An Examination of Teachers' Understanding and Use of Text Complexity and Complex
Text in Second Grade Classrooms

by

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ABSTRACT

DELPHIA S. SMITH. An examination of teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and complex text in second grade classrooms (Under the direction of DR. KAREN WOOD)

Communication in the 21st century is no longer limited to a mastery of literal level comprehension, although it is an essential element of understanding. Now, more than ever, it is paramount that students are able to read and critically analyze texts in various genres. Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu (2008) outline the notion of New Literacies as central to civic, economic, and personal participation within a globalized community, thus becoming critical to educational research and education of all students. The underpinnings of constructivist theory serve to provide a framework for examining second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text and its use in their classrooms. The study was guided by three research questions regarding teacher's understandings and instructional practices. The data was collected from initial, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, as well as follow-up interviews with three second-grade teachers. Data was analyzed using within-case and cross-case analysis and yielded in-depth details about teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classrooms. Findings revealed that teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text, as well as how complex text is used in each classroom, differed across cases.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my first loves. Your prayers, love, endless sacrifice and encouragement pushed me to continue when oftentimes I wanted to give up. Thank you. This is also dedicated to my nieces, nephews, little cousins, former students and all the boys and girls with a dream. When others say you can't, you can. And to everyone that have supported me throughout this journey, thank you. This is for you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Communication in the 21st century is no longer limited to a mastery of literal level comprehension, although it is an essential element of understanding. Now, more than ever, it is paramount that students are able to read and critically analyze texts in various genres. Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu (2008) outline the notion of *New Literacies* as central to civic, economic, and personal participation within a globalized community, thus becoming critical to educational research and education of all students. It is important to note that *New Literacies* are deictic in that they consistently change as their defining technologies change. They are regarded as multifaceted because they benefit from analysis that brings multiple points of view to the discussion. They are found within the context of human practice and language (inclusive of words, literacy, texts), while providing meaning through reasoning language.

Due to the world's changing expectations of student competence in an increasingly interconnected and digitized world, students are required to read and develop knowledge-based capital to develop critical-thinking skills and problem-solving skills, as well as make distinctions between different types of evidence (Nueman & Celano, 2012). Knowledge-based capital, as defined by Hanushek and Woessmann (2015) refers to the cognitive skills of the population, which they maintain is pivotal to a nation's long running prosperity. Before the idea of complex text was developed and utilized in classrooms today, several factors contributed to the modern era of text and how it was used to teach students to read.

Books given to children have always represented and continue to represent cultural, ethical, and/or religious values (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). Literacy/reading instruction in the United States began during the period of religious emphasis from 1607-1776 (Smith, 2002). The earliest reading materials, the primer, the psalter and the Bible (1607) were used as teaching materials. The primer, which initially meant a book of prayers for laity, came to mean an introduction to reading and later an introduction to any subject (Monaghan Collection on the History of Reading, 2001). Monaghan and Barry (1999) contend that the *Bible* was the apex of the reading curriculum at which all the earlier texts aimed. It was also during this period that the method of teaching reading was referred to as the alphabet method (Smith, 2002) where children first identified the letters by name, spelled them aloud in syllabary and then spelled out the word with one syllable progressing up to eight syllables (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). The *Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue* (1755), which included moral and religious lessons, was the final textbook printed during this period (Smith, 2002).

Some of the earliest reading materials, the primer and the hornbook, were religious tracts that introduced alphabetic instruction to children. The hornbook, which was a child's first printed introduction to Christianity, was named for the translucent horn that protected the text (Barry, 2008). It was the first reader that contained the alphabet, a set of syllables called a syllabary, the invocation, and the Lord's Prayer (Tuer, 1968, p.2). Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the dominant text used in the various colonies was the *New England Primer* (Venezky, 1987). This was considered the mainstay of colonial primary education and a true book containing more than 70 pages of comprehensive text (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). The single-sheet hornbook and the *New*

England Primer were the earliest antecedents of the modern basal reading series

(Venezky, 1987).

Basal programs, which were initially created by William McGuffey (1866), can

be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century when the first series emerged into the school

setting (Hoffman, Sailors, & Patterson, 2002). The basal reading series was a

commercially designed reading program that dominated reading instruction in the United

States. Basal reading was implemented when reading was defined as a set of subskills

taught in a prescribed manner. Implicit in its premise, basals were considered

indispensable to reading instruction and without it, children would either not learn to read

at all or would be severely handicapped (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman & Murphy, 1988).

While many welcomed the growing influence of basal materials within early reading

instruction, there was great resistance from many reading experts. Dolch (1954), who

initially endorsed basals, challenged the attempts to produce "teacher-proof" materials.

Chall (1967) after a four-year evaluation of the components, contents, and use of basal

materials concluded that the materials were a product of convention not science. Despite

vast objection, basal materials were almost universal in American schools by the 1960s

(Barton & Wilder, 1964). While many educators would argue that published programs

were secondary in instructional importance, evidence suggested that many classroom

teachers relied heavily on basal programs (Osborn & Stein, 1985). As the expectations of

reading instruction evolved, so did the expectations of basal reading programs (Schepis,

2013). Throughout its growth, Whole Language advocates persistently battled the basal

reading approach and its impact on students' desire and ability to learn to read (Moore,

1985).

Success in schooling rests upon learning to read and the continued development of reading for gaining and analyzing new and increasingly complex information (Calkins, 1982). Whole Language, which is a dynamic and generative philosophy of education, began as a grass roots teacher movement (Gilles, 2006). The paradox that is at the heart of the Whole Language debate questions whether children become literate through reading and writing (Willis, 1995). Goodman and Goodman (1979) posit that Whole Language was based on the presupposition that learning to read can be as natural a process as learning to speak and understand oral language and should take place in a literacy-rich environment with written language used for authentic purposes, that in such, children will learn to read and write naturally. Like the basal reading movement, Whole Language has been lauded worldwide and has received criticism. Stahl (1999) contends that there are lessons to be learned from the rapid rise and descent of the Whole Language movement. Being rooted in various "progressive" movements in education, Col. Francis Parker and John Dewey's activity-based educational approach was applied to reading and the language experience approach (LEA) used during the 1960s. Despite this fact, these movements never measured up to the mass acceptance Whole Language received. McCaslin (1989) argued that some in education seemed eager to support the claim that the Whole Language approach is theoretically well grounded. While Williams (1973) insists that within the Whole Language movement, alternative conditions of practice survive only within tolerances of dominant order where many are effectively incorporated or given the option of declaring an open opposition.

By the 1990s, the attacks against Whole Language became more overt (Wolfe & Poynor, 2001), and by the mid-nineties the Whole Language movement was on the

decline. As a result, the movement was unable to combat the constant onslaught of "scientific research" indicating that Whole Language did not work (McKenna, Robinson & Miller, 1990). Whole Language threatened the means of social production by making schools and teachers less reliant upon packaged reading programs manufactured by corporations. Hence, placing instructional control in the hands of teachers, while encouraging the discussion of the types of knowledge allowed into the classroom and provided different embodied experiences of school for both teachers and students (Wolfe & Poynor, 2001).

It was in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education released an alarming report. The report entitled *A Nation at Risk* provided evidence of a deteriorating educational system that was undermining America's vitality. The report called for elected officials, educators, parents and students to work together to reform a public-school system that was described as one in urgent need of improvement (Park, 2004). It positioned the nation as being at risk for economic collapse (Sugimoto & Carter, 2015). To increase economic competitiveness, *A Nation at Risk* called on local communities and states to increase academic standards, improve teacher quality and reform curriculum (Spring, 2011). The release of this report led to a series of initiatives (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), one being high-stakes testing. As a result, it transformed the position and purpose of the American public-school system.

High-Stakes Testing was initially used as a practice of attaching consequences to high school graduation exams. Students were required to pass a test in order to receive their high school diploma (Nichols, Glass & Berliner, 2012). In the years since the *Nation at Risk,* the push for high expectations, accountability and equality in education

have been supported by federal initiatives such as the re-authorization of the 1965

Elementary and Secondary School Act and *Goals 2000: Educate America Ac*t. These

initiatives laid the groundwork for federal input in state-level policy making (Sunderman

& Kim, 2004), which was the impetus for the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act

(NCLB) of 2001.

Several decades after a *Nation at Risk* was released, most schools accepted the

report's challenge to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards for learning. The

CCSS represented the most significant change as it related to the standards-based

assessment movement since the *NCLB Act* (Chingos, 2013), which required all states to

adopt academic standards and administer standardized tests. However, only forty-five

states including the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense

Education Agency initially embraced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to

ensure students receive the necessary knowledge and skills required for success in college

and careers.

Adams (2009) posits that comprehension researchers of differing epistemologies

have consistently recommended students be matched to reading materials of an

appropriately challenging level to facilitate gaining meaning from the text and continue

developing as readers. It was through the development of the Common Core State

Standards (CCSS) (2009) that a renewed focus was placed on the types of texts used in

instruction (Amendum, Conradi, & Heibert, 2017).

Levels of *text complexity* and grade level were not explicitly specified until the

implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Many would assume that

text complexity is a new way to look at text. In fact, Heibert (2012) insists that *text*

complexity has been around for centuries as part of readability formulas by governmental and educational agencies. *Text complexity*, which is Reading Standard Ten within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)/English/Language Arts (ELA), is the range of reading and level of text and centers on the issues of how and what students read. It uses three approaches to evaluate text, quantitative, qualitative and reader and task considerations.

To determine complexity, one must look at several elements (Collier, 2013), including the readability of the text, levels of meaning or purpose in the text, structure of the text, conventionality and clarity of the language, and knowledge demands of the text (Lapp, Moss, Grant & Johnson, 2015). Meanwhile, the term '*complex text,*' used pervasively in this era of the CCSS, is a more demanding form of text that helps prepare students to read challenging text effectively, while learning and interacting with material they might not necessarily encounter on their own (Glass, 2015). One challenge of complex text is gaining an understanding of what it is (Miller, 2009). *Complex text*, which is often compared to *text complexity* and often associated with the CCSS, refers to printed, visual, auditory, digital, and multimedia texts that accompanies each standards-based unit, and aligns to curricular goals, while representing an appropriate level of challenge for students (Glass, 2015). Complex text should sufficiently challenge students and require them to think critically about the text (Fisher & Frey, 2015a).

Statement of the Problem

Educators and researchers have long acknowledged the importance of mastering the essentials of reading by the end of third grade (Hernandez, 2012). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) in their report acknowledges that reading proficiently by the

end of third grade can be a make or break benchmark in a child's educational development. In a subsequent report written by Hernandez (2012), he argues that students who fail to master reading by the end of third grade often struggle in later grades and drop out of high school before earning a high school diploma. Meanwhile, despite the increased initiative for K-12 grade teachers to move students purposefully through increasingly complex text to build skill and stamina (Shanahan, Fisher & Frey, 2012), primary grade teachers are still considering how they will achieve this goal. The introduction of the CCSS has ushered in a renewed focus on the types of texts used in instruction (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGACBP] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010) and was implemented on the premise that a vast number of students graduated high school without the necessary skills required to read texts in college and beyond.

Amendum, Conradi, and Heibert (2017), in their integrative review of 26 studies, called for research that would examine and evaluate the best ways to support students in reading more challenging texts. They found that the majority of the studies (18) conceptualized text complexity as a student group or grade/text match, seven studies considered text complexity in terms of an individual reader/text match and the remaining study conceptualized text complexity in both ways. With relation to text complexity and reading fluency, the study suggested that on average, as the level of text difficulty increased, students' accuracy and reading rate decreased, particularly for less skilled readers. In Chinn et al. (1993) and Compton et al.'s (2004) studies, they found that fluency differed based on how text complexity was conceptualized and measured. Moreover, when Amendum, Conradi, and Heibert (2017) measured text complexity in

relation to reading comprehension, they found that when text difficulty increased, there was either a negative relationship to comprehension or a non-significant relationship.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require that all students in K-12 grades increase their reading of more complex text. Yet, the standards specifically exclude text complexity factors for earlier grades texts (Fitzgerald, et al, 2016). What is considered an alarming omission to many within the CCSS makes it difficult for teachers, particularly those in the earlier grades, to support their students in reading increasingly complex texts. Amendum, Conradi, and Heibert (2017) contend that although the standards do not directly call for an increase in text complexity in grades K-1, implementing the new standards in grade 2 will likely require the increase of text complexity in grades K-1. They added that while the need for the implementation of text complexity in grades K-1 is warranted, it offers a clear understanding of the effects of classroom achievement on students at the elementary level. When elementary children read more complex texts, their decoding, accuracy, fluency rate, and comprehension decline (Amendum, Conradi & Liebfreund, 2016). Yet Shanahan (2011) suggested that student achievement would accelerate with increased text complexity during reading instruction. With this present issue faced by many teachers, one central question must be asked: How do early grade teachers' understandings of text complexity and complex text impact literacy instruction in their classrooms?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classroom. *Text complexity* centers on the difficulty level of what students read. Bunch, Walqui, and

Pearson (2014) posit that text complexity is conceptualized in the CCSS along varied dimensions, quantitatively, qualitatively and by reader and task considerations. The quantitative measure of text complexity rates texts based on the level of complexity and focuses on features that can be counted such as the number of syllables (Lapp, Moss, Grant & Johnson, 2015). In addressing the qualitative dimension of text complexity, text is examined to determine how much of it is literal and how much is figurative. The final dimension of text complexity is the reader and task considerations. It determines how challenging a text would be for a specific reader or group of readers (Lapp et al., 2015).

Given the widening gap that persist between what students read in school and are expected to read and comprehend in college as well as outside of school (work), teachers are being asked to teach from and use more complex texts in their classrooms (Tucker, 2013). *Complex text*, which is often compared to *text complexity* and associated with the CCSS, refers to printed, visual, auditory, digital, and multimedia texts that accompanies each standards-based unit, and aligns to curricular goals, while representing an appropriate level of challenge for students (Glass, 2015).

Context of the Study

The current study was conducted at three K-3 schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. The participants for this study were recruited from a school county in the area. Using a case study approach, this study sought to gain insight into individual teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text. In addition, this study also sought to examine their use of complex text and how it impacts the teaching and learning of reading.

Data collection for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews and lesson observations of second grade teachers who used complex text in their classrooms. The use of interviews allowed participants the opportunity to provide their understanding of text complexity, complex and description of how it used in their respective classrooms. Observations of lesson activities were used to gain an insight into how each teacher use complex text in their classroom. With constructivism as the theoretical underpinning (see Chapter 2 for a more in-depth understanding), the study investigated the instructional practices of teacher particpants and how their teaching influenced students' depth of understanding and ability to reconstruct meaning from print. This research study informs and augments the current literature as it relates to text complexity and complex text by focusing on the following three research questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my study:

1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text?

2) How do second grade teacher integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms?

3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the heightened initiative set out by the Common Core State Standards for all students in grades K-12 to read increasingly complex texts. This was the result of the widened gap that persisted between what

students were required to read in school and what they were expected to read and comprehend in college (Tucker, 2013). What is most troubling is that early grade teachers have been given little to no guidance about text complexity. This lack of support for teachers incited the controversial debate surrounding the text complexity standard (Hiebert, 2012; Shanahan, 2011). The CCSS highlights the increased complexity of text that students must read to ensure preparation for the demands of college, career, and life, while rejecting the skills students should master in reading and writing (Turner, 2014).

The CCSS provides a text complexity staircase with grade-by-grade specifications for increasing text complexity in successive years (Fitzgerald, Heibert, & Stenner, 2015). As a result, the second/third-grade step ends at 820 Lexiles (L), which is approximately one grade level higher than previous recommendations (Williamson, Fitzgerald, & Stenner, 2014). While many students have achieved or exceeded this level by the end of third grade, students who struggle in reading on average have attained less than half of the Lexiles by the end of third grade (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). This research study has the potential to inform teachers regarding the implementation of literacy instruction that include the use of complex text and to inform administrators, state education leaders and other policy makers seeking to increase students' understanding and achievement test scores. In examining teachers' unique experiences in utilizing complex texts in the earlier grades, CCSS authors and other educators can provide pertinent information to guide early grade teachers as it relates to complex text and text complexity.

<center>Definitions of Relevant Terms</center>

Text complexity refers to the range of reading and difficulty levels of text (Collier, 2013) as well as the properties of a text, regardless of reader or task (Mesmer et al., 2012).

Complex text is a more demanding form of text that helps prepare students to read a challenging text effectively, while learning and interacting with material they might not necessarily encounter on their own. It refers to printed, visual, auditory, digital, and multimedia texts that accompany each standards-based unit and aligns to curricular goals, while representing an appropriate level of challenge for students (Glass, 2015).

Early Grades include grades in elementary school from kindergarten to third grade (K-3) (Samuels, 2015).

Lexiles are measurements of students' reading ability and the difficulty level of text. It provides an alternative and more useful measure of reading ability than grade equivalent scores (Doman, 2017).

Summary

The current qualitative study focuses on second grade teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and complex text in their classrooms. Chapter one provides background, presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, its context and the study's significance. This chapter also introduces the theoretical framework used to frame this study, as well as provides the three research questions that guided this study and definition of relevant terms. Chapter two provides a review of the literature as well an in-depth overview of the Theoretical Framework. Chapter three addresses the methodology of the study. It contains the research design, an overview of the data collection and analysis, while addressing ethical issues and the validity and reliability of the study. Chapter four presents the study findings. Chapter five concludes this dissertation with a discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him." –Maya Angelou

The above quote is a reminder that bringing children and books together will have far-reaching, often life-changing consequences (Mesmer, 2008). Many experts argue that a large gap persists between the complexity of texts students can read at the end of high school and what they are required to read during college (Achieve the Core, 2012). Text complexity, which is Reading Standard Ten within the Common Core State Standards(CCSS)/English /Language Arts (ELA) is the range of reading and level of text complexity (Collier, 2013), as well as the properties of a text, regardless of reader or task (Mesmer et al., 2012). It centers on issues of how and what students read, and the way teachers must think about instruction (Lapp et al., 2015). Adams (2010) maintained that for students to grow in reading, they must read a vast range of complex texts that provide them with new language, new knowledge, and new modes of thought. Students who can read a vast range of complex texts develop a greater content knowledge and as a result, gain an increased ability to read and comprehend new ideas.

Success in school rests upon learning to read as well as the continued development of reading for gaining and analyzing new and increasingly complex information (Calkins, 1983). Before understanding the significance of text complexity and the literature surrounding it, it is necessary to establish the historical contexts that have contributed to the modern era of text and how it was used to teach students to read. This chapter provides a historical overview of the evolution of reading texts in America.

Next, an examination of the reading eras will be outlined with a focus on declining national test scores that was the impetus for increased standards and testing. After which, topics related to text complexity and complex text will be discussed. Lastly, the role of readability formulas in measuring text complexity will be presented.

Evolution of Printed Text in America

It was not until the first colonists' migration to America that reading instruction was viewed as a necessary step for religious training (Venezky, 1987). Books given to children have always represented and continue to represent our cultural, ethical, and/or religious values (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). The use of textbooks is considered a multifaceted phenomenon, which as a result can facilitate change in one facet, while other properties remain constant. For many years, oral reading dominated literacy. It maintained its dominance until the early 20th century when the silent reading movement began (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). During 1607-1776 reading instruction emphasized religion (Smith, 2002). The earliest reading materials, the Primer, the Psalter and the Bible (1607) were used as teaching materials in America. The Primer, which initially meant a book of prayers for laity, came to mean an introduction to reading and later an introduction to any subject (Monaghan Collection on the History of Reading, 2002). The hornbook, which was first used in 1678, consisted of a single sheet of paper containing the alphabet, shortened syllabary, the invocation, and the Lord's Prayer and were at times made of wood, iron, pewter, ivory, silver or even gingerbread and covered with a sheet of translucent horn (Monaghan & Barry, 1999).

The colonial child began with the hornbook and transitioned to the primer. Once the child completed the primer, he or she read the Psalter (Book of Psalms), New

Testament, and the entire Bible (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). Monaghan and Barry (1999) contend that the Bible was the apex of the reading curriculum, at which all the earlier texts aimed. It was also during this period that the method of teaching reading was referred to as the Alphabet Method (Smith, 2002). The Alphabet Method is where children first identified the letters by name, spelled them aloud in syllabary and then spelled out the word beginning with one syllable and progressing up to eight syllables (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). *The Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue* (1755), which included moral and religious lessons, was the final textbook printed during the period of religious emphasis in reading instruction (Smith, 2002).

The next era in the reading textbook movement was called the period of Nationalistic-Moralistic Emphasis in Reading Instruction (1776–1839) (Smith, 2002). It was during this era that reading content changed to reflect American society's desire to create a nation of good patriotic citizens united in language, traditions, and morals (Gray, 1936). The notable instructional readers of this period included Caleb Bingham's Readers, Lyman Cobb's Readers, George Hillard's Readers, and Lindley Murray's Readers (Smith, 2002). Initially, a "speller" was used to introduce students to reading and was later replaced with a book called the "reader" (1830) (Smith, 2002). Readers such as those by Noah Webster or by Caleb Bingham consisted of a compilation of essays originally written for adults on varied subjects (Monaghan Collection on the History of Reading, 2002). McGuffey's Readers (1836-1844) also appeared in a complete set during this period.

The Period of Emphasis on Education for Intelligent Citizenship (1840–1880) lasted about 40 years and was less clearly defined than the previous period due to slow

development of "new" ideas (Gray, 1936). The span of the next period, The Period of Emphasis on Reading as a Cultural Asset (1880–1909), focused on the cultural development of children. It also saw the flourishing of the word method, where words were learned as whole words by sight and children were asked to link a printed word to a word that existed in their vocabulary (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). With the advent of instruments of measurement and being able to obtain scientific information as it related to the effectiveness of reading methods and materials, The Period of Emphasis on Scientific Investigation in Reading (1910–1925) began (Gray, 1936). Increased innovations in reading instruction as well as supplemental silent readers that reflected patriotic characters were used along with the basal system (Smith, 2002). The next era, The Period of Intensive Research and Application (1925–1935) saw an exerted influence in changing the reading practice with an abundance and varied supply of supplemental reading books (Gray, 1936). It also saw an attempt to use basal readers throughout the grades (1930), while organizing reading instruction around the needs and activities of children (Smith, 2002).

The Basal Reading Era

It was not until the Period of International Conflict (1935-1950) that the innovation and publication of basal readers were highlighted (Smith, 2002). The modern basal reading series began with the single-sheet hornbook and the New England Primer (Venezky, 1987). The basal reading series, initially created by William McGuffey (1866), was a commercially designed reading program that dominated reading instruction in the United States (Hoffman, Sailors, & Patterson, 2002).

The central premise of the basal reader was that an all-inclusive set of instructional materials could teach all children to read despite teacher competence and learner differences (Goodman et al., 1988). When reading was defined as a set of subskills taught in a prescribed manner, basal reading was implemented. Implicit in its premise, basals were considered indispensable to reading instruction (Goodman et al., 1988). While many educators would argue that published programs were secondary in instructional importance, evidence suggested that many classroom teachers relied heavily on basal programs (Osborn & Stein, 1985). As the expectations of reading instruction evolved, so did the expectations of basal reading programs (Schepis, 2013). Meanwhile, throughout the growth of basal materials, advocates of the Whole Language philosophy persistently battled the basal reading approach and its impact on students' desire and ability to learn to read (Moore, 1985).

The Whole Language Movement

Goodman and Goodman (1979) posit that whole language is based on the presupposition that learning to read can be as natural a process as learning to speak and understand oral language. They added that this process should take place in an environment rich in literacy where written language is used for authentic purposes, so children will learn to read and write naturally. Like the basal reading movement, Whole Language has been lauded worldwide and has received criticism. Success in schooling rests upon learning to read and the continued development of reading for gaining and analyzing new and increasingly complex information (Calkins, 1982).

The paradox that is at the heart of the Whole Language debate asks if children can become literate by reading and writing (Willis, 1995). Goodman (1998), one of the founders of Whole Language movement contends that whole language has had a profound impact on how curriculum, materials, methodology, and assessments are viewed. He adds that it has helped to redefine teaching and its relationship to learning. It was through Goodman's interest in reading as a language process that students were asked to read stories aloud from a basal reader. While students read, Goodman recorded their readings and marked their deviations from print (Gilles, 2006).

Whole Language not only changed the face of reading instruction, but also left behind some curricular casualties (Sykes, Schneider & Plank, 2012). It threatened the means of social production by making schools and teachers less reliant upon packaged reading programs manufactured by corporations, it placed instructional control in the hands of teachers, it encouraged discussions of what knowledge was allowed into the classroom, and it provided a different embodied experience of school for both teachers and students (Wolfe & Poynor, 2001). Factors such as the unintended curricular casualties of whole language, questionable applications of whole language, growth of balanced literacy, and a paradigm shift in reading research all came together to form the Reading First component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)(Sykes et al., 2012).

Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced literacy* originated in California in 1996 (Honig, 1996). It was implemented in an effort to increase student reading achievement due to low scores attained on a national reading assessment (California Department of Education, 1996).

Many argue that *balanced literacy* is a compromise between whole language and phonics reading instruction because students learn the sounds of letter, how the sounds go together to form words, hence learning to read through context, experience, and the need to create meaning for what they read (Costello, 2012). Reyhner (2008) maintained that this approach enables students to explore and develop their own understanding within a text.

Skills-based and meaning-based approaches were seen as dissimilar with much of the research focusing on the debate about which technique was the best way to teach reading. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) in their research concluded that the successful teaching of reading included both phonics instruction and whole language approach, hence *balanced literacy. Balanced Literacy* is considered a philosophical orientation that presumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support within multiple environments using various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996).

Lynch (2018) defines *balanced literacy* as a curricular methodology that integrates various modalities of literacy instruction aimed at guiding students towards proficient and lifelong reading. The National Reading Panel's report (2000) suggested that in order for teachers to achieve a balanced approach, they must use a variety of different texts as part of reading instruction as well as engage in various activities such as modeled reading (read-aloud where teacher reads to students or students read aloud to each other); shared reading (students are given more independence and responsibility in reading instruction); guided reading (small group instruction where teacher provides instruction); and independent reading (students read on their own as individuals).

A Nation at Risk and the Standards Movement

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released an alarming report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report was characterized by its authors as "an open letter to the American people." It called on elected officials, educators, parents and students to reform a public school system which was described as "in urgent need of improvement" (Park, 2004). The need for reform was a result of the report's findings. Among its many findings, it found that about 13 percent of 17-year olds were in fact functionally illiterate. It also found that SAT scores were declining, and students needed increased support in the form of remedial college courses. Such trends not only threatened opportunities for students, but their collective future. One of a *Nation at Risk*'s recommendations was that schools adopt more "rigorous and measurable standards" (United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Diane Ravitch, a former Assistant Secretary of Education also recognized as one of the chief architects of the modern standards movement explicated the rationale for standards. In her book, she states:

> Americans...expect strict standards to govern construction of buildings, bridges, highways, and tunnels; shoddy work would put lives at risk. They expect stringent standards to protect their drinking water, the food they eat, and the air they breathe.... Standards are created because they improve the activity of life. (Ravitch, 1995, pp 8-9)

She maintained that just as standards improve the daily lives of Americans, they will improve the effectiveness of American education (Ravitch, 1995). Many considered the report, *A Nation at Risk* as the impetus for the modern standards movement. Ramsay

Seldon, former Director of the State Assessment Center at the Council of Chief State

School Officers noted that as a result of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, state and

local leaders set out to improve the educational system through new policies such as

increasing the rigor of graduation requirements, which produced disappointing results.

Subsequently, policymakers focused on national goals and standards (Marzano &

Kendall, 1996). Shepard (1993) indicated that after publication of the report, the rhetoric

of educational form changed drastically. She added that it provided a link between

financial security and economic competitiveness of the nation and its educational system.

 With the growing concern about the educational preparedness of the nation's

youth, former President Bush along with the nation's governors gathered together at an

Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia in September, 1989 (Marzano & Kendall,

1996). As a collective body, they agreed on six broad goals for education, goals they

expected to be reached by the year 2000. Two of the six goals related specifically to

academic achievement (Goal 3 and 4) (Vinovskis, 1999). Goal three looked at 4th, 8th and

12th graders demonstrating competency in challenging areas such as English,

mathematics, science, history, and geography by the year 2000. It also emphasized

American schools ensuring students learn to use their minds in preparation of a

globalized and competitive workforce. Goal four maintained that students by the year

2000 will be first in world in science and mathematics achievement (National Education

Goals Panel, 1991, p. ix).

The standards movement that emerged in the 1990s morphed into the 2001

reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, better known as No

Child Left Behind, followed by Race to the Top, and now the Common Core State Standards Initiative (Bohrnstedt, 2013).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

During the 1950s, growing concern around educational equity and economic and military competiveness led to a more expanded federal role in education (Mcguinn, 2015). The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) expanded and transformed the federal role in education. ESEA, currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is the largest source of federal spending on primary and secondary education (National Association School Psychologist, 2018). It was originally signed in 1965 by then president Lyndon B. Johnson which represented the federal government's new commitment to ensure equal and quality education for all. It also challenged states and school districts to increase efforts in improving student academic achievement (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2018). NCLB was signed into law by then president George W. Bush in 2001. In 2012, the Obama administration afforded some flexibility to states under the law, and as a result, states had to prove that they were adopting and implementing components from NCLB and continue to be transparent about their progress. After much revamping, the NCLB act included Title I and highlighted achievement gaps and generated a national dialogue on the importance of closing them (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2018). In ESEA's (re-christened NCLB) most recent revamping being December, 2015, it was renamed Every Student Succeeds Act (Education Post, 2018).

Race to the Top

The Race to the top program like the NCLB Act deal with similar issues and have many of the same goals, yet their approaches are different (Lohman, 2010). Race to the top, a $4.35 billion fund is the largest federal competitive investment in school reform (ED.gov, 2009). As part of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), also referred to as the "federal stimulus" act, congress provided grants to states to encourage education innovation in four specific areas: enhancing standards and assessments, improving collection and use of data, increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and (4) turning around low-achieving schools (ED.gov, 2009). Race to the top program require states that receive a grant to adopt and use the common (K-12) standards for what students know and are able to do (Lohman, 2010). Additionally, states are required to develop the standards in partnership with other several other states and be internationally benchmarked, as well as increasing the quality of their assessments and implement common assessments (Lohman, 2010).

Common Core State Standards

The varying quality of academic standards among states and the wide disparities in student proficiency as measured under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and highlighted by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, was the stimulus for higher state academic standards (ASCD, 2010). Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan focused on the widespread adoption of the common standards across states (ASCD, 2010). States that adopted the standards received extra points on their Race to the Top grant application. The former secretary also dedicated $350 million

to help two consortia of states develop the next generation of common state assessments aligned to the new standards (United States Department of Education, 2013).

The CCSS, with roots in NCLB, was a state led effort by state leaders, including governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia, through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to develop standards that are consistent and focus on real-world learning goals (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018). The Common Core State Standards, launched in 2009, were developed in an effort to ensure all students are prepared for college, career, and life. In 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation issued the CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The CCSS are national standards designed to circumvent federal restrictions on the adoption of a national curriculum attached to federal Race to the Top grants and No Child Left Behind waivers (Rafferty, 2013). CCSS were created to ensure that students were prepared to be college and career ready (Shanahan, 2015).

Text Complexity and Complex Text

It was through the development of the CCSS that a renewed focus was placed on the types of texts used in instruction (Amendum et al., 2017). One of the critically mentioned components of (CCSS) is complex text (Miller, 2012). Adams (2009) posits that comprehension researchers of differing epistemologies have consistently recommended students be matched to reading materials of an appropriately challenging

level to facilitate gaining meaning from the text and continue to develop as readers.

Reading leveled books have become a regular practice of school literacy both inside and

outside of classrooms, so much so that researchers have developed a critical stance

towards the rapid reproduction of leveling and reading leveled books (Kontovourki,

2012). The overdependence on leveling and reading leveled books are perceived to

misguide teachers from focusing on students' reading practices as well as text

characteristics that seek to support and enhance students' comprehension (Brabham &

Villaume, 2002; Cunningham et al., 2005).

Unlike complex text, text complexity, which is a focus of Reading Standard Ten

within the Common Core State Standards(CCSS)/English/ Language Arts (ELA) and

defined as the inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with

consideration of reader and task variables, refers to the range of reading and difficulty

levels of text (Collier, 2013). With the onset of the CCSS, many would assume that text

complexity is a new way to look at text. In fact, Heibert (2012) insists that text

complexity has been around for centuries as part of readability formulas by governmental

and educational agencies. To determine complexity, one must examine several elements

(Collier, 2013). Text complexity centers on the issues of how and what students read. It

focuses on the readability of the text, levels of meaning or purpose in the text, structure of

the text, conventionality and clarity of the language, and knowledge demands of the text

(Lapp et al., 2015).

Bunch, Walqui, and Pearson (2014) posit that text complexity is conceptualized in

the CCSS along varied dimensions: quantitatively, qualitatively and by reader and task

considerations. The quantitative measure of text complexity rate texts based on the level

of complexity and focuses on features that can be counted such as the number of syllables (Lapp et al., 2015). Text is also examined for syntactic complexity, sentence structure and word length, as well as the level of vocabulary and Lexile level. When a text is examined qualitatively for text complexity, a variety of factors are considered. Miller (2012) contends that the text should be examined to determine how much is literal and how much is figurative. Achieve the Core (2012), a digital tool and resource developed for teachers, outlines the varied qualitative dimensions:

• *Structure*: Texts of low complexity often have simple, well-marked, and conventional structures, while texts of high complexity tend to have complex, implicit, and unconventional structures. Simple literary texts tend to relate events in chronological order, while complex literary texts make more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, multiple points of view, and other manipulations of time and sequence.

• *Language Conventionality and Clarity*: Texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language are often easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic, or unfamiliar language.

• *Knowledge Demands*: Texts that make few assumptions about the extent of the reader's life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary knowledge and content/discipline knowledge are less complex than texts that make assumptions in one or two of the area.

• *Levels of Meaning* (literary texts) or *Purpose* (informational texts): Literary texts with a single level of meaning are often easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning. Similarly, informational texts with an explicitly stated purpose are

generally easier to comprehend as opposed to informational texts with an implicit, hidden, or obscure purpose.

The final aspect of text complexity is the Readers and Task.

•*Readers and Task:* This dimension focuses on instructional design, with rigorous and complex tasks for work that students are asked to complete with text, while appropriate tasks are created for the student learning objectives.

The Emphasis on Close Reading and Complex Text

The CCSS placed special emphasis on students reading texts closely (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Close reading is reading to uncover layers of meaning that leads to deep comprehension (Boyles, 2013). It began in the area of literary criticism and describes a method of reading that can be applied to complex texts in both literary and nonliterary genres (Fang & Pace, 2013). The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC, 2011) notes that a significant body of research links the close reading of complex text to significant gains in reading proficiency and found close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness. They added that close, analytic reading stresses engagement with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examines its meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Close reading involves a reader's independent stops at a point in the text to reread and observe the choices an author made. The student then reflects on the observations made and as a result, gains new understanding that can color or determine the way the remainder of the book is read and thought about (Lehman & Roberts, 2013).

Though rarely mentioned in the CCSS documents, close reading involves detailed analytical interpretation, demanding careful, thorough attention to words, sentences, paragraphs, and larger segments to explore their significance in the text. Readers make sense of multimodal texts they encounter through the use of their background knowledge, their previous experiences with written text, visual images and design elements, context of the text's production, dissemination and reception, intertextual references and the text itself to construct meaning (Serafini, 2017). Burke (2017) contends that not every text is appropriate for students to read closely due to the fact that many texts are comprised of simple story lines and vocabulary that is easily understandable to the reader. This she maintains, after reading the aforementioned texts mentioned, readers are not left pondering deep ideas. Burke adds that close read-worthy texts include enough complex ideas worth exploring and discussing to sustain several days of instruction.

The Role of Readability Formulas in Measuring Text Complexity

Lively and Pressey (1923) were responsible for the creation of the first readability formula nearly 100 years ago. Well over 200 additional readability formulas have been created (Klare, 1984). Early readability formulas were developed to provide a more reliable way of controlling text complexity, making it easier to communicate important messages clearly to their intended audiences (Hiebert, 2012a). Klare (1963) defines readability as the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing. Readability is what makes some texts easier to read than others (DuBay, 2004). The concept of readability was based on the principle that the more a word is used, the more familiar it becomes to the reader (Allen, 1985). To establish text complexity, the CCSS offers a three-pronged system: qualitative (readers need to make inferences), reader-task

(reader's background knowledge of text topic), and quantitative (number of infrequent words and sentence length) (Hiebert, 2010).

Nearly all readability formulas, regardless of differences, analyze two main features of texts: syntax (measure number of words per sentences) and vocabulary (compare words in text to an index of words) (Hiebert, 2012a). Between the 1920s and 1980s, readability formulas were viewed as definitive in that the syntactic and semantic features were manipulated to produce texts with specific readability levels (Green & Davison, 1988). Critiques of readability formulas as it related to creating or manipulating texts were outlined in *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Bruce, Rubin and Starr (1981) contend that readability does not fulfill its purpose. Their failure to do so can be attributed to the following three weaknesses in formula: much of the current knowledge about reading and the reading process is often ignored or violated, statistical bases are shaky, and they are considered inappropriate for matching children and texts or providing guidelines for writers (Gilliland, 1972).

While the discussion of limitations of reading formulas continued, several projects were developed to conduct readability formulas digitally, and the most noted was the Lexile scale (Smith et al., 1989). Lexiles are based on mathematical algorithm of syntactic and semantic measures (Heibert, 2010). The syntactic measure looks at the mean sentence length (MSL) of a sample of sentences, while the semantic component looks at the mean log word frequency (MLWF) of a word's relative frequency to other words in a databank. The MSL and MLWF components are then entered into the formula that produces a Lexile on a scale from 0 (easiest texts) to 2000 (most complex texts) (Heibert, 2012a).

Early Grade Literacy and Text Complexity

Authors of the CCSS have argued that the text complexity gap that exists between high school and college/workplace must be closed. They added that in order to close this existing gap, all students throughout schooling should increase their reading of complex texts (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Hiebert (2013) contends that there is heightened confusion surrounding how early-grade teachers can determine which texts are more or less complex for their students. Although the CCSS provides four qualitative indicators (levels of meaning or purpose, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands), educators question how applicable they are to early-grade texts (Hiebert, 2013).

Fitzgerald, Elmore, Koons, Hiebert, Bowen, Sanford-Moore & Stenner (2015) in their study on text-complexity explored the question of what make early grades texts complex. They examined a variety of texts from kindergarten to second grade and found that early-grade texts can be considered complex systems consisting of characteristics at multiple linguistic levels that interplay to impact text complexity. Fitzgerald et al. (2015) also identified nine most-important text characteristics that are connected to some of the well-researched critical features of young children's early reading development.

Fitzgerald et al., (2016) maintain that before early-grade teachers identify the complexity in texts, they must first understand and know that early-grade texts differ from upper-grade texts in that they are specifically designed to facilitate young students' progress. Beginning readers are mainly working on cracking the code (Fitzgerald, Elmore, Koons, Hiebert, Bowen, Sanford-Moore & Stenner, 2015), making meaning with texts as well as developing the ability to hear sounds in words, develop sight words, and

acquire word recognition strategies (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Moreover, Appleton and Hosp (2004) contend that the information in a text is important to children's reading growth because the presence of certain text features actually can facilitate the development of code cracking. Masten et al. (2009) posit that the early phases of learning to read is crucial in that it sets the stage for later reading and academic performance as well as a potential risk for socio-emotional and health problems.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

For the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, the three research questions will examine second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text and how complex texts is used in their classrooms. In examining the participants' understanding, a constructivist theoretical framework was used to frame this study.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a philosophical framework of how one thinks and learn. It is a postmodern theory of learning that provides an explanation of the nature of knowledge and the way in which humans learn (Ultanir, 2012, p. 195). It is considered a lifelong process in which learners construct meaning from reality (Liu & Chen, 2010). Cooperstein and Weidinger (2004) defines constructivism as a theory that is one of knowledge in which humans actively engage in meaning making as well as building knowledge through manipulation, creation, and the exploration of new information to fit their belief systems and prior experiences. A constructivist classroom is one where the teacher adapt curriculum to address students' ideas or beliefs, negotiate learners' goals and objectives, pose problems of emerging relevance, emphasize hands-on, real-world

experiences, seek and value students point of view, provide social context of content, and create new understandings (Christie, 2005; Honebein, 1996).

Constructivist teachers encourage students to constantly question themselves and their strategies. Students are also encouraged to assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding. Through the use of questioning, themselves and their strategies, students become "expert learners" (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004). This practice not only equip students with tools to keep learning, but it helps students learn how to learn (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004). Moreover, students in a constructivist classroom have more of an active role within the learning process. They are able to discover their own meaning, while constructing, creating, inventing, and developing knowledge and meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Readers construct meaning by making new connections with their existing knowledge. Constructivist readers approach text with their prior knowledge (schemata) along with strategies and other self-characteristics such as world view, beliefs, attitude, motives, values, motivation and linguistic ability (Gunning, 2008). Its basic principle supports students' self-exploration and learning control integrated with their existing knowledge (Koohang, 2009).

Constructivist philosophy is influential in both psychology and education, with roots in (Woolfolk, 2001) Piagetian developmental psychology (Paiget, 1972). Though unquestioned, this unchallenged view of authority was a segue to a more objective mode of inquiry that characterized the modern period (Central Washington University: The Center for Teaching and Learning, 2011). Constructivism represents one of the biggest ideas in education where its implications for how teachers teach and learn to teach are enormous (BADA & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivism is an epistemology or theory that

is instrumental in explicating how people know what they know (Bhattacharjee, 2015). As defined by Thirteen Ed Online (2004), essentially, constructivism maintains that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and as a result, reflecting on those experiences. Teachers' personal theories of learning have longed been viewed as having significant impact on all aspects of their decision about instruction, their expectations for what learning outcomes are to be valued and sought and how they plan their instruction (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000).

Constructivism is characterized by plurality and multiple perspectives (Yilmaz, 2008). It assumes that the meaning of events and experiences are formulated by individuals who construct their realities in which they participate (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist theoretical approach recognizes the role of the teacher as one who adapts to the learner's needs while giving them the freedom to construct knowledge for themselves.

Summary

The early phases of learning to read is crucial in that it sets the stage for later reading and academic performance (Masten et al., 2009). Wallot, O'Brien, Haussmann, Kloos, and Lyby (2014) contend that skilled reading is associated with good comprehension. The text complexity standard in the CCSS was developed with the goal of all students being college and career ready after completion of the 12th grade (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Text complexity is not a new way to look at texts. In fact, the idea of text complexity has been around for almost a century as a part of readability formulas developed by government and educational agencies (Hiebert, 2012). Students in

the earlier grades are particularly at a disadvantage as it relates to text complexity and complex text because the CCSS's four indicators of text complexity (level of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands) fail to identify the full range of complexity characteristics unique to texts designed to support emergent readers' progress (Stillman & Anderson, 2017).

Given the widening gap that persist between what students read in school and are expected to read and comprehend in college, teachers are being asked to teach more complex texts (Tucker, 2013). In fact, teachers are willing to help their students read increasingly complex texts. Yet, many are unsure how they can assist their students in this area. This study examined teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and complex text in their classrooms and how this understanding impacts their literacy instruction. The literature review provided an overview of text complexity and complex text and the "eras" focused on text that precedes it. This study is essential in the area of reading education in that it provides an overview of how complex text is used within classrooms and how it impacts the way teachers teach reading.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an outline of the research methodology and describe the

research design and reasoning for its use in this study and how these methods address my

research purpose and questions. Next, I explain my role as the researcher, provide an

overview of the setting and participants, how the data was collected and analyzed, a

timeline of research, and then conclude with the limitations of the study. The purpose of

this study was to examine second grade teachers' (from varied school contexts)

understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their

classroom. The following research questions guided my study:

1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and

   complex text?

2) How do second grade teacher integrate and use complex text in reading and

   literacy lessons in their classrooms?

3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading?

Research Design

Education and other areas of social activity are considered applied social science

or fields of practice based on the premise that practitioners within these fields encounter

everyday concerns of people's lives (Merriam, 2009). Having an interest in knowing

more about one's practice as well as improving one's practice lead to asking researchable

questions, some of which are best approached through a qualitative research design

(Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research design includes the collection, analysis, and

interpretation of narrative and visual non-numerical data, which as a result provides

insight into a particular phenomenon (Gay, Mill, & Airasian, 2012). Qualitative research

can be found in a range of disciplines and topic areas (Tracy, 2013). It is a term with

varied meanings in educational research and considered a form of systematic empirical

inquiry into meaning (Shank, 2002) that involves an *interpretive* and *naturalistic*

approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Borg and Gall (1989) suggest that the term

qualitative is often used interchangeably with terms such as *naturalistic, ethnographic,*

subjective, and *postpositivistic.*

Qualitative research design focuses on rich description of content (Tracy, 2013)

and often involves situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005). It employs varied philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiries, and

methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2009). In examining the

participants' understanding of text complexity and complex text, and how complex text is

used in their classrooms, I identified the complexity of views (Creswell, 2007). Hence,

my rationale for using qualitative methods was to gain an understanding of how 2nd grade

teachers within varied school context construct their understanding and experiences with

respect to text complexity and complex text (Patton, 1985). Creswell offers several core

characteristics that supported my position in conducting a qualitative research study. My

research was conducted in the field, where I interacted with the participants.

Additionally, I used multiple data collection methods such as observations and interviews

and conducted an inductive analysis to build patterns, categories and themes. In acquiring

narratives and descriptions that outline second grade teachers' understanding of text

complexity and complex texts, how complex texts are used during literacy instruction,

and its impact on how literacy is taught, a qualitative method design was relevant for this study.

Case Study

Baškarada (2013) posits that a qualitative case study research involves intensive analysis of an individual unit such as a person, community or an organization. As such, case studies afford the researcher an opportunity to gain a deeper holistic view of the research problem, while facilitating the description, understanding, and explanation of a research problem or situation. While case studies have been traditionally viewed as soft research, Yin (2009) contends that case study research is remarkably difficult. Yin provides a case study process that is comprised of six interdependent stages: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze and share (See Figure 1). The planning stage is the first step in the case study process and focuses on identifying the research question or rationale for utilizing a case study method, deciding whether to use the case study method, and understanding the strengths and limitations of case studies. Once the decision is made to use a case study method, the researcher moves onto the design stage where focus is placed on defining the unit of analysis and the cases to be studied. It is also during this stage that the researcher develops a theory, identifies issues underlying the anticipated study, identifies the type of case study design (*single, multiple, holistic, embedded*) and develops procedures to maintain case study quality (*construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability*) (Merriam, 2009). Next, the preparation stage prepares the researcher to become a case study investigator, train for a specific case study, develop a case study protocol, conduct a pilot case and gain any relevant approvals.

After preparation, the researcher transitions to the collection stage where the case study protocol is followed, multiple sources of evidence are used, a case study database is created and a chain of evidence maintained. As evidenced by the continuous arrow (See Figure 1), the preparation and collection stages occur concurrently. The researcher then moves to the analysis stage where he/she relies on theoretical prepositions and other strategies, considers and employs analytic techniques, explores rival explanations, and displays data (facts) apart from interpretation. The final stage in the case study process is the sharing stage. Here, the researcher disseminates the information gathered while at the same time provides evidence for readers to draw his/her own conclusions.
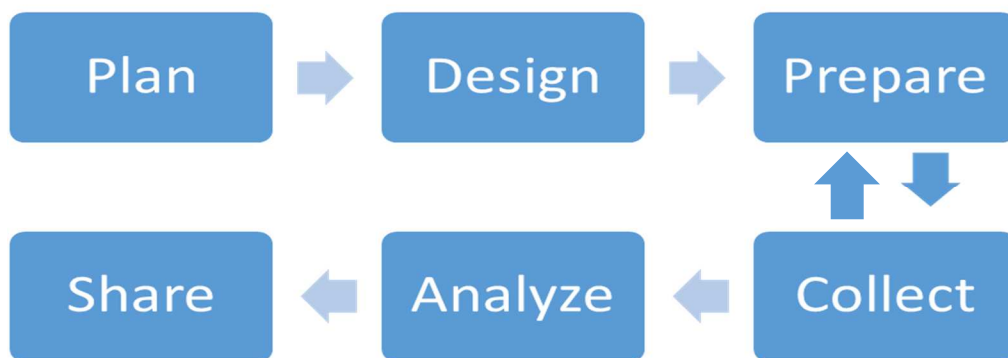
Figure 1. Case study process

I used a qualitative multisite case study design to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classrooms. I chose a qualitative multiple case study design because it was the most effective method for answering my research questions. A multiple case study enabled me, the researcher, to look beyond the individual case to the phenomenon, in this case 2nd grade teachers of literacy/reading. Stake (2006) contends that cases provide an

opportunity to examine the phenomenon by bringing the findings from the individual

case experiences to the research questions, while making observations about correlations

between events occurring together. Semi-structured interviews, observations and follow-

up interviews were used to ascertain participants' understanding of text complexity and

complex text and how the use of complex texts impacted the teaching of reading.

Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study

complex phenomena within their context using varied data sources. This ensures that

issues explored are done through a lens that allows multiple facets of the phenomenon to

be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2003) suggests that when

choosing a case study approach, the behavior of participants in the study should not be

influenced, contextual conditions should be covered due to their relevance to the

phenomenon under study, and one should determine whether boundaries are unclear

between the phenomenon and context.

Case study methodology is effective in investigating and understanding complex

issues in real world settings and has been used across a number of disciplines,

particularly in the areas of social sciences, education, business, law and health (Harrison,

Burkes, Franklin & Mills, 2017). Adeyemo (2015) used a case study to explore teachers'

perceptions of mandated, read-aloud expository text strategies in K-2 classrooms. Based

on the data attained, several themes emerged: 1) teachers' perceptions of implementation,

2) teachers' perceptions of benefits, 3) teachers' perception of situational strategies and 4)

teachers' perceptions of explanations for use. Based on the results, participants varied in

the selection and implementations of read aloud expository text strategies.

Sicherer (2014) also used a case study design to explore how elementary level general education teachers perceived the relationship between their training and knowledge of dyslexia and teacher efficacy in the inclusive classroom. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews which yielded several themes: 1) lack of appropriate pre-service or in-service training, 2) little knowledge about dyslexia, 3) lack of empirically proven strategies, 4) the challenge of an inclusive classroom for general education teachers, 5) lack of information about how dyslexia affects teaching in the inclusive classroom, 6) how lack of support and resources affect ability to teach all children effectively, 7) the weak relationship to phonological processing, and 8) inconsistent definitions of dyslexia. The above study's findings highlight the need for increased training of teachers with respect to dyslexia.

Role of the Researcher

This study is connected to my broader research focus on how teachers teach reading and its impact on how students learn to read. I was curious about teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex texts, how they utilize complex text in their classroom as well as how it impacts how they teach reading/literacy. For the purpose of this study, my role was that of researcher, participant observer, listener and reflector. As a participant observer, I interacted with my study's participants in their natural setting while maintaining a sense of objectivity through distance (Kawulich, 2005). My goal was for teachers to understand and reflect upon how their position, beliefs and understandings of reading inclusive of complex text impacts how they teach. Throughout this study, I encouraged participants to be open and honest about the questions they were asked.

Research Context

The study took place at three school sites, with varied demographics in the Southeastern region of the United States during the 2017/2018 academic year (See Table 1). The three school sites are within one school district. One second grade teacher from each school site that has taught for more than three to five years and currently teaches reading/literacy in second grade was invited using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies in qualitative research, groups participants according to a preselected criterion relevant to a particular research question (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey, 2011). A multisite/multiple case study was used in this study. By employing a multisite/multiple case study, it lends itself to a greater variation across cases (Merriam, 2009), while at the same time strengthening the precision, validity and stability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.29). Participation was completely voluntary and took place after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was attained. One teacher from each school site was interviewed, observed teaching a reading lesson using complex text where in-depth field notes were taken, and participated in a follow-up interview.

Table 1

School Information

School	School Demographics	Number of Second Grade Teachers
Uptown Elementary (pseudonym)	White 74.9% Latino/Latina 10 % Black 7.1% Asian 2% Two Races 5.7% American Indian 0.2% Pacific Islander 0.2%	8

Fox Plane Elementary School (pseudonym)	White 57.8% Latino/Latina 11.9% Black 1.2% Asian 21.8% Two Races 6.6% American Indian 0.6% Pacific Islander 0%	8
Taylor North Elementary (pseudonym)	White 51.3% Latino/Latina 16.8% Black 6.3% Asian 19.5% Two Races 5.9% American Indian 0% Pacific Islander 0.2%	6

Subjectivity Statement

The position in which this study is viewed is rooted in my position as a former elementary school teacher and researcher. Having taught in an international classroom for several years, this study afforded me the opportunity to gain insight into pedagogical tools that teachers use to improve literacy within the earlier grades in American classrooms. It also afforded me the opportunity to identify and recognize the participants' unique classroom experiences. Overall, this study is framed by the experience of the participants and my own personal inquiry and experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected from various sources during the spring 2018 semester. The primary data sources included interviews and observations. Each teacher was observed as well as interviewed individually during different times throughout the semester. In-depth field notes were used to document interactions that occurred during classroom observations.

Qualitative data consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge, which are obtained through interviews, observations or documents (Merriam, 2009). However, interviews are considered one of the most common forms of data collection in qualitative study (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). DeMarrais (2004) defines an interview as a process in which the researcher and participant engage in conversation focused on questions related to the research study. Merriam (2009) maintains that interviews are necessary when participants' behavior, feelings, or how they interpret the world around them cannot be observed. Interviews, the preferred tactic of data collection, gather better data, more data, or data at less cost than other tactics (Dexter, 1970).

Like interviews, observations are considered a primary source of data in qualitative research. Merriam (2009) posits that being alive renders us natural observers of the everyday world and the behavior in it, which in turn helps to make sense of the world while guiding future actions. When observing, the data emerges as the participant observer interacts in the daily flow of events and activities and the intuitive reactions and hunches experienced as all the factors come together (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993). Observations offer firsthand accounts of the situation under study and when combined with interviews and document analysis, a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon investigated is developed (Merriam, 2009).

Before interviews and observations were conducted, participants selected for this study read and signed a consent form and participated in an audio-recorded initial semi-structured interview that stimulated discussion that was later transcribed. As the interviewer, I assumed the posture of a listener and reflector as much, if not more than a

questioner (Tracy, 2013). Once initial interviews were conducted, teachers were observed during a reading/literacy lesson. In-depth field notes documented the interactions that occurred during the classroom observations. Based on the observation and the information gathered, a follow-up interview was conducted. The follow-up interview was also audio recorded and later transcribed. Interviews and observations were conducted at the various school sites at varied times to accommodate the schedules of the participants.

Phase I: Data. After successful presentation of my dissertation proposal and approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB), I began the first phase of my study, which involved data collection (See Table 2). I collected data from the varied sources during the spring 2018 semester as I sought answers to my research questions that examined teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how their use of complex text impacted what they taught. Participants were interviewed using an initial interview protocol (see Appendix C). Participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Participants were also observed within the classroom setting. Teacher participants were observed teaching a literacy/reading lesson using complex texts. In-depth field notes were written to document what was observed. Coding was used to identify patterns that developed in the data.

Phase II: Follow-up. At the culmination of the study, follow-up interviews with participants were conducted. The format of the interviews was based upon additional questions that developed from the initial interviews and observations. The interviews answered the research questions as well as additional questions relating to teachers'

understanding of text complexity and complex text and how their understanding impacts

how they taught. The interviews were conducted individually, audiotaped and transcribed

for analysis. The data collected was also triangulated to formulate and document a

detailed and thorough case study of the perspective of second grade teachers.

Table 2

Research Timeline

Month	Project Goal	Expected Completion Date	Activity
February 2018	Begin observations and interviews	Ongoing	Retain subjects for case study
February-March 2018	Conduct follow-up interviews	Ongoing	Complete follow-up interviews
March-April 2018	Analyze data	Spring 2018	Conduct analysis
May 2018	Present my findings	Summer I 2018	Present findings

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that requires astute questioning, a relentless search for

answers, active observation and accurate recall (Saldana, 2008). It is an essential step in

qualitative research. Data analysis is considered the most complex and mysterious of all

the phases of a qualitative project (Thorn, 2000). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007)

contend that qualitative data analysis can be described as a process of making sense from

research participants' views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes,

categories and regular similarities. The aims of qualitative data analysis involve

describing the phenomenon in some or greater detail, comparing several cases to

determine their similarities and differences, and developing a theory of the phenomenon

under study from the analysis of empirical material (Flick, 2013). For the purposes of this

study, I utilized qualitative data analysis methods to answer my research questions (see

Table 3).

Table 3

Alignment of analysis and research questions

Analysis	Research questions addressed	Data Collection Methods
Within-Case Analysis	1, 2 & 3	Interviews and Observations
Cross-Case Analysis	1, 2 & 3	Interviews and Observations

Green et al., (2007) offers four steps of data analysis to generate best qualitative

evidence (See Figure 2). The first step in the analysis of data is *immersion*. The

interviewer is considered the most immersed in the data through repeated reading and re-

reading of interview transcripts and contextual data as well as listening to recordings of

the interviews. I conducted initial interviews with teacher participants about their

conceptualization/understanding of text complexity and complex text (see Appendix C)

and a follow-up interview after lesson activity observation (see Appendix D). The next

step in data analysis is *coding*. According to Saldana (2008), a code is a qualitative

inquiry that is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative,

salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or

visual data. It forces the researcher to make judgments and tag blocks of transcripts while

moving back and forth and applying descriptive labels to segments of the document

(Green et al., 2007).

| STEP 1: DATA IMMERSION | STEP 2: CODING | STEP 3: CREATING CATEGORIES | STEP 4: IDENTIFYING THEMES |

Figure 2. Data analysis steps

Coding was done manually by reading and rereading the data looking for important patterns that emerged. Open coding was used to break down, examine, compare, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding involves the tentative development and labeling of concepts in the text that may have potential relevance to the problem being studied (Hardy & Bryman, 2004). A list of preliminary codes (see Table 3) were developed during the initial analysis.

Table 4

Initial Codes

CONTEACH	Conceptualization-Teacher
INTE/USETEACH	Integrate/Use-Teacher
IMPACTEACH	Impact-Teaching
IMPACTLEARN	Impact-Learning

Upon completion of the initial coding process, it is recommended to revisit data to examine the ways codes may be linked. The third step in this process is *creating categories*. Axial coding was used to code single categories that emerged during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). It is during this step that the detailed examination of data is carried out to categorize ways in which research participants speak about aspects of the issue under investigation. Axial coding, which is a process developed by Strauss

and Corbin (1998) involves the reassembling of substantive codes. Axial coding was also used to confirm that my concepts and categories were accurately represented via interview responses. Triangulation was achieved by using multiple data sources. This allowed me to examine the consistency of different data sources using the same data method (Denzin, 1978 & Patton, 1999).

Codes are linked to create coherent categories and concerned with looking for a 'good fit' between codes that share a relationship (see Table 4). The fourth and final step in this process is the identification of themes. Green et al. (2007) contend that a theme is more than a category and requires moving beyond a description of range of categories, shifting to an explanation or an interpretation of the issue under investigation.

Table 5

Codes and Categories

Code	Description
CONTEXCOM	Conceptualization-Text Complexity
CONCOMTEX	Conceptualization-Complex Text
USETEACH	Use-Complex Text
IMPACTEACH	Impact-Teaching
IMPACLEAR	Impact-Learning

Interpretation of the data was done using within-case and cross-case analysis. Within-case analysis considered each classroom case as a separate story. A summary for each case was developed to describe and interpret the data. Within-case analysis was used to address research questions 1, 2 and 3. Topics were organized based on themes (see Table 5). Within-case analysis in case study research is an in-depth exploration of a

single case as a stand-alone entity (Paterson, 2012). Cross-Case analysis was used as a

second step of interpretation. It involved an analysis across the three cases to look for

patterns among the cases. Research questions 1, 2 and 3 were addressed using cross-case

analysis. Cross-case analysis facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences

in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies (Khan

& VanWynsberghe, 2008). It is considered tricky and requires a careful look at complex

configurations of processes within each case (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 6

Themes

Themes
- Teacher's conceptualization of text complexity   - Teacher's conceptualization of complex text   - Teacher's use of complex text   - Impact (use of complex text) on teaching   - Impact (use of complex text) on learning

When an investigator engages in cross-case analysis, it extends his/her expertise

beyond the single case (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). Stretton (1969) maintains that it

provokes the researcher's imagination, prompts new questions, reveals new dimensions,

produces alternatives, generates models, and constructs ideals and utopias. Eisenhardt

(1989) contends that this analysis combination (within-case and cross-case analysis) is

advantageous for several reasons. Within-case analysis allows the researcher to become

intimate with each case, allowing its unique patterns to emerge while still maintaining the

distinctive identity of each case. A qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build

abstractions across cases (Merriam, 2009). Cross-case analysis is a method used to

mobilize knowledge from individual case studies (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). Although particular details of specific cases may vary, a general explanation can be built to fit individual cases (Yin, 2008). Cross-case analysis allowed me to compare cases from the various schools (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008).

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Qualitative research embraces multiple standards of quality such as validity, credibility, rigor, or trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005). When looking at the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, validity must be considered. Credibility or internal validity's purpose is to confirm that a study measures or test what is intended. External validity or transferability is more so concerned with the extent to which findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). The trustworthiness of the study ensured that the data collected were from multiple sources and genuinely reflected and respected the participants. Throughout my study, I employed trustworthiness through the gathering of data from multiple sources, conducted member checks, as well as cross-checked information.

To gather my data, I conducted interviews as well as observations to garner participants' perspectives or insight. I also conducted follow-up interviews to obtain answers for questions that emerged during the initial interviews and observations. Once data was collected from multiple sources, I provided each participant the opportunity to verify the findings. I also cross-checked the information through the use of triangulation to ensure that the data collected offered a fair and accurate depiction of their perspectives or insight.

Risk and Benefits of the Research and Ethical Consideration

This study posed no risks to participants. Yet, it provided many potential benefits in that early grade teachers of literacy shared their experiences as well as their understandings related to complex text and literacy. Their voices and experiences have the potential to contribute greatly to the area of reading/literacy education.

Ethical issues are present in any kind of research. However, the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of all participants in this study were offered primary consideration. Participants were also provided anonymity and confidentiality. Their responses will remain confidential and secured. Each participant was represented by a special code. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study. The data collected from this study was accessible to the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee members.

As a qualitative study utilizing a case study method approach, a total of three teachers from three different school sites were selected for this study. Based on the sample size, the experiences of these teachers are not a generalized representation of 2nd grade elementary teachers who teach reading/literacy. This study addressed 2nd grade teachers and did not include upper grade teachers and specialized area teachers in elementary school. Further, middle and high school teachers of literacy were not considered. Elementary school 2nd grade teachers who teach reading/literacy were selected from several schools within one school district located in a southern state. This study was conducted with the assumptions in mind that participants provided truthful accounts of their experiences and beliefs. Additionally, this study involved willing participants of the population of 2nd grade teachers of reading/literacy.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology along with a case study design to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text, how teachers utilize complex text in their classroom and how it impacts their literacy instruction. The study, which was conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year involved three second grade teachers from three different school sites within the same district. Data was collected during the spring 2018 semester via semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, observations and field notes analyzed using a cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the current qualitative multiple case study was to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classroom. This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected through semi-structured in-depth, audio-recorded interviews, follow-up interviews, as well as observations of three (3) second grade teachers teaching within one school county located in the Southeastern region of the United States. As participants provided their own understandings and experiences with relation to text complexity and complex text and how complex text impact their instruction, the nature of their experiences explicate their view in the context of their classrooms.

Questions from the initial interview protocol employed during the data collection were developed based on the three research questions that guided this study:

1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text?

2) How do second grade teacher integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms?

3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading? The follow-up interview questions were derived from in-depth fieldnotes written during observation.

The data collected in this study is in response to each teacher's own unique experience as it related to each research question. In this chapter, I first organize each

case findings in terms of the participants' responses for each research question. Next, I identify significant similarities and differences across the three cases using cross-case analysis describing the participants' understanding of text complexity and complex texts and the impact it has on the teaching and learning of reading (See Table 5). The first and third research questions will be addressed in the cross-case analysis. The chapter will conclude with a final summary.

Within-Case Analysis

Case One: Pamela-Uptown Elementary

School, Class and Teacher Information

At the time of this study, 74.9% of the student body at Uptown Elementary were White, 10% were Latino/Latina, 7.1% were Black, 2% were Asian, 5.75% were of two races, 0.2% were American Indian and 0.2% were Pacific Islander. Pamela, a second grade teacher for a total of six years within her current district, have taught in another school county in another state for three years. She taught second and fourth grades also in this district. There are a total of eight second grade classrooms at this school site. Pamela mentioned that the school lacked diversity. However, she stated that the school has a good team kind of culture atmosphere that involves a lot of sharing, willingness to help and create.

Pamela's teaching career spans over nine years. She has worked in her current district for 6 years, while working as a teacher in another district for 3 years. During her teaching career in another county, she worked for three years as a second-grade teacher. Pamela is the instructor of reading in her classroom and teaches other subjects such as

math, writing, science, and social studies. Even though Pamela is the teacher of reading in her classroom, she mentioned that there is not a reading specialist at her school, but a person who oversees reading as far as interventions for children that are struggling with reading. The students in her second grade class spanned ability levels. Students were reading below, at or above grade level.

Lesson Activity Observation

On February 21st, I went to Pamela's second grade classroom to observe a lesson activity using complex text. In her class, I observed her interaction with the students, while utilizing complex texts. The students were working in small groups. Some were completing social studies activities (weather projects) using a computer. Others were completing a small group activity with another teacher (word stories) and Mrs. Guzman was working with her small groups (five students) using one of several novels that she was using with her groups. She considered these novels as complex text based on the level of students. The first novel used was Black Beauty.

She began with questioning, asking students how they can guess what the book may be about. One student responded they can go on a picture walk. The students were looking through the book and were directed to look at the table of contents. The teacher explained that the table of contents help the reader to identify what the book may be about. They were then instructed to look at the first chapter title in the text. The teacher (Pamela) then asked, what do you think the story is about? There were several responses. After which, she led the group of students to discuss the horses in the story. She asked if the book was fiction or nonfiction. One student responded that horses do not talk, so it is fiction.

The group moved onto Chapter 2, entitled, My breaking in. Pamela asked the group, "What do you think this chapter will be about?" One student responded, "The horse finding a home and breaking into it so that he can live there." Another student gave an example of after purchasing a new shoe, you break it in to get use to it. Pamela went through every chapter, using the table of contents, asking the students what they thought the chapter was about. The students referred to the book as a 'classic'. She allowed students to give their thoughts on what each chapter was about. She also integrated a lot of students' backgrounds particularly with the books they read in class. She incorporated some of the text they read with the book they were going to read. They discussed animals such as birds and how they migrate. Students were asked to read the last chapter, think of what they believe the story is about and share it with a partner.

The students then rotated groups, so a new group began working with the text, Smith Family Robinson, which is also a classic. She asked the students to predict what the book may be about, what they may see, etc. She explained to the group that the book may be difficult, but it is a book they can read it. She directed the students to the back of the book, where a summary of the story was found. She instructed the students to read the summary and share with a partner what they think the book is about? The students, after reading the story, discussed with a neighbor what they thought the story was about. Pamela provided great questioning. The book that she used with this particular group was a chapter book with pictures. The student looked particularly at the pictures throughout the book and discussed what the book may be about. They first looked at the title page and cover. Pamela described what she saw. The students were then directed to the table of contents, where they went through the chapters and discussed what each chapter, or

what they thought each chapter was about. The students brought in their experiences as well as background knowledge to the book. They had in-depth discussion about what each chapter may be. The students went on to discuss island life and the difficulty the family might face living on the island. The group focused mainly on the first chapter.

The students were then directed to chapter 4, Falcon Hurst. The teacher modeled her thinking as to what she thought the chapter was about. She said, "I know falcon is a bird, but don't know what the chapter is about."" Then she stated, "because we are unsure what the chapter is about, should we not choose this book?" The students responded no. She added, "Because you are unsure what they chapter may be about, you can still choose the book." The students were encouraged to discuss and talk about their inference or understanding of what the chapter may be about.

The third and final group that I observed was introduced to the book Cam Jansen. Students were asked to infer what they thought Cam Jensen was about. Several of the responses were, "It is a mystery book. It is a collection." Students were instructed to read the summary of the book on the back like the previous group. The students looked at the pictures throughout the book. One student used the picture at the beginning of the book that showed recycling and inferred that the book may be about recycling. The students were asked to look at the picture and describe what it may mean or what they may learn. The book they used was also a chapter book, but it did not provide the title of the chapters and had a lot more pictures. One student read, while the other students followed along. At certain points, the teacher stopped the student that was reading and asked questions. The students were encouraged to go back if they were unsure about an answer to the question asked.

While reading, the students were asked if they had a connection to a specific part of the story, which looked at picking up of trash. One student responded that they help take the trash out at home. The teacher then talked about the recycling center that students visited while in 1st grade. That was her connection to the story. The teacher also brought in the example of Walmart and the chunks that they have in their ceiling which helps to preserve energy while helping to bring sun within the store. The teacher then ended the group discussion and asked students to get ready for their special area class.

Teacher Interview

Pamela, when asked to talk about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how they informed her instruction, she considered CCSS as skills and standards followed. As it relates to informing her instruction, she acknowledged that they have always been the foundation from which instruction is built. Pamela added:

> It informs the instruction by, we take the standards and we dissect it and we make sure that the materials we have support it, so right now we're doing non-fiction text features, so the literacy we're using supports that. They have the title, and the headings, the glossary and things like that. The activities we do kind of go along with that also. It's not necessarily our entire reading chunk, but it is a component or mini-lesson section and we try to bring it throughout the rest of our instruction. Hit it here and there when applicable.

Although Pamela provided the way in which the CCSS inform her instruction, she also highlighted the way in which her school district have supported teachers as it relates to the CCSS. She shared:

> …..two years ago, our district decided to come together and pull a few people and create like a second, each grade level, but a yearlong pacing. So, we looked at all the standards, all the common core reading, math, science, social studies, language arts, all of those components and we broke them out into how does this flow well throughout the year. And, then we pace those out by like weeks; some of them have a few weeks, you know some of them have like four or five weeks,

that's like our chunkier standards and then some of them have fewer weeks if they are lighter standards or if we're going to hit them this week and then again in another week and things like that.

Pamela's conceptualization of text complexity vs. complex text

In examining the first research question, Pamela was asked to define text complexity and how she uses it to evaluate materials used in her classroom. To Pamela, text complexity was "the kind of words in a story." She continued:

….what kind of words are in the story and some of that helped out with the leveling. You know, I'm not going to pull a book that has 250 words from a higher grade, it just doesn't make sense. And, how challenging is it going to be for them. This is on their level right now, but it's in very complex thoughts and ideas. The writing, where some of the books are just very straightforward. I would say that they are not very complex as far as the text. Even though I can apply a lot of standards to them, the complexity isn't there where, those are maybe, some of the less complex or more challenging text, I wouldn't use for my lower groups, because they really need to have a lot of the modeling. They need to be able to find the answers easily. They can't really dig through it yet. More so, not necessarily in my novels as much, because we're really helped out by them being leveled.

When asked to talk about complex text and provide examples of complex texts, Pamela mentioned one of the books she was currently using in her class, Swiss Family Robinson. She referred to the book's level, which she acknowledged was two levels above where most of her students were. She also focused on the language in the book. Pamela considered a complex text as one that has "challenging language" and is a few levels above students reading level. She went on to say:

…..the language is really, the way they have to dig, because it is not written, this was published of course 2006, this copy. But, this is much older, so the language is much more challenging for them to kind of relate to and just to kind of, to discern, you know.

Although Pamela provided two distinct understandings of text complexity and complex text, when asked how the two concepts were similar and/or different, she replied:

> I think complex text and text complexity are similar in that you have to find the right level for your students and to push them. I think they are similar because whatever you choose needs to support the standards you're trying to reinforce as well as engage them and make them think. Maybe they're different in the fact that clearly you're complex text and text complexity; your text complexity to me is more so your levels, but the readability, where I think complex text that's a component of finding complex text, does that make sense…

Ways Pamela Integrate/Use Complex Text in Reading/Literacy Instruction

Pamela, when asked how she integrate/use text complexity and complex text in her ELA reading instruction and content area instruction, she highlighted that both concepts were the driving force behind her reading instruction. She went onto say:

> …because I want to have the right materials that are challenging, but not too challenging. I use my levels, I read my passages before just giving it to you know.

She also highlighted that science, math and social studies are both integrated in her ELA reading instruction with the use of technology. She mentioned that she is able to build collections for every reading level in her classroom. She chooses a specific book and find the varied levels so that every student in her class is given the opportunity to enjoy same kind of book.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Pamela's Teaching

When Pamela was asked to talk about the impact complex text has on your

reading/literacy instruction and other content areas, she reflected on her past

experience as a teacher in another state, using a different type of text. She stated:

> Well, honestly, when I was in another state, we had a basal. And, everybody read
> the same story. Four times, you know. I'm sitting in a reading group hearing the
> same story four times. And for some children, it was incredibly challenging; for
> others, it was kind of right where they needed to be; and for some it was
> incredibly boring. I find that very frustrating. And we had little supplemental
> readers. But again, it was still just like below, on, high. And they supported the
> main story or theme, or you know the standard, but it wasn't the same.

Having experienced using basal with students and now complex text, Pamela

acknowledged that she saw no benefit in the use of basal readers. She also highlighted the

opportunity that she was afforded as a classroom teacher in the county where she

currently teaches. She was able to choose books that catered to all reading levels in her

class. She mentioned that being able to choose books for her students as opposed to

having to conform to a one-size-fits all approach to reading was making a great impact

and that it was important. With respect to content areas, Pamela believes complex text

impact these areas because students are afforded choice to the books they are exposed to.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Student's Learning

Pamela, when asked her thoughts on the impact the use of complex text may have

on students' learning, she believe that it has an impact. She elaborated:

> I think complex text, for my lower kids, the impact it has on their understanding is
> that I've picked a book I know they can be successful in. Where in my higher
> group, the complex text, the impact it has on their understanding is I pick a book
> that's going to challenge them, make them uncomfortable. And they might not,
> exactly understand everything on their own and we have to have a conversation
> for them to, more like a discussion as a group for them to truly understand the

whole meaning. Like they have the idea, but they don't grasp the entire meaning or the severity of an event until we have a discussion. So that's how I think it impacts the different groups.

When asked to expound on the challenges and benefits of using complex text, Pamela expressed that there are challenges as it relates to such as planning, and locating varied leveled books that focus on the same subject. She stated:

> The challenges are that I have multiple books, multiple plans, it's very diverse, which is a challenge as a teacher, because when I'm building my collections for science and social studies, I'm always really thoughtful about, do I have one that this group can read? Do I have one that my higher group can understand and be engaged in still? Do I have enough to keep everybody interested and have nobody feel like, oh I just can't, this is too hard. And in my reading groups that's four other books. So, it's challenging as far as the planning and the previewing and the writing questions and really making sure this is a good fit for them.

Pamela's responses as it relates to the benefits:

> The benefits? It just totally benefits my kids. It just really does. Like I said, having the basal and having the one book fits all, it just does not fit. It's really awful. Really and truly awful. So, having something that I know is within their grasp. Even with my lower groups, even though I picked something they can understand and that is a little bit more straightforward, it's still challenging, where when it's the basal and it is one story for everybody that might be far too challenging for them week after week after week. And then, at a certain point, you're working hard and you're getting nowhere. You stop working hard. So, the benefits are my students, absolutely and their engagement and their desire and their enjoyment without, sometimes without knowing that they're working hard and their learning. I love when my kids are reading, they laugh, or they giggle, you know because they are so engrossed in the story.

Analysis

I examined the three research questions using within-case analysis. Five themes emerged: (a) teacher's conceptualization of text complexity, (b) teacher's conceptualization of complex text, (c) teacher's use of complex text, (d) impact (use of complex text) on teaching, and (e) impact (use of complex text) on learning. These

themes were connected to the research questions because they provided answers to teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text, how teachers integrate and use complex text within their classrooms and how it impacts the teaching and learning of reading. When Pamela was asked to define text complexity, she responded, "Text complexity, I kind of define as, what kind of words are in the story and some of that helped out with the leveling." Pamela's understanding of text complexity is a limited one because she focused on the element of vocabulary with relation to reading levels. She also reduced the meaning of text complexity to the readability of text, which is a quantitative measure. While this is Pamela's understanding of text complexity, it does not align with how research defines the concept. Text complexity is comprised of several elements (Collier, 2013). When looking at text and text complexity, other factors include text structure, language conventions, as well as background and motivation to reading. Text complexity looks at the level of difficulty in reading and understanding a text based on three distinct factors, the readability of the text (Quantitative Measures), structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands and levels of meaning (Qualitative Measures) and the background knowledge of the reader, motivation, interest, complexity generated by teacher professional judgement (Reader and task considerations) (Bunch, Walqui & Pearson, 2014).

Synonyms for complex includes *involved, intricate, complicated* and *convoluted,* which can all be applied to some form of complex text (Glass, 2015). Yet, what may be considered complex is dependent upon a reader's features and teacher's ability to match the right complexity level to the reader. Pamela, when asked to share her understanding of complex text, she responded, "it is a text that has challenging language with varied

levels and needs to kind of hit multiple standards." Based on her response, the analysis revealed that Pamela had an understanding of complex text as opposed to text complexity. She used key words that are elements of a complex text, 'leveled', 'challenging', and 'hit standards.' Glass (2015) defines complex text as printed, visual, auditory, digital, and multimedia texts that complement each standards-based unit, align to curricular goals, and represent an appropriate level of challenge for students. Pamela added, "I think it definitely has to be leveled. You need to know that, the text you're getting is appropriate or challenging for your student. Not just going to the library, that looks interesting. It definitely has to be leveled and create a bit of a challenge for them. And I think it needs to have its multidimensions within it, where you could talk about beginning, middle and end."

In Pamela's ELA and content area classes, students are exposed to traditional text. When asked how she integrates these concepts in her ELA and content area classes, Pamela replied, "they are both the driving force behind what I teach." She added that with the use of technology she is able to integrate these concepts into her content area classes. Pamela stated, "I like to use like the online library, EPIC. So, I'll build collections for my class." Pamela's reliance on traditional text, which is a narrow set of textual types, are outside of the texts emphasized by the CCSS. The use of informational text is a key feature of the CCSS and given much focus because it is challenging and complex and affords the reader the opportunity to learn how to engage, interact and have conversations with the text in ways that prepare them for the experiences they will encounter during college and career. While the use of traditional text is encouraged, there are varied forms of informational text. These include books, magazines, handouts,

brochures, CD-ROMs, journal articles, technical texts (directions, forms, and information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps), and Internet resources. Glass (2015) maintained, students often encounter traditional text, however, there is a larger repertoire of material (informational text) that students can use to build their capacities in content areas. For instance, in social studies, students can look at graphs, artifacts or timelines rather than a traditional book. In science, students can look at diagrams, photographs, specimens, or experiment results.

Teachers across the content areas are responsible for exposing their students to rigorous text and incorporating literacy into their instruction. This is true for teachers in all areas (CCSSI, 2010b, p. 43). This is particularly important because not only is it an important skill, but it is a skill that is necessary for students' success in academics and college and career readiness. Glass (2015) maintains that good instruction is one that supports students' reading of increasingly complex texts, first by modeling and then by giving students many opportunities to critically analyze the text. When asked the impact the use of complex text have on her instruction, Pamela reverted to her experience as a teacher in another state. She highlighted the fact the use of basal readers was a one-size fits all approach and she saw no benefit in its use. However, Pamela believed that the use of complex text had a great impact on her teaching because it afforded her students varying levels of text focusing on the same topic. Yet, she mentioned that the use of complex text impacts her students' understanding in that they are exposed to text that they can be successful in while posing a little challenge and discomfort. When readers are given the opportunity to engage in complex text that offers 'appropriate complexity,' they are able to learn about themselves and eventually become successful readers. Fisher,

Frey, and Lapp (2012) argue that students should be provided with opportunities to struggle and to learn about themselves as readers when they struggle, persevere, and eventually succeed. Additionally, she indicated that it benefits her students because they are afforded 'choice' as it relates to texts/books. Choice is considered a well-supported motivational practice where students choose their own texts, tasks they perform and who they work with (Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, Taboada & Barbosa, 2006). When students are given choice, they are motivated to read and will choose books they are interested in. They will also choose to read and enjoy challenging text (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). While 'choice' is important when referring to the text students read (Johnson & Blair, 2003), what's most important, is the ability to comprehend complex texts (ACT, 2006).

Pamela used several texts with various groups during my observation of her lesson activity. There were no more than five students in each group. Pamela began her group activity by asking a question, "How can you guess what the book is about?" which began the focus of the lesson. Throughout each group, students were questioned, encouraged to verbally express their thoughts and share those thoughts with a partner or the group. Through a lot of questioning, students in each of Pamela's group were given the opportunity to construct their own understanding of the text. While students worked in groups, at some point during their small-group activity, they were encouraged to work with a partner. Pamela instructed the students to read the last chapter, think of what they believe the story is about and share it with a partner. Students were not only learning about a new text as an independent learner/reader, but they were learning within their groups. Having students use complex texts is critical for success in college, career and

life. While there are benefits to students using complex text, there are also challenges. Teachers often find difficulty in choosing the 'right text' that would encompass the components set out by the CCSS needed to support students in reading. When choosing the 'right' complex text, it should contribute to the reader's knowledge about the topic, it should be engaging and rich, and it should be at the right complexity level for students (Berger, Woodfin, Plaut, & Dobbertin, 2014). Additionally, students should be exposed to a variety of text. However, teachers face a challenge when balancing the types of texts students read. Berger, Woodfin, Plaut, and Dobbertin, (2014) contend that students need to gain experience and confidence with multiple texts such as complex texts, leveled texts, literary novels, informational texts, and texts they read for pleasure. In one of her groups, Pamela modeled how to infer. She looked at the cover and title page and described what she saw. She also incorporated students' background knowledge/experiences as it related to the topic of the book. This practice helps students to not only become independent thinkers, but also independent readers. Lucks (1999) maintained that learners construct their own understanding rather than having it delivered or transmitted to them; they use their own experiences to construct understandings; and new learning depends on prior understanding, interpreted in the context of current understanding and not first as isolated information that is later related to existing knowledge.

In this section, the first within-case analysis was examined. The data revealed that Pamela had a greater conceptualization/understanding of complex text as opposed to text complexity. Her understanding of text complexity was narrow when compared to the definition set out by the CCSS. It also revealed that students were exposed to traditional

text in both her ELA and content area classrooms. These findings suggest that the teacher gain a better understanding of the concept as well as expose students to a range of complex texts other than traditional text so that she can meet the needs of students in her classroom. These findings also suggest that students are not exposed to a wide genre of text, particularly informational, which is the type of text highlighted in the CCSS. The next section examines the second case. Using a within-case analysis, the second school, class and teacher's information will be outlined and the interview and observation data will be analyzed.

<div align="center">Case Two: Sarah-Fox Plane Elementary</div>

School, Class and Teacher Information

At the time of this study, 57.8% of the student body at Fox Plane Elementary were White, 11.9% were Latino/Latina, 1.2% were Black, 21.8% were Asian, 6.6% were of two races and 0.6% were American Indian. Fox Plane Elementary is a Title One school with 50% of the student population receiving free and reduced lunch. There are a total of six second grade classrooms at this school site.

Sarah is in her eleventh year of teaching at her current school. With over 11 years of classroom teaching experience, she has taught second-grade for seven years. She has also taught first grade and third grade for a period of two years each. Although the school has two reading specialists that focuses on Title I initiatives, Sarah is the instructor of reading in her classroom. She also teaches other subjects such as Math, Reading, Science and Social Studies integrated and Writing. Sarah's students spanned ability levels. Students were reading below, at or above grade level.

Lesson Activity Observation

     I observed a literacy lesson activity using complex text in Sarah's 2nd grade classroom on February 22nd. Teacher was observed interacting with the students, while utilizing complex texts. The teacher began by working with the whole class in an area of the classroom that was designated as the reading center/carpet. Her focus for the activity was 'metacognition.' She displayed a chart entitled, 'Good readers can STOP, THINK, THEN JOT ABOUT….' There were several codes also displayed, which were: 'p'-what they picture in their mind, '?' what they wonder, 't'-what they think, 'a heart'-what they feel, 'I'- what they find interesting and 'c'-what they connect to, STOP, THINK, JOT.

     During this activity, the book used was George Washington Carver (non-fiction book with chapters). The students, while sitting on the carpet had their response journal to write their responses as the teacher read the story. The teacher reviewed what the class did with Washington Carver. One student responded that they looked at text features in the form of a scavenger hunt. They used the Raz Kids book to identify text features. The lesson focused on the students listening to the story and being metacognitive. One student asked what jot meant, the teacher asked student for responses, then she clarified. The teacher showed the students the text features, first being the table of contents, she identified the chapters, as well as the index.

     Stolen in the night was the first chapter. The teacher and students talked about Carver's life from the very beginning. It began with them talking about the two slaves, which were stolen. The mother was gone, but the children were found and the Carver's raised the children because they had no children of their own. The teacher identified the pictures as well as caption. The first code used was the '?'- the teacher asked, why did

they not know when he was born? She responded: "Carver was adopted or taken in by the Carvers (aunt Susan and uncle Moses), him and his brother and they were taken care of as their son." Several responses included: "I-Uncle and aunt once owned the boys but took them in as their sons." The students wrote in their journals about what they were thinking/wondering about as it related to what the teacher read to them so far in the story. Some of the responses were (code-?) "Where did Mary go? Why did they take care of them? Why was his statue in Missouri? Why didn't they know his birth date? Who was George's dad? When was he born? Why did they take them in? Then the code 'heart' was used, which one student responded, "I felt bad for George because he got taken away from his mom."

The teacher clarified one question, "Why do you think they didn't know when he was born?" She explained that the record keeping was not accurate during that time, so that is why. The teacher then read chapter 2, Why and How. The teacher pointed out the text feature of the picture and the caption. She demonstrated the use of the strategy, using different codes of 'I', 'heart', and 'C.' She made a connection between the feelings students had of school during the period when the Carver story took place, to the feelings of school students have today. She emphasized that Carver wanted to go to school so bad that he lived in a shack, he did anything he could to attend school. She added that it reminded her of the difference between students then and now. "School was a privilege back then and now students look at it as an option." She explained. She garnered students' responses and their use of the codes. After the whole group activity using the complex text, the students were directed to the individual groups.

Interview

Sarah asked to talk about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how they inform her instruction. She considers the CCSS as a pacing guide that teachers use. She explained:

> ……have worked really hard with a team to pace out our entire year. And they take our year based on Math, reading, writing, science and social studies as well as language standards and they break it down week by week. So, we look at our pacing guide for the quarter or for the week, depending on where we're at in our discussion. And we take the unpacked document of the CCSS and we look at what the state expects us to do, what are some of the exemplars to look for when we're teaching our kids. We might look at strategies. We might bring our instructional coach who sits in the meeting.to find some technology integration, but we usually use those state standards in all subject areas that are put in our pacing guide to teach weekly. We usually do a CFA, some common form of assessment at the end of the unit or week, depending on where we're at to determine whether they were successful at those standards.

Sarah's conceptualization of text complexity vs. complex text

In examining the first research questions, Sarah was asked to define text complexity and how she uses it to evaluate materials used in her classroom. Sarah expressed that she was a little intimidated by the question. She decided to conduct research on the two terms/concepts. Her understanding of text complexity is that it is an approach tied to a standard. Sarah explains her conceptualization/ understanding of text complexity below:

> So, I was thinking about text complexity and it talks about these three different approaches to text complexity and one of them was this Lexile level. We don't use Lexile levels here very much. We use the MClass data, which is through the state, and so if I was going to choose a text for my kids, I'm not going to choose a Lexile level, I'm gonna focus more on the MClass level, which is Fountas and Pinnell's sort of related or reading letter, is basically what it is. And then, the other part was whether they understood it or not, you know, is there some sort of background knowledge that they can really be able to grasp or not and the third was whether I am setting a task that they can actually accomplish. So, is it tied to a standard, are we going to be able to do an activity with it, are we able to understand that activity, will they be able to do it independently? So, I was kind

of thinking of those three things as I selected dome of these texts. Some of them are a little complex for them, but I'm trying to scaffold their learning to get them there.

When asked how she uses text complexity to evaluate materials used in her classroom,

Sarah focused on books that are leveled and ones that her students would be interested in

reading. She responded:

> When I was choosing some of these guided reading text, after I did a little bit of research, I always got through and choose it for their level and interest…. I've always tried to choose books that they would be interested in and also books that hit the standard that I am focusing on. Because I think if you can have a, find a book that has text complexity, you can hit more than one standard in the same book and really dive deep into that.

In response to her conceptualization of complex text, Sarah believed that complex text

are texts that are very hard to decode; texts that are difficult for students to understand;

texts that have unfamiliar concepts and ideas. In addition to her response, Sarah offered

an example:

> It would be like me trying to read a law book or a medical book because I don't have any understanding. And I also probably won't be able to read some of the words because I just, it's too complex for me.

Sarah believed that text complexity and complex text are related, but slightly

different. She believed that there are several elements/characteristics that make a

text complex. She stated:

> When I'm thinking about the complex text versus text complexity, I feel like they are related but slightly different. For complex text I was thinking about, looking at for my kids maybe on a fourth-grade reading level, and I got a kid who's reading on a first-grade level. They're not, it's too complex for them. The ideas, the concepts, the background knowledge, they don't have to be able to really comprehend or understand that, so in literature and in informational text is really what I was thinking. I think the vocabulary, the sentence structure, and then the content behind it would be some of the structures that make it complex.

She added:

> …complex texts, it is similar with text complexity because as you are looking for books, that are going to challenge your reader, with the quality of the texts. So, with being able to have sentence structure and vocabulary and words they may not be able to decode without a little bit of help. You're wanting to have some of it in the text, but you don't want it to be so hard, and that's where I was kind of thinking the text complexity and complex text differs. Text complexity, I still want it to be sort of on their level, where it might be a just right fit book where they might be able to find five words they don't know and that's kind of what we talked about, when we talked about just right books. If you can get pass five on your finger and you still don't know that many words, it's probably isn't the just right fit book for you. So, text complexity, I want there to be like maybe a few words you don't know. With complex texts, that may be a read-aloud that I may need to introduce because there are going to be many words or vocabulary that you're not going to understand without me introducing it first.

Ways Sarah Integrate/Use Complex Text in Reading/Literacy Instruction

Sarah was also asked how she integrate/use text complexity and complex text in her ELA reading instruction and content area instruction. She explained that she uses shared reading daily, which focuses on a weekly skill that goes along with the pacing guide. She also mentioned that she uses online resources such as 'book flix' and EPIC. She went onto explain what EPIC is and how complex text is integrated during her ELA classes. She stated:

> EPIC is an online resource that we have. I might use books that I've scanned in, or a projectable book that we find on Reading A-Z or Read Works passage and I'm going to have it either displayed on the computer or give every student a copy and we're going to read the book first and then we're going to find whatever standard I'm wanting to work on. So, for non-fiction text-features, we've read a book and I've had them take screenshots of that book, finding the text features. So, I am trying to integrate, whatever my standard is, within that text I've chosen for the week. And I usually try to make it be in second grade reading level so I know my lower kids can reach up and get it and my higher kids can find some of the vocabulary and make meaning from that. With my guided reading, I am using on level text. So, whatever level the kid is working on, I'm using that level for them. So that's more of a differentiated type of reading instruction versus what we

do whole group and shared reading. And so for guided reading I choose a text that is going to challenge them and make them excited about reading. So, trying to focus on choosing the level that is appropriate for them and then on top of that I'm trying to give them a task to work on the standard of the week or whatever standard I think they may be assessed on at the end of the quarter for their comprehension. So, usually I have to go through and figure out which comprehension skills are gonna see at the end of the quarter when they get assessed and I want to teach and have anchor charts and have activities and have books that they can really access those comprehension skills from, so they will be able to pass those levels. Just don't want to teach to the test, but I'm trying to find books and think about what standards can I incorporate with this particular book that's on their level.

When asked how complex text is integrated into her content area classes, Sarah stated:

Typically, when I start a new unit, in Math, I might try to find a book that relates to that and integrate some literacy into my Math time. Whatever math book I choose, I hope it is a little bit funny and interesting so that not only are we learning about Math, but we're also able to enjoy the book and make some meaning out of what it is saying and tying it into the Math. In writing, I always start with mentor text and those are typically those complex text we are talking about that I don't think the children would pick up and read on their own. I'm gonna choose a Gail Gibbons book called Tornadoes and maybe my highest two readers in the classroom will be able to read that book and understand it, but the rest of my friends. I think would do well with me reading and breaking it down more for them. And science and social studies, I'm choosing Tornadoes because one of our standards is weather right now and so I thought that would be a great way to tie in science. Social studies, we're not doing right now. We're doing that towards the end of February with Famous Americans. But of course, I'm still doing it in my reading. I'm doing both social studies and science in my reading because in shared reading, I'm focusing on non-fiction text features which is our reading skill as well as guided reading, I'm focusing on non-fiction text features. So, for guided reading I have chosen books that are maybe fun with either weather or life cycle or something we'll do later. Or with shared reading using Famous Americans. And we're going to research them, find the text features in the book, and create an informational book out of it.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Sarah's Teaching

Sarah believes that the use of complex text benefits her students. She

stated that it allows her students to access text that they may not necessarily

access on their own or without her assistance. She also believed that the use of

complex text affords her students the opportunity to explore higher-level text, vocabulary

and figurative language or the concepts. She continued:

> I feel like it helps children make better connections when you include a literacy
> component in other content areas. It helps them to make connections, not only of
> course with getting better in reading, but you can really have some really
> authentic conversations about the topic in Math that you're having and they're
> able to make a little more connections. It just gives them this concrete concept in
> front of them and they are able to laugh and have fun. Also, really just see it more
> visually, which I think helps them to be able to understand it. With science and
> social studies, especially with Famous Americans, biographies or animals, they
> love those books, they eat them up.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Student's Learning

Sarah, when asked how the use of complex text impact students' learning,

she expressed that it affords students time to develop in areas related to reading.

She stated:

> So, I think that complex text gives students time to develop vocabulary, schema, it
> can also activate background knowledge they already have and maybe extend it
> because you're giving them an opportunity to explore it together, whether it be
> whole group or in a small group differentiated guided group and that helps them
> to understand and navigate texts when they're working independently. And if the
> text they are working on is on their level independently, then you may have given
> them the tools they need to succeed independently when you are working on that
> more complex texts together.

When asked to share the challenges and benefits of using complex text, Sarah

expressed:

> I think the challenge of using complex text is choosing the right book. You just
> have to think about so many things; you have to think about that reader and the
> task; and you also have to think about what their levels are and is this
> appropriate? Is it going to be too complex or is it going to be just right for that
> text complexity?

She added that the benefits of using complex text is:

> It means that students are going to have this new knowledge and new understanding and hopefully they will be able to apply it independently.

Analysis

Five themes emerged from the data collected during my visit to Fox Plane Elementary: (a) teacher's conceptualization of text complexity, (b) teacher's conceptualization of complex text, (c) teacher's use of complex text, (d) impact (use of complex text) on teaching, and (e) impact (use of complex text) on learning. These themes provided answers to the three research questions.

> Sarah, when asked to define text complexity replied,
>
> So, I was thinking about text complexity and it talks about these three different approaches to text complexity and one of them was this Lexile level. The other part was whether they understood it or not, you know, is there some sort of background knowledge that they can really be able to grasp or not and the third was whether I am setting a task that they can actually accomplish.

Sarah had some understanding of text complexity. Her response relatively aligned with text complexity's definition set out by the CCSS. Although Sarah mentioned three approaches and attempted to provide an understanding of each, she only identified two of three approaches. Sarah's understanding focused on Lexile level, which are numeric representation of a text's readability and represent the quantitative element, and the use of students' background knowledge and setting a task that students can accomplish, refers to the reader and task element of text complexity. The one approach that Sarah did not provide in her response was the qualitative measure of text complexity that includes text structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands and levels of meaning and purpose. The definition of text complexity encompasses so much more. NGA and CCSSO (2010) argued that text complexity is not simply a measure of the

length of the words or sentences, or simply a measure of the difficulty of the vocabulary, but it is both and more; it is a tripartite evaluation. One element measures how the text is complex (Quantitative), the other looks at why the text is complex (Qualitative) and the final element looks at who is the reader and what is the task (Reader and Task Considerations) (Carreker, 2018).

In reading, sometimes we acquire information fairly quickly. Other times, we may encounter material that is difficult to grasp or comprehend. When the latter occurs, it is often referred to as 'complex text' (Glass, 2015). Sarah believed that complex text is a one that would be hard to decode, hard for students to understand, have new or unfamiliar words and lack 'schema.' Based on her response, Sarah had some understanding of complex text. The phrases that she used,' 'hard to decode,' hard to understand,' and 'new and unfamiliar words,' are all related to the word 'challenging.' Decoding, which is important in reading, is the foundation on which all other reading instruction is built. Students are unable to make sense of a text that they can't decode. When students are unable to decode text, their reading will lack fluency, comprehension will suffer, and they would have a limited vocabulary. Hence, if they are unable to decode, they would be incapable of reading complex text (Hastings, 2016).

When asked how she integrates text complexity and complex text into her classroom, Sarah mentioned that she incorporates the strategy of shared reading as well as technology and find books that would integrate concepts across subject areas. It is important for teachers to expose students to a variety of texts within ELA classes and across content areas because it helps students to grow as readers and be able to comprehend and analyze text independently. Collier (2013) posits that across disciplines,

students question, examine, analyze, compare, scrutinize and probe, which represent

mental processes required for students to engage fully with complex text. Sarah believed

that the impact the use of complex text has on her instruction is that it affords her

students access to books that they may not necessarily access independently. She added

that it also affords them the opportunity to explore high-level text, vocabulary, figurative

language and concepts. Sarah believed that it impacts her students' understanding by

providing them time to develop vocabulary, schema, as well as help them to also activate

their background knowledge. Across most school systems, the standards outline that

students are expected to read and experience a variety of complex text as they progress

from grade to grade. The benefit of this is that students are being prepared for college and

career. While there are benefits to students using complex text, there are also challenges.

As Sarah stated, one of the challenges she encountered is finding the 'right book.' She

added,

> We want the book to be at their grade level or on their reading level depending on
> which section of literacy instruction I'm wanting to use them for. And then also
> wanting to integrate it into a theme or into a standard, whether that be a literacy
> standard, which is a little bit easier to pull from.

The challenges to using complex text range from choosing the 'right book' to providing

students with a range of complex text (Berger, Woodfin, Plaut, & Dobbertin, 2014).

This section examined the second case using within-case analysis. The data

revealed that Sarah had some conceptualizations/understandings of complex text and text

complexity. It also revealed that students were exposed to traditional complex text in both

her ELA and content area classrooms. These limited understandings require the teacher

gain a better understanding of the terms as well as expose students to a range of complex

texts other than traditional text so that she can meet the needs of students in her classroom. The next section examines the third and final case. Using a within-case analysis, the school, class and teacher's information will be outlined and the interview and observation data will be analyzed.

<div align="center">Case Three: Kathy-Taylor North Elementary</div>

School, Class and Teacher Information

At the time of this study, 51.3% of the student body at Taylor North Elementary were White, 16.8% were Latino/Latina, 6.3% were Black, 19.5% were Asian, 5.9% were of two races and 0.2% were Pacific Islander. Kathy, a second grade teacher for a total of six years within her current district, have taught in another state for twelve years, two years in Pre-K ad ten years in kindergarten. There are a total of six second grade classrooms at this school site.

Kathy has taught for total of 18 years. She has been a second-grade classroom teacher for six years at her current school. Kathy describes her school as being a Title I school with grades Pre-K to third. There is a reading specialist, but her title is Title I specialist where she oversees the Title I program responsible for intervention. Kathy teaches all subjects inclusive of Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies, and Writing.

Lesson Activity Observation

I visited Kathy's 2nd grade classroom on March 6th to observe a lesson activity using complex text. The teacher was observed interacting with the students, while utilizing complex texts. The students were working independently completing a main

idea activity, while the teacher worked with a group. The students were given a text the teacher considered was a complex text, Giant Panda.

The teacher instructed the students to look for the glossary. They were probed and asked to tell what it is. The students identified the glossary as a text feature and provided its purpose. The first word (s) that the students were asked to define were 'endangered.' The next words were extinct, habitat. One of the students was unable to say the next word and the teacher instructed her to chunk the word (environment) to sound it out. The next word was' nutrient' and then 'predator'. The students provided the meaning and concrete examples for each word. The students were instructed to turn to page three of the book, which was another text features, the table of contents. They were provided with whisper phones (a device used to help students hear themselves read), ways to take action cards which provided students ways to chunk the words to be able to say what they are. The students were reading the text quietly. They whispered and were quiet enough so that they were able to be heard reading. The students read while the teacher listened.

The students were instructed to go to page 6 and asked to identify a text feature (caption) on the page. The students were then asked a series of questions such as, "What in the text help them connect to the size of the panda?" The teacher compared the size of the panda and its mom. The teacher highlighted the word 'vulnerable.' After which, they (the teacher and students) connected the word 'vulnerable' with the context of the story on that page. The students were then directed to page 4. They were asked to identify a text feature (map) found on that page.

After the discussion, the students were instructed to get their journal and explain how the text feature or one text feature (map) helped them understand the story. The

students were instructed to use the RAP Strategy, 'R-Restate the question, A-Answer the question, and P-prove you are right.' The final instruction that the students were given was to go to page four and respond to the question, "How does the map help you understand the text?" Use details from the story in your answer. After completion of the activity, the students were encouraged to share their answers. I think the observation went well. My role was that of participant observer. I sat at the table with the teacher and students and observed the interaction not only between teacher and students, but their interaction with the text and how the teacher used the complex text with the group of students.

Interview

Kathy describes the CCSS as standards that are more in-depth than before which she uses as a framework for what her students need to know and a guide to help her as a teacher as it relates to planning, interventions and enrichment.

Kathy's conceptualization of text complexity vs. complex text

In looking at research question one, Kathy was asked to share her conceptualization of text complexity and complex text. Kathy seemed unsure, but in her response, she believed text complexity is higher level text. She added that she incorporates text complexity to dig deep into the text and get to the complex part of it daily. When asked to share her conceptualization of complex text, Kathy stated that complex text is a text that makes the children think, makes the children dig deeper into the information. She added that it is texts that have higher level vocabulary; texts that have vocabulary with multiple meanings; texts with higher Lexile levels. When asked if

text complexity and complex texts were similar and/or different, Kathy expressed that

complex texts are the text that you're using and the text complexity is the levels of what's

inside of the text.

Ways Kathy Integrate/Use Complex Text in Reading/Literacy Instruction

Kathy, when asked how she integrates/use complex text within her ELA and

content area lessons, she expressed that she models the use of context clues within the

text, how to take parts of the text to make inferences and how to the take information that

they know from their text to guide them into understanding the other parts of the texts.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Kathy's Teaching

Kathy believed that the use of complex text not only impacts her teaching,

but it impacts her students as well. She expressed that it helps her students'

comprehension. She responded:

> I feel like using the complex texts are making my students think deeper and
> making them develop higher level understanding within their comprehension in
> all areas really because their comprehension and understanding in reading you
> know a certain type of text or in science and social studies to understand that
> material that they need to know but that higher level of understanding that's
> making them be able to go beyond what is just the basic expectation.

How the Use of Complex Text Impact Student's Learning

When asked how the use of complex text impact students' learning, Kathy

expressed:

> Well it gives them a better vocabulary which in turn is helping them to understand
> at a higher level. And having that higher expectation they work towards it. So,
> then they are learning and understanding and comprehending and everything at a
> higher level, but taking that complex text is making their vocabulary higher which
> is making everything else continue to grow beyond.

Kathy believed that there are challenges and benefits to using complex text. She stated:

> The challenge is just being to find what you need you know and being able to make sure it is complex enough to really get understanding that you want to get and having the resources. But then also I think it takes a lot more modeling as a teacher. It takes a lot more teaching how do you pull this apart and how do you use context clues and how do you make a connection from something that you already know from somewhere else, so there is a lot more modeling and a lot more work that goes into it. But the benefits are you know having the students that are able to excel and more easily understand things because they're understanding at a higher level anyway. So being able to understand things a little bit easier and comprehend more deeply within that text.

Analysis

I examined all research questions using within-case analysis. Similar to the previous cases, five themes emerged: (a) teacher's conceptualization of text complexity, (b) teacher's conceptualization of complex text, (c) teacher's use of complex text, (d) impact (use of complex text) on teaching, and (e) impact (use of complex text) on learning. These themes provided answers to the three research questions.

When Kathy was asked to define text complexity, she was a bit hesitant to provide a response because she was unsure, but later stated that it was 'higher level text.' Her response revealed that she had no understanding of text complexity. She associated 'text complexity' with a type of text as opposed to a process or practice. Higher level or higher order thinking is a process that include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking and activated when individuals encounter unfamiliar problems, uncertainties, questions, or dilemmas (King, Goodson & Rohani, 2018). While Kathy provided her understanding of or what she believes to be text complexity, her response differed from how it is defined. As defined by NGA and CCSSO (2010), text complexity

is a tripartite evaluation. It relies on a three-part measure: Quantitative, which looks at how the text is complex, Qualitative, which looks at why the text is complex and Reader and Task considerations, which looks at who is the reader? and what is the task? (Carreker, 2018).

Kathy defined complex text as a text that makes children think and makes the children dig deeper into the information. Her response to the question revealed that she had some understanding of complex text because it is much more than students thinking and digging deeper into the information in a text. Complex text refers to all types of text that not only compliment standard-based unit, but they are texts that align with curricular goals and has some level of challenge for the reader (Glass, 2015).

After Kathy provided responses to her definition of text complexity and complex texts, she was asked to identify the similarities and differences between the two. It was here that her definition of text complexity changed. She clarified that text complexity was the levels inside of the texts. Her new response revealed that she still had underdeveloped understanding of what text complexity meant after looking at the two concepts. The term 'leveled,' when referencing text complexity looks at quantitative measure, which is generally measured by Lexile calculations to determine levels (Gomez, 2016).

In Kathy's ELA and content area classes, she provided a general statement as it relates to the text used. When asked how she integrate the concepts of text complexity and complex texts in her ELA and content area classes, she replied:

> Um, I try to do this with all areas. Especially reading, but I try to bring in the text within science and social studies and even with math. So within like whole group lessons, I do a lot of modeling of using the context clues within the text and modeling how to take parts of the text to make inferences and how to the take information that they know from their text to guide them into understanding the

other parts of the texts. And I do a lot of modeling of taking that prior knowledge that they have to make the connections with the text, then from there I move into their independent tasks where I try to follow-up with the questioning where the students would have to go back into the text and be able to pull it apart and explain things using the text with details and evidence from the text.

She referenced the word 'modeling' several times in her response. Good instruction is one that supports students' reading of increasingly complex texts, first by modeling and then by giving students many opportunities to critically analyze the text (Glass, 2015). This practice is an effective tool for building student proficiency and skill (Fisher & Frey, 2015). When using complex text, it is important that teachers first read and analyze the text they plan to use for modeling. Regan & Berkeley (2012) posit that teaching students to read and understand complex text requires a wide range of instructional routines such as reading aloud to students, modeling their thinking about such things as text structure, word solving, and comprehension strategies so that skills are built and habits are formed.

Kathy expressed that the use of complex text impact her students in several ways. She maintains that it makes her students think deeper and develop higher level understanding within their comprehension in all areas. She added that it gives them a better vocabulary, which in turn is helping them to understand at a higher level. Students when reading widely from texts helps to build their background knowledge and vocabularies while developing morally, emotionally, and intellectually (Ivey & Johnston, 2013) Kathy expressed that with the use of complex text there are benefits and challenges. She stated, "the benefit of using complex text is having my students understand at a higher level." Meanwhile, she identified a challenge she faced when using complex text as finding the right text that is complex enough for students. Lemov,

Driggs and Woolway (2016) argued that to ensure that students are ready for the rigors of college, text selection needs greater attention and intentionality.

In this section, the final within-case analysis was examined. The data revealed that Kathy's conceptualizations/understandings of complex text was limited. It also revealed that she had no understanding of the meaning of text complexity. These misconceptions require that the teacher gain a better understanding of the terms so that she can better meet the needs of students in her classroom. The next section concludes with a cross-case analysis that address research questions one and three and a final analysis.

<div align="center">Cross-Case Analysis</div>

The cross-case analysis is organized around the themes that emerged from the initial, semi-structured interviews (See Table 5). The interviews used questions organized around the research questions for this study, which includes, 1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text? 2) How do second grade teachers integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms? 3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading? In the cross-case analysis, I address the three research questions to analyze the areas in which the three cases suggest the same points and where they differ.

Participants' understanding of text complexity was limited and differed across cases. Findings suggested that two of the three respondents had a limited understanding of text complexity, while one respondent had very limited understanding of the term. Pamela's understanding of text complexity was 'kind of words in the story that help out

with the leveling.' She focused on the element of vocabulary with relation to reading levels and reduced its meaning to the readability of text, which is a quantitative measure. On the other hand, Sarah's response focused on three approaches. She attempted to provide an understanding of each, but only identified two of three approaches. She identified Lexile level as one of the approaches of text complexity, which are the numeric representation of a text's readability and represent the quantitative element. She also identified the use of students' background knowledge and teachers setting a task that students can accomplish, which focuses on the reader and task element of text complexity. Meanwhile, Kathy's understanding of text complexity is that it is 'higher level text.' These three varied responses suggested that teachers across cases have different, yet limited understandings of the term. Pamela and Sarah, though their responses were limited, had a greater understanding when compared to Kathy. Text complexity looks at the level of difficulty in reading and understanding a text based on three distinct factors, the readability of the text (Quantitative Measures), structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands and levels of meaning (Qualitative Measures) and the background knowledge of the reader, motivation, interest, complexity generated by teacher professional judgement (reader and task considerations) (Bunch, Walqui & Pearson, 2014). Teachers' understanding of this concept is considered critical to teaching and learning because it impacts their teaching processes. It is also vital to the implementation of the CCSS, helping students become successful in learning the standards and impacting how and what is taught. It impacts teachers' ability to choose a diverse range of texts that offers students experiences with varied kinds of complexity. Most importantly, since teachers have the most direct contact with students and have

considerable control over what is taught and how learning takes place, understanding this concept helps teachers prepare students for college and career level reading. Louie (2014) maintains that text complexity is one of the concepts teachers need to understand in order to be successful with the CCSS.

Pamela defined complex text as 'leveled text.' However, Sarah and Kathy offered a different understanding. Sarah provided a lengthy response in contrast to the one Pamela provided. She described complex text as one that is very hard to decode or hard for the students to understand; texts where students may have never seen certain concepts and ideas; where there's no schema for students to understand what's going on in the text. Sarah likened complex text to reading a law book or a medical book, without any understanding of the concepts within these texts. Meanwhile, Kathy defined complex text as a text that makes the children think, makes them dig deeper into the information. The findings suggested that understandings of complex text differed across cases. Each teacher expressed that they used complex texts in their classroom but had limited understanding of what the term meant. The differing and under conceptualized understandings of the concept/term 'complex text' not only impacts the types and levels of texts teachers choose for their students, but texts that meet the instructional goals of the classroom, the needs of the students and texts that would increase students' reading of more complex texts to ensure that they are college and career ready. Carreker (2018) contends, understanding what makes a text complex is beneficial in choosing the best texts to meet instructional goals and student needs and improve students' ability to navigate complex texts.

When the respondents were asked about the integration and use of complex text within their ELA and content area instruction, Pamela's response focused on 'traditional' text with the integration of technology. She maintained that the use of EPIC, which is an online library with picture books, early readers, chapter books, nonfiction, etc., helps to build collections for her class. Sarah provided a similar response as it relates to the integration of complex text in her ELA and content area classes. Sarah also used online resources such as 'book flix' and EPIC to build collections for her classroom. She added that she used shared reading daily, which focused on a weekly skill that went along with the pacing guide. Meanwhile, Kathy's response focused on incorporating text within science, social studies and math. She mentioned the use of the instructional strategy 'modeling' where she modeled using context clues within the text and how to take parts of the text to make inferences, while taking the information that the students know from the text to guide them in understanding other parts of the texts. Teachers' responses suggest that each had a unique way of integrating complex text in their classrooms, with only two of them incorporating online resources. Two of three teachers also mentioned the use of online resources to build collections for their classrooms. This is especially essential in helping students build knowledge and engage in analysis and interpretation of a text. Allington (2007) contends that reading a series of texts that provide different takes or perspectives on a specific topic helps students build deep knowledge needed to engage in higher levels of analysis and interpretation.

In contrast, the teachers across cases agreed that the use of complex texts not only impacts their instruction, but it impacts students' learning. Pamela believed that the use of basal readers was a one-size-fits-all approach and was not beneficial for her students.

Basal readers often offer a scripted approach to reading instruction restricting teachers

from modifications, and as a result, teachers are unable to meet the individual needs of

students. They are also time consuming and difficult to integrate with other materials to

make lessons effective (Durkin, 1987). Basal readers not only impact learning but

teaching as well. Books or 'readers' that accompany basal programs are broken down

into three distinct levels, below, at, and above grade levels. These levels do not reach the

need of all students (Tyner, 2009). This is dissimilar to complex texts where there are

varied texts with some level of challenge for all readers, students' background knowledge

is integrated into the reading experience and they are more motivated and engaged when

reading complex text. Pamela also mentioned that she incorporated diverse literature in

her lessons that catered to the needs of a greater range of reading levels in her classroom.

She also believed that it impacted her students' understanding because her students are

given book choice that they would not only be able to successfully read, but books that

they would enjoy. Yet, Sarah believed that the use of complex text affords her students

access to books that they would not necessarily be able to access on their own. She also

suggested that it gives her students the opportunity to explore higher level text, make

better connections, time to develop vocabulary, schema, and activate background

knowledge. While Kathy believed that the use of complex text helps her students think

deeper, develop higher level understanding within all areas, develop a better vocabulary,

which in turn helps them understand at a higher level. The findings suggested that

teachers recognized that the use of complex text affects how and what they teach and

how and what students learn. This is critical to teaching and learning in that teachers can

select texts that align with instructional goals and are better equipped to support their

students in reading complex text, while improving students' reading skills and encouraging them to read more challenging text independently.

Conclusion

Second grade teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classroom were examined. This chapter presented major findings in response to the three research questions: 1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text? 2) How do second grade teacher integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms? 3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading? This chapter provided demographic information about the participants and school site, within-case analysis for each case and a cross-case analysis outlining the similarities and differences that were found across cases. The final chapter presents a discussion of the findings and implications and recommendations for future research

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, I examined second grade teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and complex text in their classrooms and observed teacher participants using complex text during a literacy activity lesson. Chapter one provided background as well as introduced the theoretical framework used to frame this study. Chapter two provided an historical overview of the literature as well as an in-depth overview of the Theoretical Framework. Chapter three addressed the methodology of the study. It contained the research design, an overview of the data collection and analysis, while addressing ethical issues and the validity and reliability of the study. Chapter four focused on the findings that emerged from the data. The last section of chapter four presented a final analysis, indicating that teacher participant had limited understanding as it relates to text complexity and complex text and how teachers' use complex text in their classroom and its impact on teaching and learning differed. Chapter five concludes with a review of the overall findings, discussion and implications.

The overarching purpose of this study was to examine second grade teachers understanding and use of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classrooms. The research questions that guided this study were:

1) What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text?

2) How do second grade teacher integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms?

3) How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading?

Re-statement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classroom. This study, which is framed by the constructivist theoretical approach and relates to research question three was limited to a small school county, to three elementary school teachers that taught second grade. While there are several studies that focus on the areas of text complexity and complex text, there is a dearth of studies that focus specifically on teachers' understanding and use of the concepts (text complexity and complex text) within early grade classrooms. This current study sought to inform not only educators of reading, but policymakers as well as administrators on how teachers' experience and understandings impact how and what they teach. Through the use of constructivist theory, this study sought to enhance the body of knowledge within the area of reading/literacy.

Re-statement of the Problem

Educators and researchers have long acknowledged the importance of mastering the essentials of reading by the end of third grade (Hernandez, 2012). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) in their report acknowledges that reading proficiently by the end of third grade can be a make or break benchmark in a child's educational development. In a subsequent report written by Hernandez (2012), he argued that students who fail to master reading by the end of third grade often struggle in later grades and drop out of high school before earning a high school diploma. Meanwhile, despite the increased initiative for K-12 grade teachers to move students purposefully through increasingly complex text to build skill and stamina (Shanahan, Fisher & Frey, 2012),

primary grade teachers are still considering how they will achieve this goal. With the

absence of research that focus primarily on gaining the perspective of teachers who work

closely with students, as it relates to the areas of text complexity and complex text served

as the impetus for this study.

Scope of the Study and Methods Summary

The data used in this study was collected from three second grade teachers

working in a small school county located in the Southeastern United States.

Appendix A provides the participant invitation letter and Appendix B provides the

informed consent form used in this study. Using a semi-structured interview protocol

with sub-questions constructed from the three research questions, interviews were

conducted in each of the teacher's classroom. The interviews were audio recorded,

transcribed and lasted between 25- 35 minutes. Using a case study method (Yin, 2009),

each interview was transcribed, coded and then analyzed to develop common themes.

Data was collected via interviews, observations with written field notes.

Relation to Framework

As discussed in chapter two, constructivism is used as the framework for this

study. This framework guided the research questions and interview protocol with the

goal of examining second grade teachers' understanding and use of text complexity and

complex text. Constructivism is based on the premise that people construct their own

understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflecting on those

experiences (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004). For the purpose of this study analyses, I was

interested in gaining a greater understanding of teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text and how their understanding informs how and what they teach. Constructivism, which is considered a learning theory, argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Mogashoa, 2014). Constructivism is relevant in this study because it provides a way to examine how learners learn and teachers teach.

Learners construct knowledge for themselves, individually and socially, as he or she learns (Hein, 2007). It is considered an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, while instruction looks at supporting the construction rather than communicating knowledge (Duffy 2006). A constructivist teacher is one that ensure students are actively involved in their learning, is seen as the facilitator, activities are interactive and student centered and allow students to use their own experiences, prior knowledge and perceptions (Mogashoa, 2014). The use of constructivism facilitated in helping me to make sense of teachers' understanding and how what they learn, experience or construct impact how and what they teach.

There is a dearth of research surrounding text complexity and complex text with relation to how it is used and its impact in early grade classrooms. Much of the research focused on the analyses of text complexity by examining the function, logic, and impact of qualitative systems, with a focus on understanding their benefits and imperfections (Pearson & Hiebert, 2013a; Toyama, Hiebert & Pearson, 2017), its impact in the elementary grades reporting different conceptualizations of text, reader, and task interactions (Amendum, Conradi, & Hiebert, 2018) and knowing what is complex and what is not outlining a guide to help teachers establish text complexity (Hiebert, 2014).

The study conducted here looked specifically at second grade teachers' conceptualization (understandings) of text complexity and complex text, how it is used in their classroom and how it impacts the teaching and learning of reading.

I examined three second grade teachers' conceptualization (understanding) of text complexity and complex text, how complex text is used in their classrooms and how it impacts teaching and learning through teacher interviews and lesson activity observation. A qualitative case study design was used to gather my data. The three research questions were addressed in the within-case analysis and analyzed in a cross-case analysis where I connected all three cases while highlighting the similarities and differences found across the cases.

Findings revealed that that teachers' conceptions of complex text and text complexity varied across cases with teacher participants having limited understanding of these concepts. Their limited understanding of these concepts not only shapes how and what they teach but impacts students' learning. If teachers are unfamiliar with the concept 'text complexity' and how to identify complex texts they can use with their students, then they are unable to meet the goals outlined by Anchor Standard 10 of the CCSS. The Center for High Impact Philanthropy (2010, p. 7): defines an effective teacher as one who has a positive effect on student learning and development through a combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of pedagogic skills, and communications/interpersonal skills. Stronge and Hindman (2003) maintain that effective teachers are the most important factor contributing to student achievement.

Additionally, teachers' limited understanding or conceptualization of the concepts limit the type of text used with students and goes against the goals set out by the CCSS,

requiring students to read increasingly complex text. ACT's (2006) groundbreaking study revealed that nearly half of high school graduates needed some form of remediation to read texts that were required in college and during their careers. As a result, ACT's study emphasized the need for students to read more text with increasing complexity and for teachers to understand more about what makes a text challenging.

Christie (2005) and Honebein (1996) define a constructivist classroom as one where the teacher adapt curriculum to address students' ideas or beliefs, negotiate learners' goals and objectives, pose problems of emerging relevance, emphasize hands-on, real-world experiences, seek and value students point of view, provide social context of content, and create new understandings. Pamela, in her response highlighted the fact that she incorporates diverse literature in her lessons, catering to the needs of a greater range of reading levels in her classroom. She contends that her students' understanding is impacted because they are given choice in books they can read and enjoy. Sarah offered a similar response when asked to elaborate on the impact the use of complex text have on her students. She believed that it affords her students access to books that they would not necessarily access on their own. Meanwhile, Kathy asserted that the use of complex text impact her students' ability to think deeper, develop higher level understanding and develop a better vocabulary. Teachers' limited understanding of complex text and access to limited textual resources not only undermine students' ability to construct meaning from texts but restrict teachers from providing the support students need in reading complex text.

Limitations to the Study

Limitations are potential weaknesses or issues with the study that are identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2002). Although the study conducted was carefully prepared, there were some unavoidable limitations. Based on the time frame in which the study was conducted, the population selected for this study was a relatively small one. Additionally, the county in which the study was conducted is relatively small with a limited number of K-3 schools. The findings of this study are not a generalized reflection of all second teachers as well as early grade teachers, but the teachers who participated in this study. Moreover, examining teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text worked well for this study, but it limited the voices of those who are impacted by these concepts the most, the students.

Implications for Teacher Education and Classroom Practice

The primary aim of teacher training is to develop educational skills that are compatible with education policies and enable teachers to deliver these policies (Karpati, 2009). Based on participant responses, this study reflects their limited understanding of the concepts (text complexity and complex text) surrounding the CCSS and their use of complex text in their classrooms. This is critical to teaching and learning because teachers' levels of professional knowledge helps to shape the choices they make as they help student move along the text complexity trajectory.

There are several ways in which this research can benefit teacher education programs. It can serve as the impetus for the development of additional courses within teacher education programs. These courses should emphasize the understanding and

implementation of standard-based instruction and focus primarily on the Common Core State Standards, text complexity and complex text. It can provide teacher education programs with the information needed to determine course goals and course content. Student teachers can be afforded practical experiences with identifying varied complex texts they can use within their classroom. Further, it can also provide student teachers practical experiences using complex texts within their ELA and content area classes. Recruiting, preparing, developing and supporting effective teachers has a direct impact on the learning and success of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Preparing students to read complex texts effectively is one of the most important and most challenging responsibilities of teachers. Understanding the impact that teachers' belief and experiences have on the teaching and learning process can assist schools in providing support to teachers. Applefield, Huber & Moallem (2000) assert that teachers' personal theories of learning have longed been viewed as having significant impact on all aspects of their decision about instruction, their expectations for what learning outcomes are to be valued and sought and how they plan their instruction. Teachers' responses suggested limited understanding of the concepts (text complexity and complex text).

To ensure teachers are positioned to adequately prepare students for college and career as it relates to reading complex texts, this study can be used to implement professional development sessions that focus specifically on the concepts of text complexity and complex text. The implementation of professional development sessions surrounding text complexity and complex text is necessary as schools and school districts work to meet the goals outlined by the CCSS. These sessions should be directly linked to classroom practices and should be ongoing in that it provides teachers adequate time to

learn and implement instruction, practice, and/or strategies related to the CCSS, text complexity and complex texts. Teachers should also be afforded active learning opportunities to learn how to identify and model the use of complex text within their classrooms.

Moreover, schools/school districts can offer support to teachers by providing varied types of complex text that they can use with their students. Taking into consideration the responses from the participants interviewed, K-12 education as well as policymakers can gain a greater understanding of what teachers need to help facilitate the success of students and can be used to initiate conversations between teachers who are impacted by the policies and policymakers who create, and mandate said policies.

Implications for Future Research

This study speaks to the need for future research in several areas related to the CCSS, text complexity and complex texts. First, participants in this study were selected from one school county located in the southeastern United States. A study that looks at a wider range or a larger populace of teachers within one state or across several states to gain their understandings or conceptualization of text complexity and complex text is suggested. Next, teacher participants in this study were all second-grade teachers. It would be interesting to see if these findings exist for other groups of teachers, preferably in other primary grades. Research exploring students' understanding/conceptualization of text complexity and complex text is warranted. Investigations should examine students' perspective as it relates to text complexity and complex text and how these concepts impact their learning of reading. Additional studies can provide information that could be

applied to policies and procedures beyond the local school level. Since students are the ones most impacted by the CCSS, it would be beneficial to gain insight into their perspective as opposed to the perspective of the teacher.

Summary

This qualitative multiple site case study was used to examine second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text and how it is used in their classrooms. It adds to the existing literature on text complexity and complex text by documenting the understandings and experience of teachers and their use of complex text. The participants in this study had limited understandings of text complexity and complex text and offered varied responses as it related to their use of complex text and how it impacts their instruction. This study is vital to the teaching and learning process in that it highlights how teachers' beliefs and understandings can influence how and what they teach, as well as what students' learn.

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Appendix A- Invitation Letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

I trust that this email/letter finds you well. My name is Delphia S. Smith, a PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am writing in hopes of recruiting you for my research study. My research focuses on 2nd grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how the use of complex text impacts the teaching and learning of reading/literacy in their classrooms.

The following eligibility criteria were selected for my participants:
1) Second grade teachers who currently teach reading/literacy in their classroom
2) Teachers who have taught 2nd grade reading/literacy for 3-5 years

If you meet the above selected criteria, then I would love to interview you. I would also like to observe you during a reading/literacy lesson. If you agree to participate in this study, you will engage in a 60-90 minute interview, which will be recorded using a handheld audio recorder. The interview protocol questions are divided into the following sections:

a. rapport questions
b. understandings of the Common Core State Standards, text complexity and complex text and its impact on instruction and learning.
c. the closing

The interviews will conclude with offering participants a platform to express any additional comments or concerns. Different locations (e.g. school sites) will be used to conduct the interviews, accommodating the schedules of all participants. Observations will also take place at school sites within the participant's classroom.

If you agree to an interview and observation, I will need you to sign an informed consent form. I will email you a copy as well as bring a copy of this document to our scheduled

interview and observation. Please feel free to email at dsmit347@uncc.edu specifying an interview and observation date and the times that works best with your schedule.

I cannot thank you enough for your assistance and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

Delphia S. Smith

Appendix B- Informed Consent

Informed Consent Letter

TITLE OF STUDY: An Examination of Teachers' Understanding and Use of
Text Complexity and Complex Text in Second Grade
Classrooms

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to examine second grade teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text and how complex text is used in their classroom. Given the widening gap that persist between what students read in school and are expected to read and comprehend in college, teachers are being asked to teach more complex texts (Tucker, 2013). Using a case study approach, this study seeks insight into individual teachers' understanding of text complexity and complex text as well as their experiences using complex text in the classroom. This study also seeks insight into how the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading/literacy.

STUDY PROCEDURES

The study will be conducted over a 6-8 week period. For the first three weeks, one teacher from each school site will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes with a possibility of a follow-up interview. The interviews will be conducted individually, audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. During the following three weeks, participants will be observed and in-depth field notes will be written. During the final week (s), follow-up interviews will be conducted. Follow-up interviews will also be audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

RISKS

This study poses few if any risk to participants. Yet, it provides many potential benefits in that early grade teachers of literacy can share their experiences as well as their understandings as it relates to complex text and literacy. Their voices and experiences can contribute greatly to the area of reading/literacy education.

Ethical issues are present in any kind of research. However, the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all participants in this study will be offered primary consideration. Participants will also be provided anonymity and confidentiality. Their responses will remain confidential and secured. Each participant would be represented by a special code. Participants will be given the option to withdraw from the study. The data collected from this study will be accessible to the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee members.

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may help teachers to understand and reflect upon how their position, beliefs and understandings of reading impacts how they teach and what students learn.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For the purposes of this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents.
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

- Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 704 687 1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C-Teacher Initial Interview Protocol

Background/Rapport Questions	1. (Self-introduction) Can you tell me a little about yourself? 2. Can you share a little bit about the school? 3. How long have you been a teacher? 4. How long have you taught at this school? 5. Is there a reading/literacy specialist at your school? 6. Are you the instructor of Reading? 7. What subjects do you teach? 8. What grade level do you teach? 9. How long have you taught 2nd grade? 10. Have you taught any other grades? If so, which grade level (s)?
Research Question One: What are second grade teachers' conceptualization of text complexity and complex text in varied school contexts?	11. Talk to me about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how CCSS informs your instruction. 12. How would you define complex text? Give examples of how you know when a text is complex? What are the features? 13. Tell about and show me examples of complex text you use in your classroom? 14. How would you define text complexity? When and how do you use text complexity to evaluate materials you use? 15. How are complex text and text complexity similar or different?/Please explain.
Research Question Two: How do second grade teachers in varied school contexts integrate and use complex text in reading and literacy lessons in their classrooms?	16. You talked about your definition of text complexity and complex text. Tell me how you integrate these concepts in your classroom? i. With ELA reading instruction? ii. With other content area instruction?

Research Question Three: How does the use of complex text impact the teaching and learning of reading?	17. Tell me about the impact complex text has on your reading/literacy instruction. Other content areas? 18. Tell me about the impact complex text may have on students' understanding. 19. What are the challenges and benefits of using complex text?
Closing	20. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D-Follow-Up Interview Questions

1. Can you provide an overall summary of your lesson/activity?
2. What is the title of the complex text (s) that you used during your lesson/activity?/Why?
3. How did you integrate complex text during your lesson?
4. How do you feel the overall lesson went?
5. Is there anything that you would change/do again?