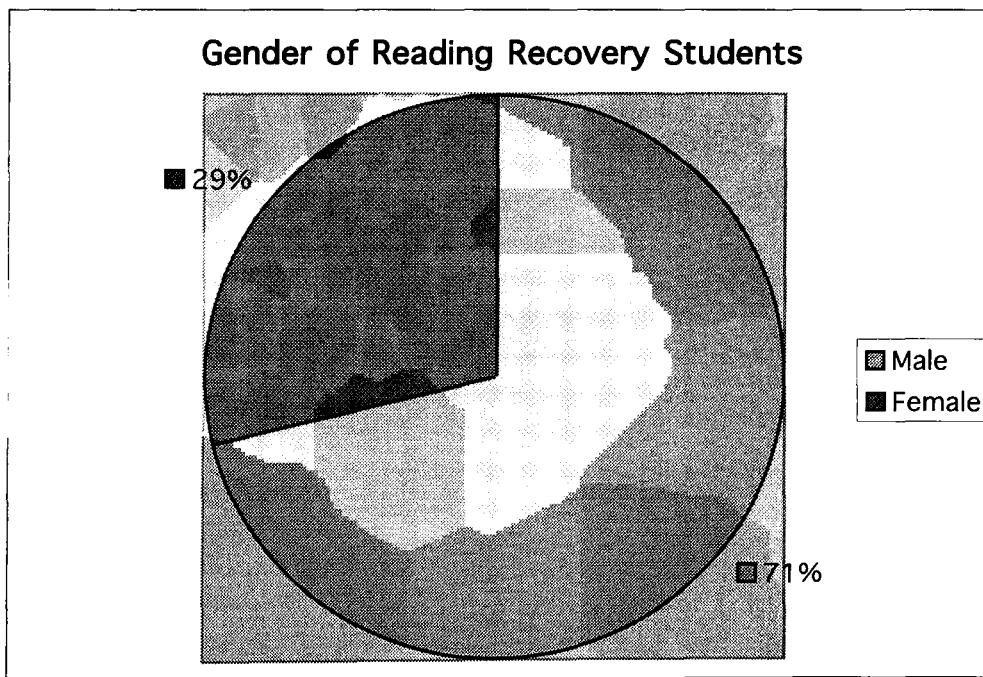


Figure 1: Gender of Reading Recovery Students

I was also interested in whether or not these students were transient or long-time students, a significant factor when determining the cost-effectiveness of an early intervention

program. As indicated in Figure 2, just 51% of the study group was still in attendance at Crestview School at the time of the data analysis. This is significant, as the Reading Recovery program possesses the underlying premise that money spent early in a child's schooling is cost-effective for the school because it saves money further down the child's school career. Nearly half the students who received this costly intervention were transient in nature.

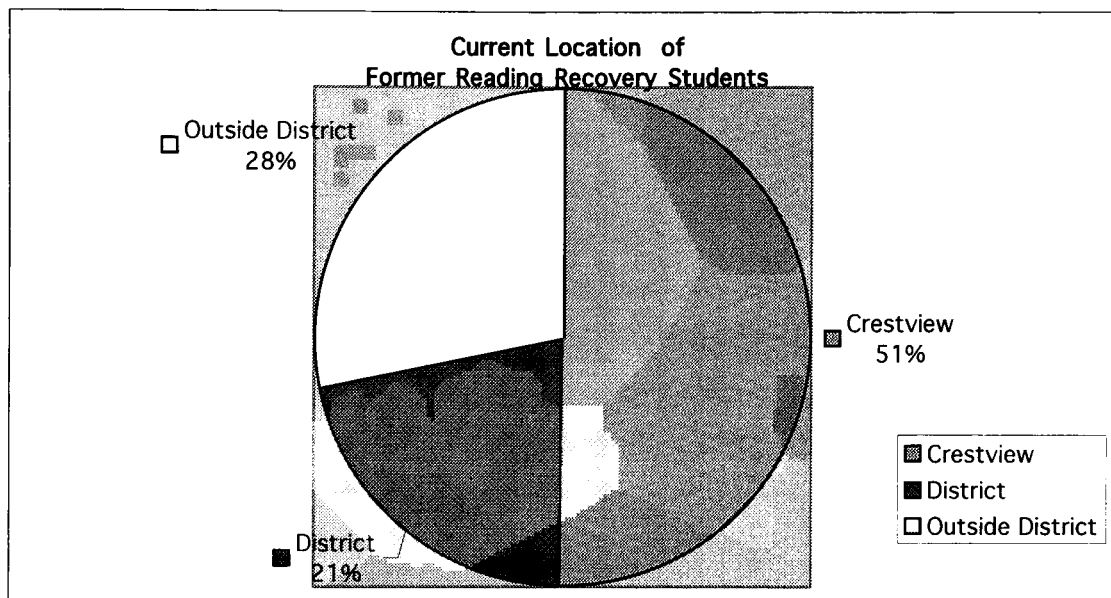


Figure 2: Current Location of Former Reading Recovery Students

I further examined the data to determine the achievement of the student group who were involved in Reading Recovery. As referenced in Chapter 2, five status categories describe the student at the end of their series of lessons. The five categories are:

- Discontinued: The child has successfully completed the program and re-enters the classroom program without further remediation.
- Recommended action: The child was recommended for further evaluation and special education supports.
- Incomplete program: The school year ended before the child had time to complete the program.
- Moved away while being served

- Other: Used to describe circumstances where the child is removed from the program for unusual reasons.

The results of that analysis are described in Figure 3.

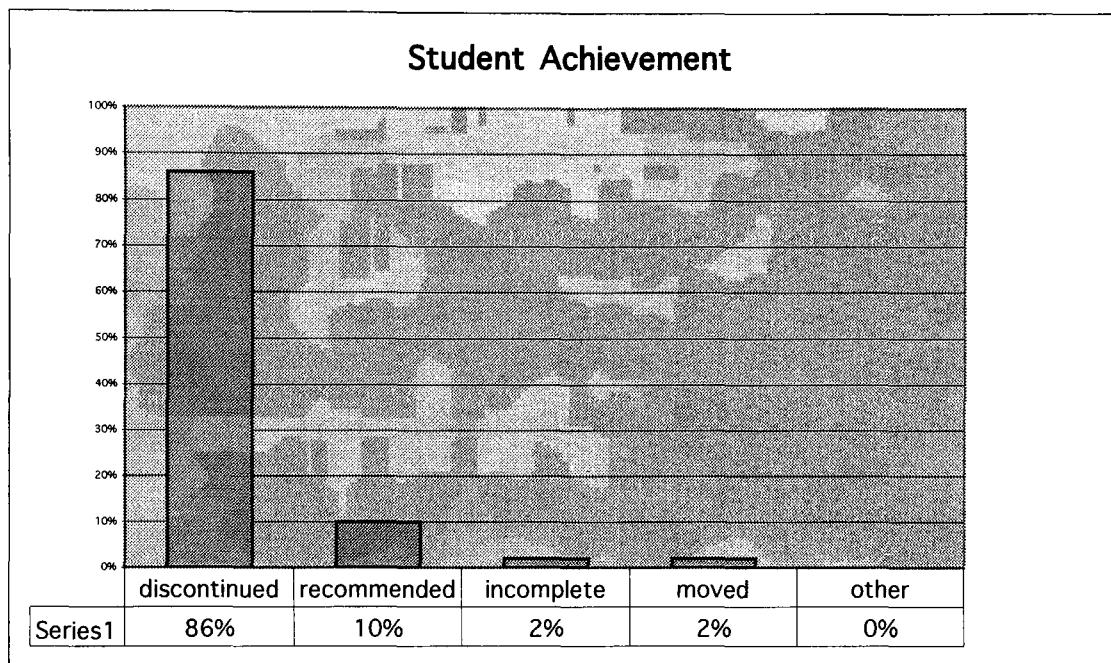


Figure 3: Student Achievement

As indicated above, of the original forty-one students, 86% had achieved the discontinued status, which indicates that they completed the series of lessons and were considered to be within the average range for their age and grade for reading ability. 10% of the students were referred to the Special Education department for further assessment to determine possible learning disabilities best served through other programs. 2% of the groups were unable to complete the program because the school year ended, and another 2% moved out of the district while still involved in the intervention program.

Further analysis was completed using just that group of students who were successful with the Reading Recovery intervention; in other words, that group of students whom received “discontinued” status, indicating that they reached a reading level that

was considered within the average range of their age and grade peers. In our district, that would be when the child is reading close to level 16 as long as he or she also had a well-developed repertoire of reading strategies.

I gathered additional archived data on Reading Recovery students contained in the annual district records of reading achievement of all elementary students. The classroom teacher administers the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) tool in the Fall and in the Spring each year, and the scores are recorded at both the school and the district level. The following list indicates the grade level scores expected at the elementary level:

Grade 1: Level 1 - 17

Grade 2: Level 18 - 28

Grade 3: Level 28 - 38

Grade 4: Level 38 - 48

Grade 5: Level 48 - 58

Grade 6: Level 58 – 68

I used the most current DRA data available for all former Reading Recovery students to determine if they were achieving within the average range for their grade level. I used this data to develop the results indicated in Figure 4 that indicates whether those discontinued students were currently at, below, or above expected grade-level results in reading achievement.

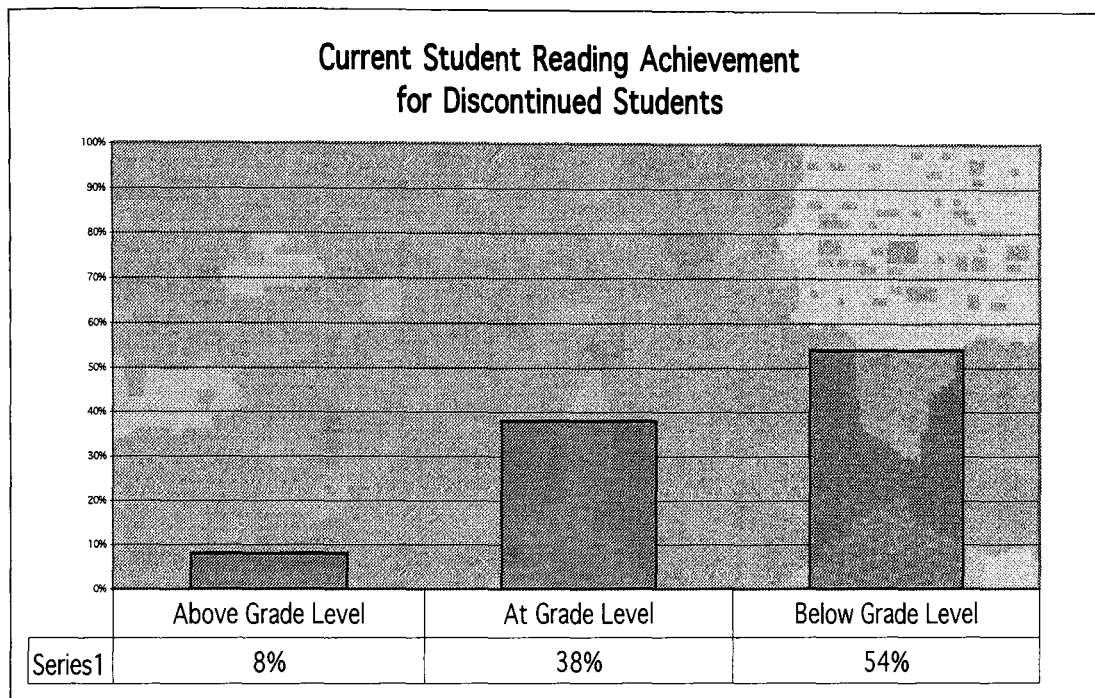


Figure 4: Current Student Reading Achievement for Discontinued Students

As indicated in Figure 4, of the group of discontinued students, those students who possessed “grade-level” reading ability at the completion of their intervention year, 54% were considered to be below grade-level reading level at the time the study was completed. 38% were considered to be scoring within average grade and age levels and 8% had achieved a reading level above their expected grade level.

### Phase II: Qualitative Data

Personal narrative. Following the gathering of the quantitative data, I engaged in a Cognitive Coaching session with a colleague, for the purposes of both reflecting on the research process thus far, to reflect on my personal impressions of the quantitative data collected, and to set further direction for my research. Van Manen (2001) describes meaning as “multi-dimensional and multi-layered” (p. 78). To uncover it is a complex undertaking. “Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its

meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure” (p. 79). Using a coach to dialogue with enhanced this process. I recorded the session and then transcribed it to examine it for recurring themes and impressions.

Van Manen (2001) discusses the concept of theme as a tool which “gives control and order to our research and writing” in the development of meaning (p. 79). He describes the human need to create meaning: “Human science research is concerned with meaning – to be human is to be concerned with meaning, to desire meaning” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 79). When we examine a situation, we are attempting to “determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 79). Uncovering themes allows the researcher to begin to make sense of the notion being studied.

Several themes kept arising during the session. The first was my anxiety about being both researcher and principal, given the data I was uncovering. The responsibility that I was bringing to the surface was one that I knew I had to accept, had to move forward with. I could not help but consider that if I had conducted a study outside my area of concern, my personal commitment to the results would have been so much more diminished and, consequently, my responsibility to act upon my findings would have been less urgent. At times, I found the data to be overwhelming, particularly the state of the Reading Recovery students’ current reading levels. One insight that I had during my coaching session was that by sharing my findings with my teachers I might be able to create a sense of a united concern to deal with it. We could have a shared responsibility. I was reminded of the insight made by Emily Calhoun (1994) as I worried about sharing the data with my staff. She describes the early stages of school renewal, where “we are



actually asking ourselves to change. Many of us wish to fix, speed up, or remove others who appear to us to impede progress” (p. 4). It is easier and less personal to identify those external factors that contribute to our findings than to focus on the changes we need to make ourselves. Barth (1990) expresses one of my greatest fears in sharing the data; that is that others will feel that they have been placed “in the position of only implementing the grand ideas of others, ideas with which they may not agree” (p. 150). He warns, “the greatest tragedy I know is to be caught every day in the position of doing something one does not want to do or does not believe in” (Barth, 1990, p. 150). Keeping that premise in mind, I continued with my series of teacher interviews based on the interview blueprint I had prepared (Appendix B).

At the time of my coaching session, I was mid-point in my teacher interviews. One concern that arose during my session related to my role as principal-researcher as interviewer. I became concerned that in asking my teachers to become participants in my research that there was the possibility that some teachers might take on the role of the overly-cooperative interviewee, trying to guess what I wanted them to say in order to support my research. I enjoy a positive working relationship with all of my teachers and I wondered how much that contributed to their willingness to speak openly, or to unknowingly edit their responses in order to be helpful. I tried to ask open-ended questions, which would allow the teachers an opportunity to talk freely, yet I remained concerned that some were cautious in their responses.

One of the most crucial moments for me during the coaching session was uncovering some clarity around my research questions. What I thought were the main questions driving the research appeared quite secondary to the findings, which was

causing me some anxiety. I thought that if I was able to suitably answer the following three questions I would uncover some answers to the current state of reading intervention at my school:

1. Do different teachers use different criteria when referring students for intervention/remedial programs?
2. Are teachers holding differing expectations for students who have gone through a reading intervention program?
3. Are there typical and predictable patterns for the educational career programs for students placed in early intervention programs?

In reality, these questions were just a springboard for the interviews, and the answers to these questions didn't answer a greater one, the one that was at the core of the research. The important question really became: What can we do to improve the long-term educational career path for students who have taken Reading Recovery?

I found the coaching session a valuable one in allowing me to reflect on the research process and on my own feelings about the data I was uncovering. According to Van Manen (2001), "self-reflection is the way in which pedagogy reflects on itself while serving others" (p. 89). My coach's thoughtful, probing questions encouraged a deeper uncovering of issues, for a far more insightful revealing of my thoughts than I would have gathered simply by writing my own personal narrative. My coach was able to bring out some fears and concerns I had about the research and, in turn, about the Reading Recovery program at our school that I did not realize were restricting my progress with the research. I was frustrated that the direction I had begun my research under was not necessarily as clear a path as I had envisioned. Van Manen (2001) describes the beginner

researcher as sometimes not being grounded in the topic being researched. Unfortunately, I believe I fit that description. The coaching session was useful to give voice and form to those concerns and to bring them to the forefront. Once I knew what they were, I had a better chance of dealing with them. By first engaging in reflective dialogue, I was able to better articulate what I was seeing. “In writing, the author puts in symbolic form what he or she is capable of seeing” (Van Manen, 2001, p. 130). The dialogue was an important step in this process and encouraged me to redirect my analysis in order to make my research more purposeful and meaningful, rather than simply a required project.

Interviews. I interviewed the teachers of my school following the interview blueprint (Appendix B) but allowed the interviews to take on whatever path the interviewees were pursuing, in order to gain the most valuable response. Riessman (1993) encourages the use of open-ended questions in the interview process as “certain kinds of open-ended questions are more likely than others to encourage narrativization” (p. 54), allowing the interviewee greater control in the interview. The interviews then become “conversations in which both participants – teller and listener/questioner – develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both” (p. 55). Following the interviews, which were taped, I transcribed the interviews to look for trends or issues that recurred. When conducting narrative research with a small group, Riessman (1993) describes how “it is desirable, as a general rule, to take work back to the individuals and groups who participated in the study” (p. 66). In this way, the participants have an opportunity to respond to the work, and their responses “can often be a source of theoretical insight” (Riessman, 1993, p. 66). Once this project is completed, I will share my findings and insights with all participants.

I was hoping to establish some understandings about the teachers' attitudes and beliefs both towards early intervention and to the learning assistance program at our school. Essentially, I was hoping to get some useful answers to the three focus questions that I previously listed:

1. Do different teachers use different criteria when referring students for intervention/remedial programs?
2. Are teachers holding differing expectations for students who have gone through a reading intervention program?
3. Are there typical and predictable patterns for the educational career programs for students placed in early intervention programs?

In actuality, based largely on the reflective coaching I received mid-process, I was able to uncover much more from the narrative interviews than I had previously hoped for. In addition to answering the above questions, I also gained insight into the teachers' perspectives on obstacles to the successful implementation of Reading Recovery at our school, attitudes towards the Reading Recovery specifically and to out-of-class learning interventions in general, and to their vision of an effective reading intervention structure for our school. In summary, I will provide general broad answers to the questions above, followed by selections from transcripts of several interviews which yield evidence of the emerging themes, followed by general comments related to obstacles, attitudes and suggestions.

1. Do different teachers use different criteria when referring students for intervention/remedial reading programs? I discovered that, in all cases, the classroom teachers initiated any remediation by the learning assistance teacher following the year of

reading intervention. Usually, classroom teachers would refer any concerns about a student's progress to the learning assistance teacher following some of their own pre-assessment. That resulted in the learning assistance teacher administering her own assessments, and then consulting with the classroom teacher about the most important course of action for the student. In no case was a student entered into a remedial reading program simply because he/she had been in one the previous year. However, there was some philosophical disagreement when it came to referring students who weren't significantly below grade level. Two children with similar reading abilities in two different classrooms may not both be referred for remediation. The different teaching style and philosophy of the classroom teacher to accommodate that child's needs in the classroom was often the deciding factor in whether or not there was reading remediation in any year following the intervention year. There were instances where one classroom may have many referrals to the Learning Assistance teacher, while a classroom of comparable dynamics had few. Some teachers feel that it is their responsibility to provide a suitable reading program for all students in their classroom, whether they are reading above, at or below grade level. Others held the position that if a child were below grade level in reading, their program became the responsibility of the Learning Assistance teacher. The varied responses of teachers to this question yielded data that supported school-wide philosophy around reading remediation.

2. Are teachers holding differing expectations for students who have gone through a reading intervention program? All teachers indicated that there was no formal system in place to inform them of which students had actually undergone an early reading intervention program, short of reading the student's permanent file for the grade one year.

In fact, all teachers indicated that they were unaware of which students in their classrooms had had Reading Recovery specifically. Some teachers make a point of reading student files at the beginning of each new school year, and gain their information about the student's past school career in that way. This goes against the philosophy of others who believe that they don't want to be influenced by past teacher perceptions and form opinions about the students' abilities before the child has an opportunity to demonstrate them.

3. Are there typical and predictable patterns for the educational career programs for students placed in early intervention programs? The answer to this question may be more fully addressed in the quantitative data of this study. However, based on the responses of the classroom teachers, there certainly was no conscious action on the classroom teacher's part to continue to refer students from Reading Recovery programs for further remediation. All of them indicated they were unaware which students in their class had received Reading Recovery in the past. Students who continued in remediation were referred strictly because of their declining reading progress in the regular classroom.

Three broad themes emerged from the teacher interviews, namely:

- Common paradigms about pedagogy
- Classroom support for Reading Recovery students
- Continuity of delivery of the program

Several teachers spoke about the need for all teachers on our staff to hold common beliefs about reading pedagogy, and to do so by accepting the pedagogy as best practice rather than being forced to change. One teacher commented that it was necessary to “get everyone on the same page with regard to Balanced Literacy and Guided Reading

. . . so that people aren't feeling like they are being told to change. Some people feel that 'this is what I've always done so why do I have to change it?'" Another commented that in order to make an effective system change we would have to have "everybody in the whole school on-board with the same programs". One teacher summed up an overarching perspective on Reading Recovery: "Reading Recovery is a school-wide thing, not a job-specific thing. Some people see Reading Recovery as just a quick-fix thing...it's never been embraced as part of the school-wide literacy system -a separate little thing that somebody else does but it isn't linked with anything else we do in the school...teachers don't see it as a part of our school-wide literacy structure so there's no tie in or link with anything else we do."

One teacher suggested the ideal situation would be that teachers could be supportive of the program by "restructuring any, you know, all of their schedules or whatever to meet this, by verbally saying, 'I really think this is a great program', making sure that if there is any support needed in terms of the kid making sure his books go back and forth, things like that, playing a secondary role in it, not saying 'he leaves and I have no idea what you're doing there but I hope it's good' but playing a kind of a 'how's he doing?' role 'where's your books for today?', that kind of stuff."

While most teachers felt there was a need for everyone to get on the same page with regards to reading pedagogy, they felt that they were on the right path and were open to learning more about best practice. As one teacher remarked, "I'm certainly not an expert in it and yet I find that a lot of what I'm hearing was intuitive for me, too, like I kind of knew that and it made sense as well. For the most part, I'm so happy to go in-depth in this area." Another teacher remarked, "I wish I knew more so that I could say

‘I’ve seen this program and I would pull this out and put it in’ but I don’t think I’m clear enough about the actual structured Reading Recovery and separating it from other early reading intervention programs so I can’t.”

Classroom support for Reading Recovery students was a recurring theme during the teacher interviews. Most of the teachers identified a lack of understanding of what really happened in a Reading Recovery intervention, and how they could continue to support those students in the classroom, both in their intervention year and in the subsequent years. When asked what needed to be clarified for the teacher about Reading Recovery, one teacher responded, “maybe, how it can be backed up better in the classroom. I know that with Reading Recovery when I work on Balanced Literacy and Guided Reading in my classroom I felt that they dovetailed really nicely together.” Another teacher said, “the biggest problem that we find is a program that’s not continuous. If they leave Reading Recovery and they don’t see Guided Reading again, that’s probably the worst thing that can happen to a child in Reading Recovery.” The need for a system-wide understanding of the ways that we can support Reading Recovery students was also expressed by the teacher who said, “I noticed a drop over the summer in the DRA levels...students finished Reading Recovery at the end of the school year and came back having dropped significantly. Then they had to go back into Learning Assistance to try to boost back up. Teachers were disappointed in the long term results of Reading Recovery.”

A concern expressed almost unanimously was that in order for Reading Recovery, or any early intervention program, to be successful at our school, we must have continuity in the delivery of the program. Since Reading Recovery was first introduced at



our school, we have had six different teachers delivering the program. One teacher described the situation as a problem with “continuity of staff in the learning assistance position...lots of turnover in recent years.” The overwhelming problem with that high rate of turnover was explained by this teacher: “in this particular school, having somebody stay in the role of Learning Assistance teacher for long enough to have it a real ingrained established thing where we talk about and come up with new and better ways to make it stronger. We just get it going and somebody leaves.” While school-based data are shared with the district Reading Recovery leader-teacher, the school currently doesn’t have a professional on-site who has been active in the role of following up students in their progress after their intervention year.

One teacher explained that not having a site-based Reading Recovery teacher caused “not much transition” for the Reading Recovery student in the regular classroom. She also remarked, “there’s no formal process for tracking Reading Recovery kids from year to year.” Another teacher added that she felt that “students still need a little bit of follow-up in the future years.” Since we always have new or itinerant staff members selecting the students for Reading Recovery, there is a concern amongst staff members that perhaps the most suitable candidates are not chosen. As one teacher noted, “my concern with that is they take the lower kids who sometimes at our school are the kids who are moving all the time so we train them and then they leave and the kids who are in our school permanently don’t get that training because they weren’t the lowest at the time.” Another concern was expressed about having a new or itinerant teacher choose the students who receive Reading Recovery: “the Reading Recovery teacher goes to the grade 1 teacher and asks ‘who do you want to go?’ It was early in September. I didn’t

really know at that point who would benefit the most...they tested the kids I recommended and then whoever was the lowest in that group would be the one that was picked. There was no classroom screening; it was just based on my referral and at that time I really didn't have a clue who would be the best suited."

Continuing with the theme of consistency, several teachers commented on the problems associated with reading level analysis. One teacher explained: "One observation I've made was the testing, the assessment ... it's hard to come up with a reading level anyway, but Reading Recovery levels and DRA reading levels aren't coinciding and they don't always and we've gone around and around with it and we haven't come up with a suitable solution. Reading Recovery and DRA/Checkpoint don't seem to be aligned...when the Reading Recovery teacher says they are at level 16, the classroom teacher is getting a lower score." Another teacher described what she thought the main problem was in successfully communicating about Reading Recovery progress: "I think the big one is the Reading Recovery teacher will say the child is so many levels ahead of where they are testing out on the DRA. I know that on the DRA it is supposed to be the first read...and Reading Recovery is the second or third read...so when they are doing an assessment, this may account for different scores, but parents and other teachers might not realize that".

Teachers identified a number of obstacles that inhibited success. Most cited budget constraints and limited Learning Assistance time as obstacles to the successful implementation of Reading Recovery. The inconsistency of the position was also mentioned on numerous occasions. The following is a list of obstacles taken from the interviews:

- one problem I see with them is they don't always take the kids when they are ready...they take them by their age. And so you might have somebody who is just not ready to take off and no matter what you do, it's the wrong time, so then if you have kids who are ready for it right then, they don't get it. So I would like to see them take kids when they are "ready" especially boys.

- budget constraints are always an issue

- sometimes when something is for primary teachers because it's not something the intermediate teachers deal with sometimes it gets pushed under the mat as something separate...like... 'it's not for our whole school, it's just for a couple of kids so you guys worry about that' ... it is for the whole school though, if we could catch all kids early it would help everyone

While teachers' attitudes towards Reading Recovery were varied, most felt Reading Recovery was a valuable program. However, there was an overwhelming sense that most teachers did not feel that Reading Recovery had anything to do with them...that it was a separate stand-alone program. The following is a list of teachers' positive and negative attitudes about the Reading Recovery program:

- teaching strategies, the daily 1/2 hour that really works, they are able to read more fluently

- they are able to use the strategies they've been taught, they have better confidence, and they can tackle a new book and not be afraid of it

- their writing is better

- I'm overall really happy with the program, I think we just need to fine-tune things here and there.

- being pulled out of the classroom is a concern as the child might become seen as “the kid that’s pulled out”
- self-esteem...do you leave them in and then later on it’s too late or do you catch them early?
- professional time wasted...1:1...could probably take more students with the same results
- types of books chosen are higher interest, with common language, everyday flow/sentences, in contrast to old-fashion books, which were artificial and not necessarily age-appropriate
- there’s more manipulation of words and word games
- very structured use of time
- high frequency of the program – every day
- grabbing them early when the first warning flags appear rather than later

Teachers had a number of recommendations to improve the success of Reading Recovery at Crestview. Their suggestions fit into the categories of structure or system changes and demonstrate the commitment teachers have to the topic. The following is their list of suggestions, which are directly taken from teacher interviews:

- recommend having Reading Recovery and other pull out programs during school-wide literacy times so that students aren’t missing other instruction
- ideally every kid that needed it would have access to it
- that all teachers would support it, which I think they would
- that there is learning assistance devoted to it at a time, which is most conducive to learning

- that it would have a priority in the school because it is so important
- phone the parents of kids that went through Reading Recovery the year before...injecting that life back into the program instead of this one-shot deal and then everybody forgets about it
- changing structures to make the program more effective
- the person who is doing the program in the first place would engage others in conversation and then talk to other teachers about on-going support and classroom practice
- increasing learning assistance (LA) time I think is one, because the more access you can have to an LA, the more that they can be supporting the program the better
- trying to have somebody stay in the role for several consecutive years, the more the better
- talking about it again more at staff meetings and school planning meetings and things because it was something we kind of used to talk about and now we're more into Guided Reading and not referring to that so much
- I guess to continue Balanced Literacy classroom where's there's Guided Reading, Shared Reading and, you know, all the parts of Balanced Literacy and continue teaching them those 12 strategies.

My final thoughts on the interviewing process are that I found all the teachers were more than willing to be interviewed. Their level of awareness differed with their position in the school; primary teachers were much more aware of the Reading Recovery process than intermediate teachers, and the learning assistance teacher even more so. That insight in itself was revealing as Reading Recovery needs to be a part of a school-wide

structure, and if only some of the teachers on staff are aware of its purpose and function, then it is failing in that regard. In transcribing the interviews, I became aware of how my beginner interviewing style contributed to the results. As a personal criticism, I felt that I summarized and paraphrased too quickly. I should have allowed the interviewee more time to formulate his/her own conclusions and I should have been patient enough to allow that narrative to unfold naturally. There were times where my questions were longer than the responses. In retrospect, I would like to go back and re-interview the teachers, yet I realize that would be counterproductive. However, I will take my reflections and apply them to future interview or discussion settings to contribute more to the dialogue that ensues.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

As I moved from data to decision making I needed to be mindful of the caution that Van Manen (2001) delivers: “we are so inclined to convert research into action and usable results that this activism can limit our possibility for understanding, a form of understanding that involve understanding that involves the experience of meaningfulness” (p. 251). In other words, time should be taken to reflect on the results thoughtfully, rather than jumping into action.

After reviewing the supporting literature as well as the reviews of the critics, I can understand why critics question the validity of the data that the Reading Recovery Council publishes related to student achievement. I reviewed two documents, both published by the Reading Recovery Council of North America: *Reading Recovery Council of North America: Results 2001-2002*, published in 2002, and *What Evidence Says About Reading Recovery*, also published in 2002. The following statements are from each publication, respectively:

Eighteen years of US data on all students served by Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura indicate that 77% of students who complete the full series of lessons, and 60% of all students were able to read and write at grade level. (NDEC, 2002, p. 6)

and “cumulative 17 year results show that in the United States, 60% of all children served can read at class average after their lessons, and 81% of children who have the full series of lessons can read at class average” (NATG, 2002, p. 1). Both sources cite a base of more than one million children as their sample size. The differences in the success rates is

puzzling, and it is understandable when some critics claim that Reading Recovery's data are too subjective to be useful.

My quantitative data revealed that 86% of students were recorded as having completed the full series of lessons and could read at class average at the completion of those lessons. Ashdown and Simic (2000) provide a possible explanation for why the completion rate and achievement levels may differ from district to district, explaining that discontinuation criteria are all relative, based on grade level norms for that district. While "a self-extending learning system is intended to be universal across all participating districts" the level at which they discontinue in one district may be earlier than in another" (Ashdown & Simic, 2000, p. 32). The level of skills that the student acquires before leaving the program in my district may indeed be a variable in how well they will continue to progress in the regular classroom. The discontinuation rate at my school, and I can safely assume in my district, may be a lower reading level than other districts, which would account for a higher percentage of students actually attaining the discontinuation level, whether that is a sustainable reading level or not.

The percentage of students who retain their grade level equivalence is a greater concern to me than the discontinuation rate. In the years following the Reading Recovery intervention, 46% of students were reading at or above grade level. "What does the administrator expect the longitudinal outcomes to be?" Clay (2001) poses this question in *Change Over Time in Children's Literacy Development*. In order to ensure good outcomes from the Reading Recovery program, there must be "good classroom teaching in the year of RR placement *and in subsequent grades/classes*" (Clay, 2001, p. 263). As well, she discusses how administrators' expectations of Reading Recovery may be



unrealistic. “They expect RR to immunize children against poor teaching in the next grades, against several changes of teachers, against social upheavals in children’s personal lives in and out of school, and all of life’s ups and downs like health and family problems. No programme can do this. The call for long-term outcomes for a short-term investment has been made by administrators, but is not predicted by the developmental theory of RR” (Clay, 2001, p. 263).

Clay (2001) states there are a multitude of intervening variables that will impact whether or not the ex-Reading Recovery student will continue to have a successful school career, variables which a year in Reading Recovery cannot counteract. She lists “the children’s life circumstances, the quality of subsequent school instruction” as two such variables and concludes that “progress would probably be sustained under optimum circumstances but immunization against all future conditions of learning is an absurd expectation not sustainable by learning theory or by developmental theory” (Clay, 2001, p. 248).

One of the questions that arose during the teacher interviews was why the Reading Recovery program couldn’t be offered to a group of students rather than in a one-to-one setting. This would allow more students to benefit from the intervention and would be more cost-effective. Clay (1997) asserts the individual instruction model is so powerful because it allows the lesson to be structured from the individual student’s paradigm, rather than a pre-structured lesson that the teacher had prepared. “When two or three children are taught in a group the teacher cannot make this change; she has to choose a compromise path, a next move for ‘the group’. In this manner, the learning for all the students in the group is compromised” (p. 8).

Clay (2001) offers a challenge to other researchers to develop questions and conduct further research on students in the years after their intervention year. She poses that “further insights into literacy processing at higher levels than the RR age group could lead to new understanding and changes in practices during RR lessons” (p. 280). This certainly supports the concerns this study revealed regarding the low retention rate of grade level reading ability over time (46%), for the Reading Recovery students at Crestview School. At this time, with limited published research material available, while it may seem to be an unsatisfactory retention rate, perhaps it is within an average range found throughout the Reading Recovery program, simply not confirmed or refuted by further research data.

Clay (2001) expects that researchers could determine what effective transition into the regular classroom would look like, suggesting that “researchers would probably be advised to first find out what RR professionals think supports the transition out of RR for their graduates” (p. 280). Many of the participants interviewed suggested that they were unsure how to effectively transition the Reading Recovery student back into the classroom, were unsure about the types of learning that occurred in a Reading Recovery lesson, and in some cases felt that the success of the Reading Recovery student was removed from their influence. More focused and concrete guidelines would assist the regular classroom teacher and increase student success in subsequent years.

Clay (2001) suggests that further research would also determine what “subsequent learning of discontinued children [might] look like?” (p. 280) in the year immediately after Reading Recovery and in further years, how that learning might be maintained. Interestingly for me, the questions that Clay hoped researchers will address were the

same questions that I posed for the Reading Recovery program at my school site and had hoped to find the answers to in my reading of the Reading Recovery material.

Clay (2001) describes “the quality of subsequent school instruction” (p. 248) as a variable that Reading Recovery can not counteract, yet as the participant interviews of this study revealed, many teachers felt that if Reading Recovery was embraced as a school-wide structure, then it will be a variable that as a school we can have a great deal of influence over, in fact, it is the variable that as a group of professionals we have the most influence over. In consideration of possible suggestions for system changes at Crestview School, I have taken the three main themes that arose from the analysis of the teacher interviews, and the direct suggestions from the teachers, and grouped them into some concrete directions for improvement of school instruction and system structures in an effort to improve the longitudinal outcomes of Reading Recovery intervention.

The themes that arose during teacher interviews could be generalized into three broad categories:

- Common paradigms about pedagogy
- Classroom support for Reading Recovery students
- Continuity of delivery of the program

In searching for possible solutions or alternatives, I must consider that “none of us is as smart as all of us” (Barth, 2001, 82). School improvement is a group process, not an individual task. Unless we work on a solution together, there will be no change to group norms. “The more educators are a part of the decision-making the greater their morale, participation, and commitment in carrying out the goals of the school” (p. 82). Most of

the teachers interviewed in this study agreed with Barth, commenting that everybody needed to be on the same page in order for change to occur.

Many suggestions that the study participants made for improving reading achievement align with the indicators that Rowe (1995) uncovered, particularly the need for a whole-school focus and continuous professional development, indicating that as a staff we may be already on the right path. Given the themes that arose during the interviews, and the range of suggestions for success, I have combined recommendations for improvement and success into the following three goal areas. The final section of this chapter includes specific 'next steps' in implementing the recommendations.

#### Recommendations for Improvement

1. Overall System Restructuring
2. Classroom Support
3. Ongoing Monitoring of RR students

Overall system restructuring. Rowe's (1995) study results show that it is important that school based measures to prevent early reading difficulties (such as the Reading Recovery program [Clay, 1985]) should be coupled with an early intervention program designed to encourage and assist parents, where necessary, to take an active role in partnership with teachers (p. 84). "Reading Recovery is the early intervention component of a school's comprehensive literacy plan. As such, it is a system intervention, not an isolated, stand-alone program" (NDEC, 2002, p. 13). While Reading Recovery is mentioned in our school growth plan, it hasn't been incorporated effectively into the structures and strategies implemented in an integrated manner with the rest of the literacy plan.

On the matter of costs associated with Reading Recovery, our district recently instigated an initiative whereby every school would receive additional funding to provide Reading Recovery for at-risk students. “The key issue for at-risk students is not *if* additional costs will be necessary, but *when* they should be provided. By every standard of evidence, logic, and compassion, dollars used preventively make more sense than the same dollars used remedially” (Slavin & Wasik, 1993, p. 9). Slavin and Wasik (1993) acknowledge that “the major drawback to tutoring is its cost” but “if in fact early intervention can prevent children from experiencing failure and can help them get off to a successful start in school, the use of this expensive intervention may be cost effective in the long run” (p. 2). They further went on to conduct a study to determine the effectiveness of early intervention programs, explaining that:

it is important to know how large the effect of tutoring is (in comparison to plausible alternatives), to what degree effects of tutoring are maintained over time, and which specific tutoring programs and practices produce the largest gains in student reading achievement. (Slavin & Wasik, 1993, p. 2)

When considering reform in light of the data, I must remember that the implementation of change to early reading intervention programs at the school requires change in some aspects of school culture. “To change the culture requires that we bring in more desirable qualities to replace the existing unhealthy elements of the culture” (Barth, 2001, p. 10). It is not sufficient alone to simply say that there must be changes. In addition to developing a sense of shared vision regarding early reading intervention, we must also start to identify alternate ways of operating to change our culture.

Indeed, it cannot in any way harm the progress of Reading Recovery students, or any other students in our regular programs, to further improve and enhance the literacy programs in our school. A study of interest for me in my research was the work done by Janet Scull and Neville Johnson (2000) as they undertook a study aimed at evaluating the model of the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP), a project which “involved teachers in a process of significant reform, re-conceptualizing both curriculum content and classroom organization for teaching and learning as they worked to implement a program to maximize the literacy achievements of ‘at-risk’ students in the early years of schooling” (p. 43).

The ELRP goal was to implement a program that aimed at “literacy gains achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to literacy with an emphasis on prevention and intensive intervention” (p. 44). The project ensured that each of the following elements was in place: early intervention, structured teaching programs, regular monitoring and assessment, home/school programs, pre-school programs, professional development, and school-based coordinators. Their findings are particularly relevant as I contemplate the next steps necessary for implementing change in early literacy at the school level. The study found that the factors which contributed the most to change as the schools in the study worked to improve their literacy practices were: “*Clear Model, Orchestration, Pressure and Support, Technical Assistance, Shared Control/Rewards, and Removal of Competing Priorities*” (p. 46). A brief description of each follows:

Clear Model: In the beginning of the research, school teams were given an instructional design that included all the elements necessary as a “means of improving the literacy learning outcomes of their students” (p. 47).

Orchestration: In order to facilitate a structured implementation, “coordinators planned for the introduction of changes to teachers’ classroom programs” (p. 47).

Pressure and Support: “Acknowledging that people need pressure to change, the expectations and structure of this Project left teachers with little option but to change” (p. 49).

Technical Assistance: As teachers added new skills and practices to their classroom programs, there was a need for “practical support and guidance” (p. 51).

Shared Control/Rewards: As the project moved forward, teachers went from being motivated by the challenge to improve to experiencing “success as enhanced literacy learning outcomes were achieved” (p. 53).

Removal of Competing Priorities: “The creation of time and space within the curriculum enabled teachers to focus their energy and work towards the implementation of significant reform to their daily literacy teaching practice” (p. 56).

Another key point raised by the study was that “it is clear from this study that the practice of continually adding to teachers’ workloads needs to be addressed” (p. 56). In summary, the meaning that I take from this study on changes to early reading intervention to my own situation is that change is not accidental and must be carefully planned for and implemented purposefully and methodically, over time.

Ashdown and Simic (2000) indicate that other researchers, in trying to determine the effectiveness of the Reading Recovery program, have suggested, “developing

predictive models that would identify the characteristics of students most likely to succeed in Reading Recovery” (p. 30). While this approach is at first appealing to me as “Budget Manager” I am quickly chastised by the philosophy of the Reading Recovery program, which is that such a policy would be dismissed on “practical and ethical reasons” (p. 30). It is reasoned that by admitting the lowest scoring students into Reading Recovery, it is “potentially more cost-effective, because a significant number of these children who succeed in Reading Recovery do not later become a burden to the system, in terms of costly supplemental services in higher grades” (p. 30). While this may be true at a system level, it does not help my budget at the school level when I consider the high rate of transient students (49%) who have received Reading Recovery at an expense to my school and then moved to another school, either in our district or beyond.

A variable that is beyond the control of the school is the transient nature of the population who were selected for Reading Recovery. In order to support the long-term learning assistance needs of the school, perhaps an effort should be made that all other factors being equal, permanence in the community would be the deciding factor in the selection of the participants. One of my teachers explained that, at Crestview, she ultimately decided the fate of which students received Reading Recovery as she was asked to refer the lowest students in her classroom. The Reading Recovery teacher then tested those children to determine the lowest scoring and the oldest of that focus group. I am being cautious here not to suggest that the lowest students should not be selected simply to improve statistics, as the criterion of Reading Recovery is that the lowest and oldest student should be the successful participant. Still, there must be some occasions



when the decision to select the most suitable applicant should take account of multiple variables.

While I agree that an effective early reading intervention program can reduce future remediation costs, I feel that there are other factors in place at Crestview School, which work against those savings. However, some of them might be addressed by many of the suggestions made throughout this discussion.

Classroom support. Clay (2001) asserts:

when an early intervention builds effective reading and writing processing systems, which can handle texts of different kinds . . . then that early intervention provides the learner with the potential for subsequent successful progress.

Whether that potential is realized depends on whether the early intervention programme has prepared the learner sufficiently well to engage with instruction several years later on, or whether alternatively, the subsequent classroom instruction has been good enough to allow the reader to build upon the foundation laid by the intervention. (p. 216)

Clay (2001) describes the transition back into the classroom for the Reading Recovery student as one where “there must be minor adjustments to tune in a particular child to the particular demands of his or her classroom teacher in the last few weeks of the Reading Recovery programme” (p. 301). She describes the ideal situation as one where “the ex-lowest achievers must ideally be able to learn within the classroom programme without special programming, but with an attentive teacher” (p. 301).

In comparing five different early reading intervention programs, Chapman et al. (1999) noted that Reading Recovery has no connection to classroom instruction (p. 4).

They note that programs that integrate completely with regular classroom instruction also produce some of the largest effect sizes (p. 24). They also describe the situation where “if Reading Recovery . . . were used both in the classroom and in tutoring, Reading Recovery might still have greater effects because its model of reading and delivery of instruction may be more effective” (p. 24).

Chapman et al. (1999) also note that although students needed to reach a book level of at least 16 in order to be discontinued, classroom teachers report that their students were actually scoring closer to the book level of only 9.0 (p. 6). While there is no explanation for this discrepancy, it does echo a similar complaint that the teachers on my staff also noted. One teacher noted that the Reading Recovery assessments are done using books that the child has had at least one opportunity to read, while the Diagnostic Reading Assessment administered by the classroom teacher is a “first-read,” which may account for some discrepancies in scores.

One of the recurring themes in my teacher interviews was that “all teachers need to be on the same page” with relation to reading instruction at our school. Barth (2001) questions, “on what occasions must all teachers and all children in a school behave in the same way, and when is it acceptable -- even desirable for them to differ?” (p. 72). When everyone is doing the same thing, it gives the public the impression that collectively you are united and you know what you are doing, and I hasten to suggest that it also increases the comfort level of the teachers. Perhaps more than everybody on staff doing the same thing, and at the same time, we can welcome and embrace diversity of instruction, as long as it meets the same philosophy about strong reading pedagogy, and as long as it allows for differing styles and experience.

Marie Clay describes the on-going efforts on the parts of schools to address the needs of low-achievers. “Many educators strive to change the classroom programs so that fewer children need individual help, and this is good” (Clay, 1994, p. 122) yet she is quick to point out that Reading Recovery does not claim to know which classroom theory is the best. “Irrespective of how classroom instruction is designed and delivered, the majority of children . . . survive the various and different programs quite well” (Clay, 1994, p. 123). Most children will never need the intense strategies employed by the Reading Recovery teacher and Clay would discourage the classroom teacher from trying to adapt those processes into the classroom. “Reading Recovery is an appropriate supplement for even a high quality classroom program” (Clay, 1994, p.123). Her point is that the low-achievers in any class will appear regardless of the classroom instruction model employed to teach reading and writing.

The ex-Reading Recovery student’s success back in his/her own classroom depends “obviously, on whether the quality of instruction in classrooms can sustain the progress of ex-RR children; sometimes it can and sometimes it cannot” (Clay, 2001, p. 248). By working with teachers at Crestview, I hope to create the conditions where all ex-RR children can be successful. An overwhelming sentiment expressed by the interview respondents was that they fully expected Reading Recovery students to be successful in the classroom following their intervention year. They possessed a confidence in the merits of the program and supported its’ role as a part of a school-wide literacy program.

Ongoing monitoring of RR students. While discussing the merits of the Reading Recover program, Clay defines success as “relative and time-limited” (p. 139). Perhaps

she is a pragmatist at heart! Slavin et al. (1993) caution against the interpretation of studies such as mine:

Some might take the observation that effects of early interventions often fade in later years as an indication that early intervention is ultimately futile. Such a conclusion would be too broad. What research on early intervention suggests is that there is no magic bullet, no program that administered for one or two years, will ensure the success of at-risk children throughout their school careers and beyond. (p. 8)

While that sentiment may be true, I believe that it would be almost negligent to ignore the results that my study revealed. While I am not concluding that the intervention has been futile, study results reveal a need to improve the progress of Reading Recovery students past their implementation year. Slavin et al. (1993) would seem to agree:

Intensive early intervention for at-risk children with no follow-up in improved instruction is unlikely to produce lasting gains, and mild interventions over extended periods may also fail to bring low achievers into the educational mainstream. Yet intensive early intervention followed by long-term (inexpensive) improvements in instruction and other services can produce substantial and lasting gains. (p. 9)

### Next Steps

I am hesitant to suggest that I am single-handedly going to be able to make any of my recommendations actually happen but, that being said, my first step to making this happen will be to share the research findings with my staff. Calhoun (1994) explains, “informed decision making is what action research is all about” (p. 88). As a part of the

action research cycle, I hope to move this research from being an individual design to a collective team model, to have a team united with a shared vision on improving the long-term effects of Reading Recovery intervention on our students.

Initially, I recommend that first steps towards overall system restructuring is the educating of all staff about Reading Recovery, providing training for a permanent teacher to work in the Reading Recovery position, working with the Reading Recovery teacher to fine tune how students are selected for the intervention, and incorporating Reading Recovery into a system-wide intervention program that is tied to the literacy goals in our School Growth Plan. Reading Recovery sessions will be scheduled during optimal times for both the student and the classroom teacher.

In terms of implementing changes to classroom support, I will continue to engage teachers in professional development around best practice with regards to literacy development, as already initiated through our School Growth Plan, to create an understanding of Reading Recovery as a part of a school-wide structure, with shared responsibility for its success. I will work with the Reading Recovery teacher to use Professional Development days to provide literacy development for the staff. A more cohesive re-integration of the Reading Recovery student back into the regular classroom upon discontinuation needs to be developed, with on-going support for the classroom teacher.

On-going monitoring of the Reading Recovery program is my final area of focus. One of the first steps in this process is to work with the Reading Recovery teacher to formalize a method of tracking the yearly progress of Reading Recovery students. The Reading Recovery teacher will also implement a plan of regularly working with Reading

Recovery students and their parents past their intervention year. Regular communication between home and school will be an integral part of this process.

While this may be the end of my research project, I'm left with the feeling that it isn't finished. I'm experiencing the feeling that Calhoun (1994) associates with action research for school renewal, a feeling of "discomfort and joy of never finishing our education, of never graduating from our study of teaching" (p. 4). While my recommendations may only be in the preliminary stages, I am optimistic that what began as an individual research question that arose because of seemingly negative and sometimes personally overwhelming data can be turned into an on-going process of improvement for Crestview School with shared decision-making by its stakeholders. "Stakeholders in the education of children must make informed choices about the use of limited financial and personnel resources" (Gaffney & Paynter, 1994, p. 29): it can be a monumental task. Yet, in the words of Goethe "things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least". Surely, the increased confidence and success of every child must be a thing that matters most.

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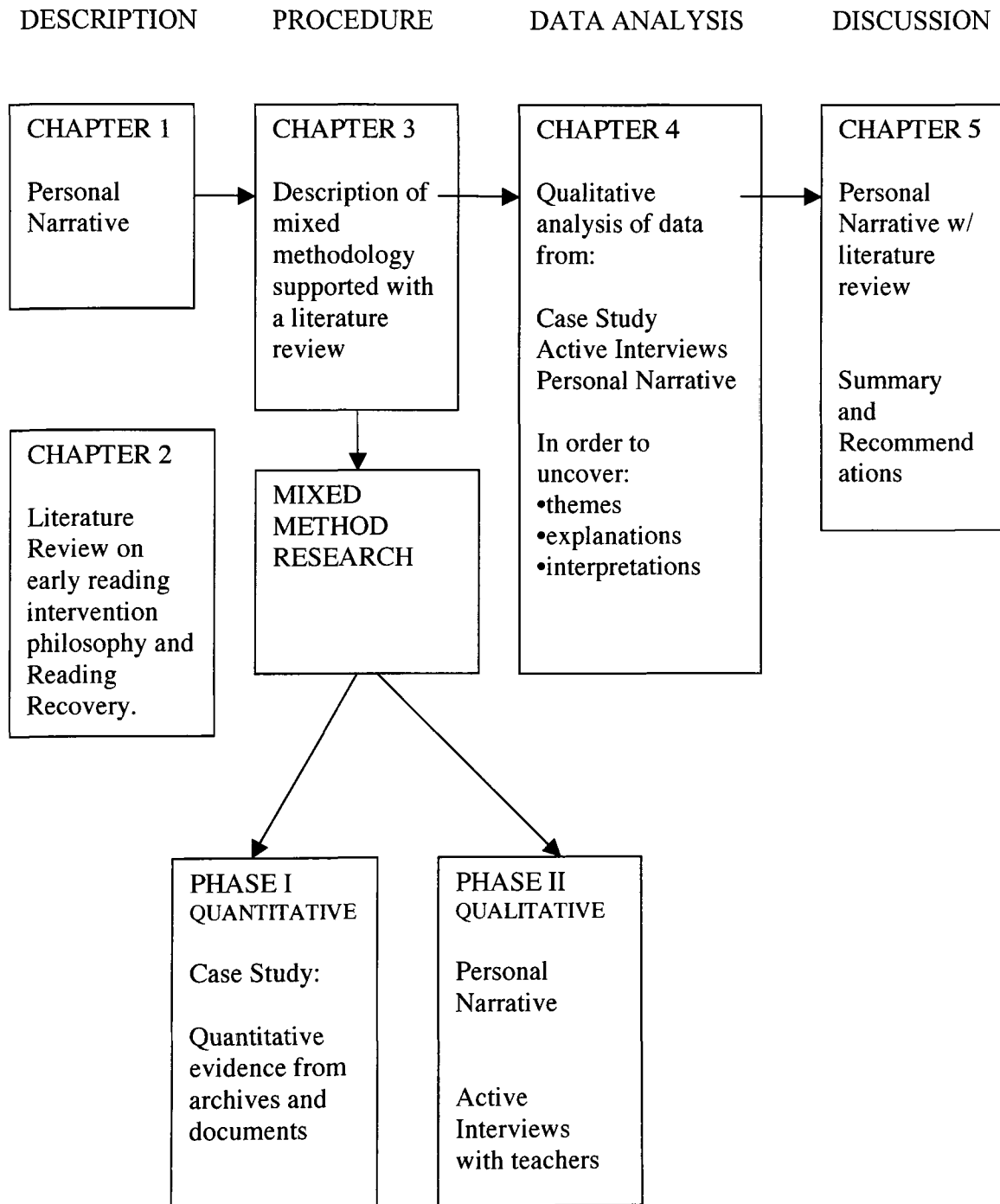
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## Appendix A

## Mixed Method Research Blueprint



## Appendix B

### Interview Blueprint

#### Objective Questions

- What is your experience with reading intervention programs at any time in your career?
- Which ones have you used personally?
- Which ones have you had students involved in?
- How were those students referred and who referred them?

#### Reflective Questions

- Describe some aspects of reading interventions at our school that you admire.
- Describe some of your concerns about our reading intervention programs.
- How have you seen the use of reading intervention programs change over time, at this site, in education in general?
- What are some of your questions about reading intervention programs?
- What needs to be clarified for you about reading intervention programs?
- How do you refer students for reading intervention programs? What are your personal criteria? What steps do you go through?

#### Interpretive Questions

- What value do you see in using effective reading interventions?
- What would you envision as an ideal situation for reading intervention programs at our school?
- What are our strengths in this area?

- What do you see as the greatest challenge in effective reading interventions for us at this school?
- Who benefits from reading interventions?
- How do reading interventions make your job easier?
- How do reading interventions make your job harder?

#### Decisional Questions

- What can we do to increase the effectiveness of using reading intervention practices at our school?
- What do we need to do first?
- What is our highest priority?