

INTO THE FIGURED WORLDS OF FIRST GRADE TEACHERS:  
PERCEPTIONS AND ENACTMENTS OF INSTRUCTIONAL GROUPING  
AND DIFFERENTIATION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN NEW SOUTH  
CLASSROOM CONTEXTS

by

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## ABSTRACT

MICHELLE PLAISANCE. Into the figured worlds of first grade teachers: perceptions and enactment of instructional grouping and differentiation for English Learners in New South classroom contexts. (Under the direction of DR. SPENCER SALAS)

The seven-month participatory qualitative inquiry (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) explored how a first grade team in a metro Charlotte elementary school perceived and enacted instructional grouping and differentiation for English Learners within a prescribed literacy curriculum. Informed by a Vygotskian theoretical framework for understanding the social construction of teacher identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), the study examined how institutionalized practices interacted with teachers' lived experiences and professional subjectivities to mediate how they made sense of and potentially improvised their teaching of the English Learners in and outside of mainstream classrooms. Data analysis revealed the complexities of teachers' professional selves as they made sense of their teaching within the structure of "Balanced Literacy." Findings included teachers' recasting of English Learners as "struggling readers;" the ambiguity of ESL within the context of the standardized reading curriculum; and, finally, the conflicting subjectivities of teachers as they negotiated the remediation of English Learners.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	17
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD	47
CHAPTER FOUR: “JUST RIGHT READING LEVELS”	71
CHAPTER FIVE: ESL WITHIN THE FIGURED WORLD OF BALANCED LITERACY	99
CHAPTER SIX: THE FIGURED WORLD OF LIT LAB	120
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION	137
REFERENCES	160
APPENDIX A: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	175
APPENDIX B: ADMINISTRATOR PROTOCOL	177
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE FROM THE FIELD NOTE RECORD	178
APPENDIX D: ANALYTIC WRITING SAMPLE: LITERARY TALE	180
APPENDIX E: ANALYTIC WRITING SAMPLE: VIGNETTE	184
APPENDIX F: FOUNTAS AND PINNELL READING LEVELS	186
APPENDIX G: LIT LAB FIELD NOTE SAMPLE	188

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Participant characteristics	58
TABLE 2: Data generation	64
TABLE 3: Fieldnote asides examples	67
TABLE 4: Balanced literacy at Madison	76
TABLE 5: Fountas and Pinnell reading levels	80
TABLE 6: First grade text levels and benchmarks	81
TABLE 7: ESL cluster classrooms	103
TABLE 8: Amanda's hats	107
TABLE 9: Word Attack Strategies	113
TABLE 10: Lit Lab and the daily schedule at Madison	121

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In March, 2013 the Brookings Institute's Brown Center Report on American Education reported a resurgence of ability grouping in classrooms across the United States —with 71% of fourth grade teachers in 2009 indicating that they grouped students according to ability, compared with just 28% in 1998 (Loveless, 2013). Ability grouping and tracking are long-standing educational traditions highly criticized in the early 90's in light of scholarship casting such practices as forms of in-school segregation for historically minoritized student populations (Mickelson, 2001; Oakes, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 2005). Indeed, elementary school teachers are actors within unique spaces. In their roles as educators of young children, they exercise a great deal of autonomy and power. Simultaneously, however, they find themselves constrained by and accountable for the enactment of school, district and state-level institutionalized practices that interact with and ultimately mediate their professional subjectivities and classroom teaching.

Informed by a sociocultural theoretical framework (Holland et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2007; Portes & Salas, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978), the qualitative inquiry presented here was aligned with a tradition of participatory inquiry (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Van Maanen, 2011; Wolcott, 1994) to generate nuanced descriptions of first grade elementary school teachers'

perceptions and enactment of instructional grouping and differentiation for English Learners in the setting of a metro Charlotte elementary school.

### Statement of the Problem

In metro Charlotte and across the I-85 corridor, the potentially segregating-mechanism of instructional grouping has been a focus of activist scholarship (Mickelson, 2001; Mickelson & Everitt, 2008; Portes & Salas, 2010; Salas, 2012; Watanabe, 2008). According to the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (Singer, 2004), by the turn of the century the greater Charlotte area had established itself as a pre-emerging gateway for new immigration, citing a 315% increase in its foreign-born population in the final two decades of the twentieth century (see also Grieco, 2013). Unlike existing points of entry, newly arrived immigrants across this region settled into suburban areas in lieu of traditional patterns in larger cities that located immigrants in tightly clustered urban centers (Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005; Singer, 2004). As a result, neighborhood schools across the southeast often find first and second generation immigrant children dispersed sporadically throughout their student populations—and these students are often identified as “English Learners”<sup>1</sup> through institutional mechanisms beginning with the home language survey commonly administered as part of the school enrollment process (Abedi, 2008; Portes & Salas, 2010).

Conflicting ideologies often mediate teachers’ approaches to designing instruction for the English Learners in their classrooms. On one hand there is the

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<sup>1</sup> I employ the term “English Learners” because it describes a process and avoids implying deficiency. Throughout the dissertation, I use this phrase to refer to students identified by North Carolina as “Limited English Proficient”, as determined by the WIDA W-APT assessment (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013). I acknowledge that this term is imperfect because it could be generalized to native speakers who are also learning English.



argument that English Learners require special services and modifications to address their academic needs (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2011; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002; Nieto, 2004). Yet, on the other hand, school districts in the region are moving to embrace more inclusive models of instruction that emphasize the need for English Learners to receive equitable preparation for the high stakes testing that they will encounter (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2007; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012a; Peercy & Martin-Beltrán, 2011; Reeves, 2004). It is in this context that instructional grouping in elementary schools has increased.

Elementary school teachers are progressively more responsible for English Learners' achievement, which is often coupled with multiple forms of student diversity in any given classroom. This classroom diversity is quite often accompanied by the administrative requisite that teachers demonstrate accommodation of each student's unique needs—be those needs linguistic, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, or a combination of some or all of such considerations—through what has come to be known as instructional differentiation (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008). However, nuanced qualitative description of how teachers conceptualize and enact instructional differentiation and grouping within the contexts of their individually and collectively constructed professional communities, and in the face of constraints imposed by institutional practices is somewhat underrepresented in the literature. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how general education teachers in elementary school classrooms made sense of and enacted instructional grouping and differentiation in

linguistically complex classrooms—and the relationship between differentiation and “ability grouping/tracking.”

#### Conceptual Framework: Differentiation as Social Practice

At a theoretical level, this qualitative study was located in a Vygotskian tradition emphasizing the cultural historical nature of human development (Holland et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2007; Portes & Salas, 2011). While sociocultural approaches to research in language, literacy, and culture are diverse in commitment and focus, scholars working in that tradition have broadly emphasized the mediation and distribution of higher order thinking through cultural historical tools. As such, first grade teachers’ professional subjectivities about instruction for English Learners are not exclusively located in the minds of teachers. Rather, those teachers’ subjectivities about differentiation and instructional grouping for English Learners are mediated by and “distributed” (Salomon, 1993) across cultural historical productions enacted in local “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2007) or “figured worlds” (Holland et al., 1998) driven by the “purposeful practice of diverse social actors” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).

To that end, thoughtfully adaptive teachers, or those who reach beyond commodified knowledge to meet the needs of diverse students, must “recognize that virtually every situation is different, must see multiple perspectives and imagine multiple possibilities, and must apply professional knowledge differently” (Fairbanks et al., 2010, p.164). These are the times when teachers’ pasts mingle with current contexts potentially to produce “circumstances and conditions for

which they have no set response” (Holland, et al., p. 15). In other words, teachers in a suburban Charlotte public elementary school often find themselves “improvising” (p. 15) their professional subjectivities and practice as they respond to the fluctuating events and circumstances that arise throughout the instructional day. Far from static, “differentiation” is a negotiated positionality mediated by artifacts such as a “Balanced Literacy” curriculum, value-added teacher assessment paradigms, the lived experiences of the teachers, students, and administrators within a specific setting and so forth.

Contemporary qualitative research for language, culture, and literacy has drawn heavily from Vygotskian traditions at the secondary school level—exploring, among other things, the social dynamics of classrooms (Smagorinsky, 2007), teachers’ conceptual development and negotiation of context (Bikmore, Smagorinsky, Ladd, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005; Cook & Amatucci, 2006; Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Ronopak, & Moore, 2002), and various aspects of specific classroom practices (T. Johnson, Smagorinsky, & Thompson, 2003; Maloch, Worthy, Hampton, Hungerford-Kresser, & Semingson, 2013). However, with some notable exceptions (see, for example Dyson, 2010; Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Yoon, 2013) this framework has been somewhat underutilized in studies that explore teaching at the elementary school level. From a theoretical perspective, this study was aligned with such precedents. Furthermore, it sought to expand existing sociocultural explorations of how teachers construct “differentiation” and, possibly, improvise institutional practices surrounding instruction for English Learners in the context of elementary school classrooms.

### Research Questions

Specifically, the qualitative dissertation study explored, through a Vygotskian framework emphasizing the social nature of thinking and doing, how first grade elementary school teachers in a metro Charlotte setting conceptualized, enacted and potentially improvised instructional grouping and differentiation and what professional subjectivities and institutional practices mediated their choices within individual and collective cultural/figured worlds. The guiding questions were:

- How in the setting of a metro Charlotte first grade learning community, do general education teachers understand and enact instructional grouping for English Learners in their classrooms?
- What professional subjectivities and institutional practices mediate why and how general education classroom teachers group their English Learners for instruction?
- How do the same teachers potentially "improvise" instructional grouping and to what ends?

### Outline of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two, I present a review of literature relevant to this study. I begin with a brief overview of the historic and contemporary approaches to teaching English Learners, and then embark on a discussion of the major perspectives that framed my research, including recent trends toward inclusive programming, ability grouping and tracking, standardized curricula and the preparation of teachers to work with diverse student populations. I also include a

discussion of the influence of current legislation and funding initiatives, as well as the manner in which the resulting standardized or scripted curricula potentially mediate teachers' approaches to differentiation of instruction. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of Fairbanks et al. (2010) contribution that provides an insightful theorization of why some teachers are able to extend their practice beyond knowledge beyond what was taught in their teacher preparation programs to become thoughtfully adaptive to diversity in their classrooms.

I begin Chapter Three, describing the "sociocultural turn" (K. Johnson, 2006, p. 237) in educational research that has given rise to interpretive examinations of teachers and teaching and ultimately provided the precedent for this study. In addition, I describe the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that shaped the study, and specifically, the Vygotskian framework that informed my decisions in terms of collecting and analyzing data. Finally, I describe the procedures and processes I used in designing and conducting the dissertation.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I present and theorize my findings as they relate to the guiding research questions.

The first findings chapter, Chapter Four, specifically focuses on the Balanced Literacy program at Madison and the way in which teacher leveled students and grouped them based on their perceived reading abilities. I describe how, in light of a mandated, standardized literacy program, teachers perceived learning to read as the primary instructional focus, positioning reading instruction as a singular tool symbolic of academic success. So heavy was the emphasis on learning to read that teachers prioritized it within the curriculum, relegating

instruction specifically designed to promote English language development as unnecessary. Simultaneously, the classroom teachers, in light of the mandated curriculum and expected outcomes, interpreted the needs of English Learners to be identical to those of native speakers. I conclude the chapter by problematizing the way in which linguistically this team positioned diverse students as struggling learners, arguing that this practice promoted deficit perceptions of English Learners.

In Chapter Five, I look at Madison's ESL program and its implementation during the year of the study. I draw from observations and field notes to illustrate the manner by which the ESL teacher and general education teachers resisted inclusive programming and how, in the face of limited professional development, they improvised instruction within the new mandated inclusive model. Teacher identity and agency are a focus of this chapter, as both the first grade teachers and the ESL teacher struggled to negotiate and define their professional roles within the constraints of a mandated, standardized curriculum. I conclude by describing how the resulting co-constructed figured world of ESL at Madison created increased instances of ability grouping for English Learners as well as differential literacy instruction.

In Chapter Six, I characterize one institutional structure, Madison's Lit Lab, as a figured world unto itself. I describe the co-constructed procedures and processes that mediated how and when the first grade teachers used instructional grouping and differentiation. I then examine how the first grade teachers exercised agency and advocacy to position their students in what they perceived to be

favorable learning contexts. Furthermore, through a series of comparative observations, I illuminate differences in grouping and instruction for students within this figured world, a disproportionate number of who were English Learners.

Chapter Seven concludes the study with a summary of my findings. In addition, I include a discussion of the study's implications and recommendations for policy, practice and for future study.

#### Contribution to the Field and Significance of the Project

Fairbanks et al. (2010) cautioned that failure to equip teachers with the skills necessary to “negotiate the demands, discourses and politics” (p. 167) that are inherent in school settings will result in a process of “cultural mediation,” whereby teachers are likely to resist extending beyond commodified knowledge. Consequently, such teachers risk being or becoming less thoughtfully adaptive in response to the overwhelming demands of the multiple contexts in which they operate. Indeed, teachers face increasing demands in terms of time, knowledge and flexibility as their classrooms become more diverse and the need for instructional differentiation increases. Thus, the potential exists to resort to traditional means of managing diversity, specifically rigid ability grouping and tracking.

The implementation of the Common Core when combined with federal, state and local initiatives that increase accountability for classroom teachers creates a need to reevaluate traditional school structures and practices. In addition, the standardized programs and scripted curricula that are often byproducts of these

initiatives suggest a potential reconceptualization of teachers' roles within these evolving contexts. While macro-level studies of policy implications are unquestionably beneficial, equally important are micro-level inquiries that provide in-depth insights into how policy is translated and enacted within local school contexts. This dissertation represents access into the figured world of one first grade teaching community via thick descriptions of how its members' lived experiences mingle with cultural artifacts (i.e. standardized curricula, high-stakes testing, etc.) in the enactment of institutionalized practices.



## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this dissertation study, I describe how general education teachers in one metro Charlotte suburban elementary school situated within a large urban district in the southeastern United States perceived, enacted, and improvised differentiated instruction for the English Learners in their first grade classrooms. In the literature review that follows, I identify four interrelated perspectives that informed my inquiry. First, I briefly explore the evolution of current contexts for teaching English Learners in New South classrooms. I expand this discussion to include a trend toward inclusive models and the subsequent challenges of cross-disciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, I highlight how the mandate for differentiation has potentially perpetuated ability grouping and tracking. Second, I present literature that describes historic and contemporary perceptions of tracking and ability grouping, and how English Learners have faced increased isolation and unequal educational opportunities in tracked school contexts. Third, I situate Balanced Literacy within discourse related to scripted or mandated curricula in the new standards era, emphasizing how such programs have reduced English language development opportunities for English Learners. Fourth, I review contemporary discussions related to pre-service and in-service teachers' dispositions toward diverse learners.

As a platform for describing the sociocultural perspective that frames this study, I include a review of Fairbanks et al.'s (2010) theorization of why some teachers are able to extend beyond the mere application of “commodified knowledge” to adapt to the needs of their diverse students, and how agency is enacted in pursuit of their visions for their diverse learners. Furthermore, Fairbanks and her colleagues explore how these same teachers potentially improvise their actions, perceptions, and even roles within the complex and multilayered figured worlds within which they operate. Thus, in addition to understanding teachers and diversity, we must consider the shifting layers of social, professional and even political contexts that mediate the work that they do and how they frame and re-frame their professional selves. The chapter concludes with a discussion of apparent gaps that exist in terms of scholarship related to micro-level, qualitative examinations of how, and in what contexts teachers perceive and enact instructional grouping to differentiate instruction for English Learners.

### Evolving Approaches to Teaching English Learners

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California schools were in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for merely offering equivalent educational opportunities to non-native English speakers. Similarly, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) required that public schools offer additional support to non-proficient students. However, in the absence of a universal model for this additional instructional support, school districts across the nation have taken

markedly varied approaches to teaching English Learners (Abedi, 2004; Collier & Thomas, 2012; National Education Association, 2011; Staehr Fenner, 2013).

Bilingual education programs have long been thought to hold the most promise for academic success and acquiring English language proficiency (Collier & Thomas, 2002, 2004, 2012; Dixon et al., 2012). However, logistical and political issues often hinder the implementation of such programs (Crawford, 2003; Hopstock & Stephenson, 2003).

ESL pullout programs (where students leave their mainstream classes for specialized language instruction in English) represent another method for serving English Learners. However, this model has proven to be highly problematic due to the decontextualized and irrelevant nature of the language instruction, absence of content material, separation from exemplary language models, and for the belief that they isolate and stigmatize English Learners (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; Collier & Thomas, 2002, 2004, 2012; Krashen, 1987; Valdés, 2001).

Sheltered ESL programs have become popular because they are thought to promote language development in English Learners as students are simultaneously exposed to the standard course of study (Ariza, Marales-Jones, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2010; Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012). These programs also allow for valuable teacher-student interaction in the discourse of the content area that promotes second language acquisition (Gibbons, 2003). However, in order for English Learners to be successful in sheltered courses, it has been argued that teachers must have an understanding as to how to connect the content material to students' lived experiences (DelliCarpini, 2008a), a potentially formidable

challenge for educators who have limited experience working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Over the past decade, the incorporation of language minorities into state testing programs (Zacher-Pandya, 2013) and the inclusion movement in special education (Klinger, Hoover, & Baca, 2008) caused educators to reconsider current programming for English Learners and turn to push-in and co-teaching models (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003; Reeves, 2004; Staehr Fenner, 2013). According to Short, Fidelman and Louguit (2012), this shift in preference for ESL programming is a response to political constructs (i.e. high stakes testing via NCLB) rather than the needs of individual students.

### The Challenge of Sheltered Instruction

One significant stumbling block to blended programs, such as sheltered instruction, is finding teachers with backgrounds in both second language acquisition and instructional content (Echevarria et al., 2007). Often times general education teachers have had little or no training in working with English Learners, while ESL teachers have had limited exposure to the standard course of study (DelliCarpini, 2009). While programs like the often prescribed Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria et al., 2007; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010) are offered to support teachers in this challenge, many find that the day-to-day demands of classroom teaching often overshadow teachers' implementation of strategies learned in such short term professional development programs (Tomlinson et al., 2008).

Co-teaching models of instruction, where the ESL teacher enters the general education classroom to assist in the instruction of English Learners appear promising in meeting the demands for inclusive practice while overcoming the need for teachers to be both content and language experts (DelliCarpini, 2008a, 2008b; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) argued that all teachers should be exposed to models of effective instruction for English Learners in an ongoing, integrated manner, supporting the possibility that language instruction could occur within the mainstream classroom. However, among several other challenges, the need for collaboration and mutual planning time for ESL and classroom teachers surfaces in the face of an already overly-taxed school day (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Pawan & Craig, 2011). Furthermore, while these inclusive models hold promise for improving the educational experiences of immigrant students, they present significant logistical, interpersonal and professional challenges for the teachers charged with their implementation (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

#### Cooperation and Collaboration

The introduction of inclusive models for serving English Learners compelled education scholars to examine the concept of professional collaboration between teachers both generally and specifically to ESL and mainstream teacher partnerships (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2013). In September 2012, *TESOL Journal* sponsored a special issue dedicated to this topic and invited contributions from a wide range of perspectives. In their introduction to the issue, Honigsfeld and Dove (2012a) identified rationale for promoting collaboration. The reasons included:

the demands of interdisciplinary programs, such as the Common Core, that require shared ownership of curricula; ESL frameworks such as Chamot and O'Malley's (1996) Cognitive Academic Language Learning model that blend content and language instruction; promotion of collaboration as a key 21<sup>st</sup> century skill; and finally, administrative demands in light of institutional factors, such as standardized assessments.

In order for cross-content partnerships to be successful, Bell and Baecher (2012) argued that schools must foster a “culture of collaboration” (p. 504) in which participants feel valued, possess a sense of belonging, receive administrative support, desire positive outcomes and share in the ownership and responsibility for English Learners' progress. Specifically, they noted a need for communal planning time, meaningful professional development and compatible teaching styles as factors that support collaborative programs. However, Pawan and Orloff (2011) argued that in order to develop *sustained* collaboration, there must exist a balanced approach on the part of administrators. These authors advocated for compromise between rigid, top-down mandates that require that teachers work together and for programs where collaboration is voluntary and unsupported by school administrators. Pawan and Orloff also emphasized issues of trust and interdependence, arguing that these develop with time and experience working together, while noting they observed a “one-way dependency” (p. 470), where ESL teachers felt they relied on mainstream teachers for direction when working with their students.

Contemporary scholarship addresses the need to prepare general education teachers to use collaboration as a tool for expanding their knowledge of English Learners (see for example, E. García, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2009; T. Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Hutchinson (2013) argued that it is time to break “the cycle of unpreparedness” (p.28) in light of the enormous growth of the U.S. immigrant population by requiring all pre-service teachers to take courses related to teaching English Learners. Such exposure, she found, led to pre-service teachers developing increased sensitivity to linguistic diversity and better appreciation for ESL teachers.

Nonetheless, classes for pre-service teachers do not address the gap in knowledge for the existing teacher workforce, many of whom, regardless of their years of experience, feel insecure in their abilities to effectively teach English Learners (Walker & Edstam, 2013). DelliCarpini (2008a) predicted that with the growth in immigrant students populations in U.S. schools, slogans such as “Every Teacher an ESL Teacher” (p. 101) would soon be appropriate. Such slogans illustrate the need for mainstream teachers to receive opportunities to expand their knowledge of English Learners in an effort to overcome what they described as frustrating gaps in knowledge. Kim, Walker and Manarino-Leggett (2012) argued that providing non-ESL teachers the same types of professional development historically offered only to ESL teachers would provide these professionals a “common ground” (p.730) from which to work. Furthermore, in-service general education teachers who receive meaningful instruction in working with English Learners are likely to “pay it forward” (p. 350) by sharing their new knowledge

with colleagues throughout their schools (Verplaetse, Ferraro, & Anderberg, 2012).

General education teachers are not alone in feeling unprepared for meeting the needs of English Learners in the current PK-12 school collaborative contexts. Baecher (2012) recently administered a questionnaire to 77 ESL teachers who had completed a Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language within the past five years. She found a significant gap between how ESL teachers were prepared to teach and what was actually required of them in the classroom. For example, respondents reported they lacked the knowledge necessary to support English Learners in content area classes, particularly in the area of literacy. Furthermore, elementary ESL teachers did not feel they were adequately prepared to negotiate the complexities of the collaborative program models they encountered in their schools. Wong, Fehr, Agnello and Crooks (2012) found that while ESL teacher candidates may feel they were well-prepared to address the cultural and social needs of their students, they were less certain they possessed the strategies necessary to deliver quality instruction and differentiate it to meet individual learners' needs.

Harvey and Teemant (2012) found that school administrators viewed ESL teachers' preparation in the area of language acquisition to be adequate, but found administrators felt they should be better prepared to become leaders within their school communities. In addition, administrators unilaterally agreed that ESL teachers needed better preparation for collaborative teaching environments, adding



that the onus for initiating collaboration with mainstream teachers fell almost entirely on the ESL teacher.

In a project particularly relevant to the current study, researchers examined how ESL teachers and mainstream teachers collaborated when faced with a standardized literacy curriculum (Martin-Beltrán & Percy, 2012; Martin-Beltrán, Percy, & Selvi, 2012; Percy & Martin-Beltrán, 2011). These researchers argued that the mandated program, which they referred to as a Curriculum Framework (CF), served a platform for collaboration between classroom teachers and ESL specialists. While they conceded that standardized programs might narrow the curriculum, they observed instances where collaborative practices expanded and enriched the program. They viewed the CF as means of staying in touch, because general education teachers who were too busy to communicate in other ways could make pacing guides and lesson plans available to the ESL teacher. In addition, they referred to the CF as an “import tool” (Percy & Martin-Beltrán, p. 428) upon which the ESL teacher could build when designing instruction for English Learners. However, they framed their vision of collaboration as a compromise, in which teachers had little choice but to settle for superficial interaction and coverage of only the required material in light of the standardized curriculum.

#### Differentiation in the Classroom

In addition to the need for collaboration, the inclusive programs brought with them an expectation that classroom teachers adjust their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse range of student backgrounds and abilities. Differentiating instruction for individual students presents general education teachers with a

sizeable challenge considering students learn at different rates, possess unique skills and have different needs. This trend toward instructional differentiation becomes instantly apparent in a precursory examination of district websites across the country. For example, in addition to maintaining a strategy bank and blog dedicated to the topic of differentiation, Grand Island Public Schools in Grand Island, Nebraska (2013) offers the following in terms of communicating expectations to its teachers:

Differentiation: The driving force of successful schools is the staff's commitment to ensuring the success of each student. Therefore, staff are expected to work collaboratively to provide all students with learning experiences and environments that honor who they are, where they came from and what they can already do, moving them to achieve at increasingly more sophisticated and rigorous levels of learning. (Grand Island Public Schools, n.d.)

Similar initiatives can be found on many other district websites, such as a differentiation wiki maintained by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2014), or a descriptive differentiation chart presented by the Napa County Unified School District (Napa Valley Unified School District, 2011-2012). These represent but a few examples that are symbolic of the current instructional differentiation movement. It has become so widely accepted as a beneficial classroom practice and has gained such popularity that entire schools are being founded on the principle of differentiation. For example, the Village Charter School in Boise, Idaho boasts the development of the Limitless Learning Method, designed to meet the needs of the students through assessing them, determining what they already know so that they are not bored because they have already learned the skills being taught, nor are they frustrated that their work is too hard (Village Charter School, 2010).

However, in examining these same websites from across the nation, much variance exists from district to district in the manner in which they define and address differentiation. Notwithstanding, there is a common underlying notion that this method of teaching is preferred and expected to be widely visible in most classrooms.

In this portion of the literature review, I have outlined the historic and contemporary scholarship related to teaching English Learners in primarily monolingual contexts. I highlighted the trend toward collaborative models of instruction that require classroom teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse classroom. In the following section, I examine one form of differentiation that characterizes classrooms throughout the United States— ability grouping and tracking. In addition to a brief history, I include a review of scholarship related to how English Learners have experienced these practices.

### Perceptions of Ability Grouping and Tracking

In her seminal work, Oakes (2005) explained that, dating back more than 100 years, tracking practices emerged as the popularity of public high schools increased toward the end of the 19th century. Efficiency was the primary reason for sorting students, a reaction, in part, to early reports of school failure and low academic achievement. Equity-based school reform movements in the 1970's and 1980's gave rise to criticism of tracking practices (Loveless, 1999), sparked in large part by seminal research reports that highlighted the disproportionate

presence of poor students and students of color in the lower tracks (Eder, 1981; S. R. Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Rist, 1970).

Oakes (2005) revealed that behavior modification, rote learning and computational skills were the focus of classes located in lower tracks. Conversely, teachers exposed students in higher tracks to activities that required high levels of logic and reason. Most telling, perhaps, was that teachers' objectives varied depending on the track they taught, with upper track teachers seeking to instill a sense of self-direction, creativity, critical thinking skills and active participation, while lower track teachers focused almost entirely on behavior management.

There are even greater implications for tracking and ability grouping in the contexts of U.S. schools located throughout the New South. The process of school desegregation has spanned decades and fluctuated greatly in terms of progress and outcomes (Chemerinsky, 2005). However, throughout the 1990's this process appeared to stall, or even reverse itself in light of, among other issues, the segregated nature of residential settlement patterns along economic, racial and ethnic lines which resulted in schools that remain to this day similarly segregated (Reardon & Yun, 2005). When this between school segregation is combined with the inequitable outcomes of the within school isolation described by the previously reviewed scholarship, there is alarming potential for long-term isolation and inequitable school experiences for students in New South contexts (Chemerinsky, 2005).

## Tracking and English Learners

English Learners, like native speakers, experience the negative ramifications of being placed in low reading groups (Neufeld & Fitzgerald, 2001) and non-college bound tracks (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gifford & Valdés, 2006; Valdés, 2001). In addition, there are special considerations for English Learners in the discussion surrounding ability grouping and tracking. Being a linguistic minority is not synonymous with being economically disadvantaged, nor does it automatically signify membership within a traditionally oppressed ethnic population. However, being young and multilingual does usually accompany some form of cultural diversity, and differences are quite often translated as deficits by educators who view the “problem” of English Learners when “framed as some kind of comparison with a presumed ‘mainstream’ norm” (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Orellana & Gutiérrez, 2006). English Learners are particularly vulnerable to the deficit perceptions and inaccurate assessments of ability (Harklau, 1994, 2000; Menken, 2008; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 2005; Zacher-Pandya, 2013).

To conclude this section, how teachers perceive English Learners becomes an important question in the face of institutionalized practices such as ability grouping and tracking. Teachers often develop their conceptions of ability in their early training or apprenticeship within the larger community of practice, which may be a teacher education programs or PK-12 setting. Therefore, I now shift focus, and in the subsequent section synthesize current scholarship as it relates to pre-service and in-service teachers working with diverse student populations.

### Current Discussions/Teachers and Diversity

Contemporary literature for teacher education working within a sociocultural paradigm has emphasized pre-service and in-service teachers' dispositions in relation to student diversity broadly defined. Recent empirical studies have explored, for example, how teachers enact institutional practices within their individual classrooms in potentially creative ways that allow for the “unlocking of curricular closets” (Dyson, 2010; see also Maniates & Mahiri, 2011; Worthy, Consalvo, Bogard, & Russell, 2012 ). Garrett and Segall (2013) urged teacher educators to re-examine their understanding of the concepts of ignorance and resistance that have historically been thought to impede predominantly White teacher candidates from effectively confronting their biases (see also Ajayi, 2011; Gay, 2010; Rueda & Stillman, 2012).

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) encouraged teachers to bridge the gap between school and home by incorporating students' *funds of knowledge* into classroom instruction. They asserted that through learning more about children's homes, teachers might abandon deficit-based ideologies and create learning contexts that were more congruent with their students' cultural backgrounds. Literature that is more recent has explored ways in which teachers might become better prepared to serve students from backgrounds dissimilar to their own. For example, García, Arias, Murri and Serna (2009) urged teachers to tap into “contact, collaboration and community” (p.132) to develop a more “responsive pedagogy” (p.138). Similarly, Souto-Manning (2010) encouraged teachers to gain

access to students' cultural and linguistic resources by abandoning the traditional student/teacher relationship in favor of one based on dialogue and mutual interest, a concept built upon Gutiérrez's (2008) pedagogical *third spaces*. Smagorinsky (2013) took a similar approach, arguing that teachers must incorporate students' daily, lived experiences into classroom instruction in order for it to be meaningful. However, in the tradition of a sociocultural framework, Smagorinsky contended that teachers must also become mindful of the current and historical social context in which learning and identity development occur, a task he identified as difficult for teachers who are accustomed to traditional classroom processes.

Hammel, Shaw and Taylor (2013) asserted that teachers become more mindful of their approaches to educating diverse students when they are given the time and resources necessary to collectively reflect on their personal bias and prejudices. Similarly, Gonzalez and Ayala-Alcantar (2008) advocated for the creation of a "safe space" (p. 131) where pre-service educators can explore stereotypes and, thus, develop the capacity for critical caring (p. 133). The adoption of a critical caring framework allows teachers to identify and dismantle existing inequities that surface from personal bias, and transform classrooms into places of acceptance, respect and rigorous and relevant academic experiences. Gay (2010) asserted that starting with identification and acknowledgement of these personal attitudes and beliefs is essential in that it is inconceivable how teachers, "who have negative beliefs about ethnically diverse students and their cultural heritages as valid and viable educational resources can relate to them positively in personal and instructional interactions" (p. 150).

### Teaching English Learners in the New Standards Era

Thus far, I have discussed the movement toward collaborative and inclusive models for serving English Learners that stemmed from the increase in non-native speakers in monolingual classrooms, and a desire to move away from the stigma and isolation of pull-out models. In addition, the evolving standardized curricula and the implementation of the Common Core present powerful arguments for preparing more educators to meet the needs of English Learners, as the literacy and language demands on these students become more acute. *Race to the Top* (RttT) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) encouraged states to adopt a common set of standards for English language arts and mathematics. At the time of this study, forty-five states had adopted the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts, with implementation dates ranging from school years beginning in 2012 to 2015 (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). The new standards differed from previous state standards in that they emphasized acquiring academic vocabulary, building knowledge from informational texts, and producing and using evidence to support students' ideas and arguments. Santos, Darling-Hammond and Cheuk (2012) noted that these skills will likely prove difficult for all students, but particularly for students who are in the process of acquiring proficiency in English.

Santos, et al. (2012) argued that “educational attention to the needs of (English Learners) can no longer be considered a boutique proposition” (p. 3) and that the intensified literacy demands of the Common Core require an overhaul in teacher education in preparation for cross-disciplinary endeavors. In a recent



article, Bunch (2013) appealed to teacher educators and administrators to abandon previously held conceptions of arming mainstream teachers with “pedagogical content knowledge about language” (p.298), but rather they should seek to support the “pedagogical language knowledge” (p.298) that allows teachers to enact language instruction through the content they teach. In other words, it might not be necessary for teachers to possess an in-depth understanding of second language acquisition theory or linguistics, but rather teachers must consider language in general, in every possible opportunity in their teaching of the content in which they are experts.

Bunch (2013) asserted that there are several possible approaches to reframing traditional understandings of language learning in the content classroom. Among these is a sociocultural perspective, where teachers view language as a tool for participation in communities of practice and value function over form to support students in acquiring the content language needed to survive the demands of programs such as the Common Core. Furthermore, he argued that acknowledging home literacies and tapping existing linguistic resources allows English Learners to express their learning across the curriculum, as the new standards era requires. Palmer and Martínez (2013) argued that teachers have a powerful role in classrooms constrained by standardized curricula and rigid scheduling. They posit that teachers can use their power, or agency, to position emerging bilinguals as equals in linguistically complex classrooms by supporting a broader conception of “language as practice” (p. 276).

Thus, current scholarship has, for some time, emphasized the need to prepare teachers for working with diverse students, and specifically in some cases, linguistically diverse students. However, as literacy and linguistic demands increase for English Learners in the face of the new standards era, scholars even more so are advocating for a reconceptualization of learning English in monolingual, mainstream classrooms. Moreover, they emphasize the many ways in which educators must share in foregrounding language in every day classroom instruction. In the subsequent section, I provide a brief overview of what this new standards era looks like in elementary schools as well as its implications for English Learners.

#### High-stakes Accountability

The Common Core appears prepared to uphold the tradition of standardized assessments in the United States, a new series of which become available in the 2015-2016 school year (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). This does not constitute a new experience for English Learners, as their inclusion in high-stakes standardized testing programs began with the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (aka NCLB) in 2001, thrusting the assessment of English Learners into the spotlight throughout much of the previous decade. In 2003, TESOL joined a host of scholars (Abedi, 2004; Crawford, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Zacher-Pandya, 2013) in articulating the disadvantages faced by English Learners and the myriad harms of including them in the standardized, high-stakes assessments mandated by NCLB. In particular, these harms included 1) an inability to assess content

knowledge without assessing language proficiency, 2) cultural and educational bias, and 3) insufficient opportunities to learn the content material being assessed (TESOL International, 2003). Zacher-Pandya (2013) added that high stakes tests for English Learners potentially cause misallocation of instructional time in the classroom, leaving little or no time for quality English language development.

Crawford (2008) argued that the structure of NCLB's accountability program presented a lose-lose scenario for English Learners in that the threat of sanctions for failing schools inevitably results in diminished educational opportunities for historically marginalized student populations. Furthermore, he made an intriguing argument for why the very fluid sub-group comprised of English Learners could never make adequate progress under NCLB, as newcomers constantly entered as the most proficient students simultaneously moved out as their English skills progress.

#### Scripted Curricula and Commercial Literacy Programs

Au (2011) wrote passionately about the rise of scripted curriculum and commercial literacy programs that have emerged in response to the high-stakes standardized testing that has accompanied NCLB and other federal funding initiatives. He noted, that while historically teachers have resisted such programs, more and more are falling into compliance with scripted, commercially prepared lessons under increased pressure from administrators and standardized assessment instruments. Scholars have expressed concern that scripted curricula, and in particular, scripted reading programs overlook the individual needs of students (Ainsworth, Ortlieb, Cheek, Pate, & Feters, 2012; Eisenbach, 2012; Milosovic,

2007), reduce teacher autonomy and creativity (Crocco & Costigan, 2007) and reduce opportunities to promote critical thinking (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010).

Milner (2013) noted that while scripted curricula are typically designed to promote equality by ensuring that all students are exposed to the same content material, such programs may actually promote inequality. He argued that scripted programs are more prevalent in high-poverty and culturally diverse schools, and that it is unlikely, or perhaps impossible, to represent these culturally diverse students in one standardized curriculum. T. Meidl and C. Meidl (2011) echoed Milner's concerns and further argued that scripted programs adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students. They posited that in order for scripted curricula to even approach meeting the needs of diverse student populations, teachers must adapt (change) and integrate (supplement) the standards-based curricula they teach.

#### Balanced Literacy as a Scripted Curriculum

There exists no universal definition of Balanced Literacy as an approach to teaching children to read and write. For example, Siegel and Lukas (2008) defined it as "an attempt to balance any number of dimensions of literacy curricula" (p. 34) while Spiegel (1998) described it more specifically as "a decision making approach through which the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day about the best way to help each child become a better reader and writer" (p. 114).

Yet, there are those who would argue that Spiegel's definition perhaps overestimates the autonomy of teachers in contexts where Balanced Literacy programs are actually enacted. For example, Gutiérrez, Rymes and Larson (1995)

defined scripts as the “orientation that members come to expect after repeated interactions in contexts constructed both locally and over time” (p.449). Yoon (2013) used this definition to argue that Calkin’s Writers Workshop, with its prescribed schedule of genre studies, was indeed scripted, in that it imposed a sequential, predictable and rigid system onto a “generative” (p. 152) process (writing). She expanded this definition to include the “language, strategies and ideologies that are written down for teachers to say and follow” (p. 150). Siegel and Lukas (2008) asserted:

(such programs) were not simply a set of classroom routines and teaching methods, but an authoritative way of talking about reading and writing. Teachers and students could not read whatever text they wanted in whatever way they chose because the balanced literacy curriculum treated some ways of reading and writing, and not others, as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. Getting recognized as a successful student in a balanced literacy curriculum thus required that children show they could talk about and interact with texts in particular ways, using the symbol systems considered appropriate for learning to read and write. (p.16)

Particularly relevant to the current study is Siegel and Lukas’s emphasis on how the restricted nature of Balanced Literacy programs negatively impacts culturally diverse students who are labeled “at risk” or poor readers, because the mandated curriculum does not leave room for their diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Both Fountas and Pinnell (Heinemann, 2012) and the Calkins Workshop Model promoted by Teachers College (The Reading & Writing Project, 2010) resisted being labeled as scripted or rigid in any way. Yet, Fountas and Pinnell made reference to giving teachers the “precise language” to teach (Heinemann, p.3). Furthermore, they added that,

when everyone in the school uses the same literacy assessment, curricula, and language—moving from observation, to analysis, and then to instruction—a common conversation occurs across the school staff. (p. 4)

Calkins (2013) avoided directly instructing teachers to use particular phrases and strategies, yet her suggestions were powerful, and as Yoon (2012) argued, it is difficult for teachers to ignore the program's underlying ideology. In *A Curriculum Plan for The Readers Workshop Level 1* (2011), Calkins used phrases such as “you could say something like” (p. 21), “you might want to create a chart” (p. 18), and “you will want to say things like ‘good job’ and ‘that’s right’ each time they read a word correctly” (p.42). Rather than directly instructing teachers in how to conduct their daily lessons, she provided a series of fairly strong suggestions. So while Calkins asserted the goal of her program was to “highlight replicable teaching moves” (Calkins, 2013, p.3), and to “free teachers from choreography so they are free to teach” (Calkins, 2013, p. 46), it appears that teachers could rely on the supplied materials to plan even the smallest details of their lessons.

#### Considerations for English Learners and Balanced Literacy

Few studies have specifically addressed how English Learners weather the shift to programs such as those that promote a Balanced Literacy approach to learning to read. However, I found one notable and relevant exception in the work of O'Day (2009), who conducted a three-year inquiry of the implementation of a Balanced Literacy program in San Diego. Collecting and analyzing data that were part of a broader analysis, she focused specifically on how English Learners fared in the transition— including teachers' perceptions of the benefits to them. In general, the teachers in her study operated under the assumption that “good

instruction is good for everybody” (p.07), emphasizing that they saw no difference in their needs as English Learners.

O’Day (2009) described four components of Balanced Literacy that “hold promise” (p. 99) for English Learners: an emphasis on meaning, the combination of interactive instruction with explicit teaching of strategies, differentiated instruction and what she called “accountability talk” (p. 99), or the requirement that learners be able to provide evidence to support their ideas. In terms of quantitative analysis, in the case of San Diego’s English Learners, small gains in reading achievement were noted; however, these gains were terribly thin in comparison with those made by native speakers.

O’Day’s (2009) qualitative findings are particularly relevant to the current study. O’Day found that the Balanced Literacy program drew students out of bilingual classrooms, long thought to be the most beneficial to them, to learn to read in monolingual classrooms, next to their native speaking peers. Teacher participants in the study reported that, in light of the Balanced Literacy curriculum, they saw little need to differentiate their interventions for English Learners, who they largely viewed as struggling readers. While the Balanced Literacy program emphasized instructional differentiation, teachers did not tailor instruction to accommodate English Learners’ language development needs; rather teachers approached their instruction as they would any struggling reader. O’Day (2009) joined other researchers (see for example T. Lucas et al., 2008) in underscoring the importance of specific instruction targeted at promoting English language development that has potential to be overshadowed by standardized curricula.

Alvarez and Corn (2008) identified one additional, critical consideration in the discussion of standardized curricula for English Learners. Pre-packaged, standardized assessment instruments designed more for accountability and data generation than to inform instruction often accompany these programs. They argued that in the case of English Learners, this shift away from authentic means of assessing student progress resulted in useless data that told teachers little about second language acquisition. Rather, standardized assessment results provided justification for the implementation of inappropriate teaching strategies that targeted an increase in test scores rather than support for English language development.

#### Teachers' Responses to Policy and Mandates

In one sociocultural examination of the implementation of mandated curricula, Maloch, Worthy, Hampton, Hungerford-Kresser and Semington (2013) concluded that teachers' enactment of district policy interacted with their own subjectivities, experiences and beliefs to produce classroom instruction that often varied significantly from the intended curriculum. In this case, first grade teachers enacting a guided reading program became fixated on moving students through the various reading levels, allowing such leveling to be an overt and organizational feature within the classroom. They concluded that enactment of mandated policy in individual classrooms is often contextual, and highly dependent upon the acceptance or rejection of members of the broader community of practice.

Spillane (1999) explored differences in how policy is enacted by teachers within the contexts of their individual classrooms. He asserted that teachers often



resist or adapt policy designed to change teaching practices to align with their perspectives of what is best practice in the classroom. Furthermore, Spillane's zones of enactment provided a useful construct for understanding these differences:

'Zones of enactment' refer to that space where reform initiatives are encountered by the world of practitioners and 'practice', delineating that zone in which teachers notice, construe, construct and operationalize the instructional ideas advocated by reformers. (p.144)

In addition, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) emphasized the role of individual agency in how policy is enacted in the classroom. They provided a three-tier framework for understanding implementation, beginning with the individual agents as sense-makers who interpret policy in light of their prior knowledge and experiences, beliefs, values and emotions. Second, Spillane et al. argued that situated cognition accounts for the idea that the context in which policy is implemented is a "constituting element" (p. 389) in the process of sense making. Finally, the role of representation, or the way in which policy is designed and presented plays a role in this sense making. Spillane et al. emphasized the importance of not only formal, organized structures, but also the influence of informal communities, or "implementation networks" (p. 409) on how policy is enacted in the classroom.

#### Moving Beyond Knowledge: Thoughtfully Adaptive Teachers.

The literature I have reviewed to this point has highlighted the need for pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as teacher educators, to forefront diversity in their classrooms, using it as tool for growth rather than an excuse for failure. Furthermore, the literature emphasized that we expect teachers to accomplish this

in the face of high-stakes accountability measures and within the constraints of scripted and/or mandated curricula. Recently, Fairbanks and her colleagues (2010) offered a nuanced and insightful synthesis of research in the field of teacher education in an effort to explore why, in the face of all of these mediating factors, some teachers appear to move beyond the knowledge and skills they have acquired to become more “thoughtfully adaptive” (p. 161) than others with the same preparation. While these authors approach this question from varied epistemological perspectives, their discussion highlights the sociocultural dimensions of teaching. Thus, I have chosen to incorporate their work, which I summarize below, as part of my framework for analyses and interpretation in the current study.

Fairbanks et al. (2010) contend that there has historically been an emphasis on knowledge in teacher education and emerging federal and state legislation, implying that good teaching might be defined as the “rational and conscious application of knowledge” (p.161). Yet these authors problematize this assumption, suggesting instead that knowledge alone is insufficient, as thoughtfulness is what lies at the heart of teachers’ abilities to respond to their individual students’ needs. They engaged in a three year discussion of what, beyond knowledge, might aid teacher educators in developing more thoughtfully adaptive teachers. They offer four perspectives on why some teachers are able to apply their knowledge responsively, while others are more narrow and rigid in their approach. These perspectives include belief-based personal and practical theories, vision, belonging and identity.

Belief-based *personal practical theories* (PPTs) encompass a wide range of teacher characteristics, such as their attitudes, values, perceptions of self, sense of agency and self-efficacy. Individuals develop these beliefs both in formal settings, such as teacher education courses, as well as through social interaction and lived experiences. These beliefs become a lens through which teachers view education and their students, and thus, largely influence teacher decision making (Levin & Ye, 2008). Through personal reflection, PPTs can become more apparent and provide teachers and teacher educators insights into how they shape the capacity to be thoughtfully adaptive.

A teacher's *vision* can be thought of as their idealistic objective for each student, outside the requirements of the standard curriculum. While there have been varied approaches to understanding teachers' visions, they all seem to address a "self-understanding about a commitment to extended outcomes" (Fairbanks, et al., 2010. p. 164). Vision lies at the root of teachers' resistance to policy that restricts opportunities for their students and inspires them to do more than what is simply required in an effort to develop potential in their students beyond academics.

A personal *sense of belonging* arises when teachers see their work as being congruent with the common objective of those with whom they work. However, belonging is a two-way street in that teachers who do not see the connection between their work and those of their colleagues are not likely to feel part of the fabric of the school's mission. Furthermore, Fairbanks et al. (2010) suggest that teachers with a strong sense of belonging are more likely respond thoughtfully to

their students because of the confidence that arises from feeling supported in acting on their individual perspectives, or visions.

The final perspective that contributes to developing thoughtfully adaptive teachers, *identity*, is derived from multiple fields of social sciences. Generally, however, these researchers describe identity as learned, but constantly changing in relation to current contexts and prior experiences. Thus, Fairbanks et al. (2010) contend, “As teacher candidates interact with school settings, they are positioned and position themselves as specific kinds of teachers” (p.166). One important consideration related to identity is the many ways in which power and authority influence teacher identity and thus, mediate their actions and decision-making.

Fairbanks et al. (2010) conclude by explaining the way in which *agency* and *self-knowledge* embody these four perspectives, allowing teachers to act within and upon their personal practical theories, vision, belonging and identity to respond to the complex needs of their diverse classrooms. They caution that,

Without preparation, a process of cultural mediation occurs in which contextual elements (e.g., school, community, state, and national policies, politics, and economics) may quickly force teachers into less thoughtful ways of teaching. (p.167)

Thus, supporting and preparing teachers to address the multiple, and often conflicting demands they face on a daily basis becomes an essential element in the discourse surrounding teacher preparation.

### Conclusion: The Figured World of First Grade

In the same tradition as Fairbanks, et al. (2010), Sutton and Levinson (2001) asserted that policy (i.e. standardized curricula, mandates for differentiation or collaborative ESL programs) comprise a “recursive dynamic” ( p. 3) whereby

actual practice is reflected in the manner by which “individuals and groups engage in situated behaviors that are both constrained and enabled by existing structures” (p.3). This study sought to describe how these situated behavior and perceptions of teachers within the figured world of first grade at Madison Elementary interacted with their professional subjectivities and lived experiences to mediate the enactment of grouping and differentiation for English Learners. Such an examination of the processes and structures that mediate how teachers perceived and enacted institutionalized practices, as well as their approaches to the instruction of linguistically diverse students holds the potential to contribute to the collective understanding of how teacher educators might support pre- and in-service teachers in developing capacities that allow them to extend beyond commodified knowledge to adapt to diverse student needs.

More thick description of the unique contexts of individual teachers working within prescribed curricula is needed. In particular, there exists a gap in scholarship as it relates to teacher decision-making in terms of grouping and instructional differentiation for English Learners. This study sought to fill that gap by providing a nuanced and detailed description of how a team of first grade teachers approached the instruction of their English Learners within the general education classroom.

In this chapter, I summarized the vast scholarship that relates to English Learners and the current contexts for educating them in this era of accountability. I also reviewed relevant scholarship as it relates to teacher education and preparing future and in-service teachers for work in increasingly diverse classrooms.

Fairbanks and her colleagues (2010) constructed a meaningful and intricate examination of teaching, highlighting its highly social, contextual and dynamic nature. In the spirit of sociocultural tradition they emphasized the manner in which the interplay between personal past and present experiences and the structures of power and authority mediate how teacher make sense of their worlds. It is through their work that I conceptualized the sociocultural theoretical framework for this dissertation, which I describe in detail in the chapter that follows.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

In this chapter I outline the ethnographic methods of qualitative inquiry I employed to produce nuanced descriptions of how first grade teachers in a New South suburban classroom conceptualized and enacted instructional grouping, and what professional subjectivities and institutional practices mediated those conceptualizations.

I begin with a broad discussion of constructionism and the assumption that knowledge and meaning are socially generated, contextual and cultural productions. I then outline a series of sociocultural studies related to education that serve as a precedent for the sociocultural lens through which this study was conceived and enacted. Finally, I describe the context for the study, including the setting, and participants, as well as an overview of the methods of data collection and the processes I used for analyses.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

In the 40th anniversary issue of TESOL Quarterly, Johnson (2006) described the shift in educational research toward interpretive approaches: The positivistic paradigm that had long positioned teachers as conduits to students and their learning was found to be insufficient for explaining the complexities of teachers' mental lives and the teaching processes that occur in classrooms. Rather, an interpretative or situated paradigm, largely drawn from ethnographic research in

sociology and anthropology, came to be seen as better suited to explaining the complexities of teachers' mental lives and the various dimensions of teachers' professional worlds (p.236).

This dissertation study aligned with the "sociocultural turn" identified by Johnson (2006) and built of a body of scholarship for the early elementary classroom emphasizing language, culture, and literacy as social productions. Since Heath's (1983) landmark ethnography of young children's "ways with words" in a small textile center in the North Carolina Piedmont, sociocultural inquiry for the early grades has examined the "funds of knowledge" that young children bring to schools and classrooms (N. Gonzalez et al., 2005; Haneda & Wells, 2012; Razfar, 2012), community literacies (Auerbach, 2001; Dunsmore, Ordoñez-Jasis, & Herrera, 2013; Guerra, 2009; Jacobs, 2013; Reese & Goldenberg, 2008), and young learners bilingual practices (Cuero, 2009; Cummins, 2012; Toohey, 2000; Walters, 2011).

In terms of teachers, scholarship has examined the centrality of pre-service teachers' subjectivities about diversity (Gay, 2010; Rueda & Stillman, 2012), negotiation of white privilege (Whipp, 2013), and linguistic difference (Commins & Miramontes, 2006; Fecho, 2000; Jiménez & Rose, 2010; T. Lucas et al., 2008). In many instances, such scholarship has argued for individual and collaborative reflection and participatory professional development to be leveraged for transformational teaching (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005; Nieto, 2013; Portes & Smagorinsky, 2010; Rush & Fecho, 2008).



Sociocultural studies of pre-service teachers have also centered on the conflicting paradigms from which they draw in terms of pedagogical approaches. For instance, Smagorinsky, Rhym and Moore (2013) describe the socialization process of teacher candidates who are faced with “competing centers of gravity” (p. 147) that mediate their conception of teaching. Similarly, Bickmore, Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen (2005) examine how new teachers reconcile the differences in what is taught in teacher education programs and what is experienced early in their teaching careers.

Many studies of teachers and teaching employing Vygotskian lens have focused on novice students and learning, with comparatively few addressing the way in which in-service teachers negotiate meaning and make decisions in situated and ever-changing contexts. Yet, teaching is a complex and conflicted pursuit, and by adopting a sociocultural perspective, we are able to better understand its nuanced and complicated nature, as well as the “dynamics of collaboration and the interdependence of individual and social processes” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 204). As Smagorinsky, et al. (2013) argued, by taking this approach:

We do not limit ourselves to viewing the developing of a conception of how to teach as following from a single, powerful cause. Rather, our attention to the role of mediation—the social, cultural, and historical means by which thinking is accomplished through engagement with tools and signs—suggests that teacher socialization may involve many influences, not all of which are in mutual accord. (p.151)

Thus, sociocultural studies hold the potential to unpack the social processes underlying teaching and reveal the manner in which personal and professional subjectivities arise from lived experiences, biases and beliefs to interact with the context in which teaching occurs.

To that end, Yoon (2013) examined the ways in which teachers “translate” (p.149) scripted curricula to co-construct meaning with their students. Maloch, et al. (2013) described first grade teachers as “sense makers” (p. 283) whose instruction could be viewed as the enactment of policy. Winchester (2013) reconciled social and cognitive perspectives of language learning to describe the manner by which teachers co-construct students’ identities and prepare them to exercise agency within a community of practice. Salas (2008) adopted a neo-Vygotskian framework to illustrate how teachers might position themselves as advocates for the students they teach in light of the multiple, sometimes conflicting roles that they fill.

While there is variance among their use of Vygotsky’s theories (see, for example Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2007; Rogoff, 1990) scholars share in the understanding that teachers’ “minds in society” (Vygotsky, 1978) allow for the social formation of cognition. Employing a sociocultural lens for examining teachers and teaching allows for a deep understanding of “dynamics of collaboration and the interdependence of individual and social processes” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 204). Thus, scholars have begun to explore the social and contextual nature of teaching and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, influences under which teachers operate (Fairbanks et al., 2010; Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006; K. Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Salas, 2008; Smagorinsky, 2007; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002).

Lave and Wegner’s (1991) model of situated learning relied on the concept of membership and participation in communities of practice. These communities

of practice are comprised of practitioners who come together with a common interest, and consist of a series of relationships and interactions. As defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) “a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). Similarly, Holland et al. (1998) described the figured worlds of individuals as the “socially-produced, culturally constructed activities” (p. 41) in which individuals engage. These figured worlds are comprised of the intrapersonal interactions among participants, and emphasize participants’ positions, or roles within them.

Indeed, teachers may participate in multiple figured worlds simultaneously, authoring and re-authoring them in response to the multiple influences that coalesce with lived experiences to shape daily practice, decision-making and sense making. Furthermore, Holland and her colleagues (1998) asserted that individuals were far from passive in this process. In contrast, humans enact agency as a means of “redirecting oneself” (p. 278).

Holland et al. (1998) explained that one form of human agency emerges in the form of improvisations that people “create in response to particular situations, mediated by these senses and sensitivities” (p. 279). Improvisations, or those “individual behaviors that work outside the lines drawn by cultural expectation” (Rush & Fecho, 2008, p. 124) are evidence of human agency, which Holland et al. defined as

The capacity to act purposively and reflectively...to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view. (p. 42)

Improvisation and the capacity for human agency appear critical in light of Fairbanks, Crooks and Arial's (2011) assertion that the work of teachers is done under the influence of numerous internal and external forces and teaching is, therefore, "dilemma-ridden and inherently ambiguous" (p. 163).

As players operate within multiple figured worlds, they encounter artifacts, or tools that mediate human activity (Cole, 1996). Whether material or symbolic, Fairbanks, Crooks and Arial (2011) asserted that it is these tools "by which individuals interact with each other, understand these interactions, and accomplish goals or tasks, whether they are successful or not" (p. 3). Social relationships, institutional practices and school structures are also tools, or artifacts that ultimately mediate the way in which participants interact with and make sense of their figured worlds.

### The Design of the Study

Research within a sociocultural framework often employs ethnography as described by anthropologist Geertz (1973) who viewed such ethnographic productions as fictions in the sense that they are "'something made,' 'something fashioned' . . . not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments" (p.317). Furthermore, he emphasized the centrality of the researcher in such studies:

The ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted..." (p. 317)

Thus, according to Geertz , the interpretive nature of ethnographic research produces "thick description" that allows for understanding that goes beyond what

can be learned from “thin” descriptions that represent merely factual accounts of what is observed. It is impossible, he argued, to divorce the observer from what is observed, and similarly what is observed from the context in which it occurred.

Outlining practical considerations for ethnographic production, Emerson et al. (2011) contended that the selection of a research method ultimately reflects the researcher’s underlying assumptions about social life and how to better understand it. Thus, they viewed “fieldwork and ultimately fieldnotes as predicated on a view of social life as continuously created through people’s efforts to find and confer meaning on their own and other’s actions” (p.14). They defined four principles of “ethnography as the inscription of participatory experience” (p.15) that underscore the appropriateness of its application to a study that employs a sociocultural framework. These principles included the idea that what is observed is inseparable from the observation process, the need to highlight meanings and concerns of the people studied, the necessity that field notes be contemporaneously written, and finally, that the researcher focus on the interactions “through which members of social settings create, and sustain specific, local social realities” (p.18).

#### A Figured World: Madison Elementary

The study took place within a public elementary school in a large urban district in metro Charlotte, approximately 10 miles south of the center of large urban city was the little town of Madison. Boasting a population of a little over 25,000, Madison had seen a boom in growth over the last several years.

Geographically, the town spanned a little over 17 miles; much of this area was indiscernible from the larger, suburban sprawl of the bigger city. However, right

in the center of this area was about 5 square miles of homes, businesses and community organizations that maintained the quaint, traditional feeling of historic Madison, a town with roots in farming that was established at the beginning of the 19th century.

A walk through downtown Madison might have made some people feel as if they had just walked onto the set for the Andy Griffith Show. A major landmark, Nieman's Hardware, had miraculously withstood the competition of mega-chain stores like Lowe's and Home Depot, offering residents such goods as Radio Flyer sleds and handmade rocking chairs as well as traditional supplies such as hardware, bird feed and lumber. Other businesses included a bicycle store, an art school, a dry cleaner, a coffee shop and a handful of specialty/gift shops. There were a few restaurants, most oriented toward families, and the downtown area was devoid of fast food or any type of drive thru service. Town Hall shared a large, attractive brick building with an impressive library. A historic railroad depot sat next to the active railroad tracks that split the downtown area right through its center.

Madison prospered during the mid-1800's, new businesses came with the railroad. Its first school was opened in 1895; run by local churches it sat in what is now called Bellville, the community park. Due to overcrowded conditions, the town constructed a brick building and in 1906 Madison Elementary School was founded. At the time of this study, this building stood within 100 yards of the current building and was used by the town as a community center. The entire community participated in a series of festivities and events a few years ago as the

school celebrated its 100th birthday. As part of the celebration, the parent-teacher organization installed a tile wall that now covers the entire entrance hall. Each tile bares the handprint and name of a current or past student, staff member or teacher. Upon close examination, it was easy to find current students whose parents and grandparents were Madison Elementary alumni.

The school was situated on the town's primary road, South Main Street. Directly across the street was the Madison Volunteer Fire Department that hosted countless fieldtrips for all area students. Churches sandwiched the school on both sides and the town community center sat directly behind the school. This same building hosts the Madison Playhouse, which sponsored several theatrical productions each season. Thanks to the close proximity, students often enjoyed attending these shows, as well as embarking on walking history tours of the downtown area. Officer Wilson from the town's police department, who was assigned to watch over Madison Elementary during its hours of operation, arrived daily to man the two crosswalks that brought many of the students to school on foot or by bicycle. Area restaurants hosted too many spirit nights to count and the local merchants sponsored everything from mile run activities to t-shirts for Blue and Gold, the school's spirit week.

#### Madison's Composition

I selected Madison for a variety of reasons. First, a moderate demographic shift occurred over the last five to six years. Subtle redistricting that brought two large apartment communities into Madison's attendance zone, as well as changes in the residential housing market in the area resulted in the enrolment of a rising

number of immigrant families. These English Learners represented diverse cultural backgrounds, with Hispanic, Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese and South Korean populations being the most predominant (roughly 10% of the school population). In addition, there was additional diversity found in the socioeconomic class of families attending this school, which range from moderately wealthy to homeless, with a moderate population of students receiving services for exceptional needs. Furthermore, Madison was an appealing research site because of the experience and stability of its teaching force. The school's staff could be described as follows during 2013-2014 school year: 100% of the school's teachers were fully licensed, 43% possessed advanced degrees, 63% had more than 10 years of teaching experience and the school boasted a modest 4%, annual turnover rate. Finally and perhaps most importantly, was the genuine willingness of the Madison's administration and staff to host my research.

#### The Community of Practice: Madison's First Grade Team

Participants comprised the entire first grade instructional team (eight teachers), the ESL teacher, one literacy facilitator and a school administrator. My rationale in including the entire grade level team rested in the fact that collaborative planning time and discussions within professional learning communities often influence individual thinking and practice within the classroom. A great deal of my field notes were generated in team planning sessions and group data analyses meetings, meaning that the perspectives and subjectivities of the entire team contributed to how English Learners received their instruction.

English Learners in Madison were placed in small groups within appointed



classrooms, known as ESL cluster classrooms. Therefore, only three teachers had English Learners present in their classrooms during the time of this study, and these teachers became my primary participants, which I referred to as ESL cluster teachers.

In addition to the eight first grade general education teachers, Madison's only ESL teacher participated in the study. Her participation allowed me to explore differences in perspectives and objectives based on professional preparation and roles. It also allowed opportunities to observe how the ESL program influenced decisions related to instructional grouping and differentiation.

Additionally, a school administrator was included in order to clarify school policy and procedure, as well as to gain insights into what, if any, district communications and policies have the potential to influence how the first grade team approaches differentiating instruction and grouping students. Finally, the school's literacy facilitator was included to provide background information related to the school's literacy program and because she is responsible for establishing and communicating school and district policies and practices. The table below describes illustrates the participants, their experience and their role within the study.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Participant	Title	Primary (y/n)	Years of Experience	Master's Degree	National Board Certified
Sheila	First grade teacher	Y	14	Y	Y
Eliza	First grade teacher	Y	20	Y	N
Sarah	First grade teacher	Y	2	N	N
Elizabeth	First grade teacher	N	16	N	Y
Rhonda	First grade teacher	N	9	Y	N
Krista	First grade teacher	N	25	Y	Y
Brenda	First grade teacher	N	1	Y	N
Jessica	First grade teacher	N	4	Y	N
Amanda	ESL Teacher	Y	18	Y	N
Literacy Facilitator Terrance	Literacy Facilitator	N	17	Y	Y
Principal Michaels	Principal	N	13	Y	N

#### Primary Participants- The ESL Cluster Teachers

Sheila. Sheila was a White female and 35-year old mother of two who had been teaching for 14 years. Originally aspiring to be an FBI agent “like Jodie Foster in *Silence of the Lambs*” Sheila’s father persuaded her to pursue a career perhaps more aligned with her passion for youth, particularly children who struggle in some area. While she majored in elementary education, she was a self-described lover of literacy and focused on reading education in both her master’s

program and the completion of her National Board Certification. Sheila assumed a leadership role amongst her team members and within the Madison community. Her hard work had obviously earned her the respect of her peers, who recently selected her as Teacher of the Year.

Eliza. Another White female, Eliza converted to Islam upon marrying her husband of ten years. A bright and colorful hijab characterized her daily appearance, something that her students rarely acknowledged. Soft-spoken and thoughtful, her career in education began as a pre-school teacher. When she later had difficulty finding a teaching position upon the completion of her Master's degree, she accepted a position teaching in Mexico, where she spent a few years.

Sarah. Sarah was in her mid-20's and in her second year of teaching in public school. However, she was a new member of the first grade team, as she had been assigned to teach second grade her first year at Madison. After completing her undergraduate degree in education, Sarah moved to Peru, where she taught in a private, international school where all instruction was delivered in English.

Amanda. In her late 40's, Amanda was originally licensed to teach in Florida, where she completed eight years of service in a content classroom with extensive experience working with English Learners. She was with Madison for 10 years as of the year of this study, with ESL as the only position she had held. Amanda described her Jewish faith as a defining character trait, as well as her role as a wife and as a mother of two teenage children who attend school in the district in which she taught.

### Processes and Procedures

I first approached the principal at Madison with the idea of conducting a study in the fall of 2012, as his support of this project was critical in obtaining district permission. Principal Michaels was kind enough to endorse my study, and thus, after receiving approval from the university's IRB and submitting a formal application to the district, the district granted me permission to proceed with my research. Principal Michaels and I met briefly in the spring of 2013 to discuss the structure of his first grade team as well as the projected enrollment of English Learners. Then, in early August of 2013, we met again to look specifically at his first grade staff and the distribution of English Learners across the grade level. With his permission, I contacted Rhonda, the grade level chair for first grade to arrange a time to meet the team, explain the project and obtain their informed consent. This meeting took place August 21, 2013 in Rhonda's classroom where the team had gathered to discuss their lesson plans for the first few weeks of school.

### Subjectivity Statement

My interest in the school experiences of English Learners began when I volunteered in my daughters' classrooms as a tutor, beginning in 2005. In particular, my work with Luis, a Latino student in the classroom of a teacher who was coincidentally a participant in the current study, profoundly influenced my desire to become an educator. Eliza, a member of the first grade team, was admittedly overwhelmed by the task of bridging their language gap and, as she has since confessed, completely confounded by behavior that she attributed to his

cultural background. In one interview, she employed sarcasm as a tool for describing how her lack of preparedness for working with English Learners escalated into a cultural clash with her student's mother over something as minor as Valentine's Day chocolates:

That's why I was so effective with Luis— all of that training I've had [laughter]. I didn't know how to deal with him. His culture got in my way. I found it frustrating. He didn't bring his Valentines on Valentine's Day and he showed up like a week later with them. And he was trying to just pass them out to the class, flinging them at people and I said no, no, no, you can't do that. And it just ended up being a big thing. She (Luis' mother) came in all hysterical and demanded to meet with the school counselor and myself. And she's sitting there going off, and her English is fine at that point— telling the counselor what a terrible teacher I was and on and on and on. Which is probably the very point that Amanda (our ESL teacher) was like— you don't ever need to have another ESL child the whole time you are teaching. I accept that. I can embrace autism and all this other stuff. I am just telling you right now, a mom comes to me and says it's okay for boys to be boys and he can climb on top of the desk because he's a boy and he'll tell me what to do and I'm okay with that because he's the only boy in our house and it is part of our culture...I don't have patience for that. That was probably a really bad experience to start.

Over the course of the year, I watched as Elizabeth and Luis attempted to bridge the cultural and linguistic distances between them while operating within the chaos of the typical Kindergarten classroom. I became aware of the complexity of it all and the potential for misinterpretation, particularly in terms of culture and student ability. Quite honestly, I was struck by the fundamental unfairness of it all— both from the perspective of the teacher who was given no support or professional development, and from the young boy whose education was so very different from my native-speaking daughter seated in the chair next to him.

I took this experience and returned to school, obtained a teaching license and a Master's degree and eventually became employed as an ESL teacher in a similar school within the same district. This school had a new and only moderate

population of English Learners, which meant that the teachers were equally underprepared and under-supported in addressing both the linguistic and academic needs of their immigrant students. In my years as an ESL teacher in this school, I worked closely with general education teachers, which gave me the opportunity to listen to and observe their varied perspectives related to English Learners.

When the time came to select a school for the current study, I returned to my daughters' school, Madison Elementary. The school sits at the heart of a community in which I have participated in various capacities over the course of the last 13 years. Having served in the school as a parent, volunteer, board member, tutor and test proctor, I became a familiar face and established friendly relationships with many staff members. This familiarity contributed to my belief that Madison provided a meaningful venue for examining how teachers' differentiate instruction for English Learners within the general education classroom.

### Data Generation

Data collection began August 26, 2013, the first day of the academic school year and continued until March of 2014. My initial intention was to conduct nine weeks, or one academic quarter of intense classroom observations (4-5 hours daily). However, because of the irregular schedule at the beginning of the school year and the frequent changes in daily routines due to testing and school events, I elected to continue the intensive period of observations for four additional weeks, for a total of 13 weeks. Table 2 illustrates the approximate total number of hours of observations and the various contexts in which they occurred.

In addition to the intensive period of observations, I continued to visit Madison for follow-up observations from late-November through March. These follow up observations spanned one entire school day each week (7 hours), with occasional visits on other days, allowing me the opportunity to focus on various instructional practices as they emerged as significant through my data analysis. It also gave me the opportunity to observe closely student activities within the instructional environment, as I volunteered to assist three English Learners during various times of the follow-up days.

The number of hours per week varied depending on the school schedule and relevance of activities within individual classrooms. In total, I conducted approximately 80 observations during the intensive observation period, which began on the last week of August and concluded the third week of November. These observations ranged from 45 minutes to four hours in duration. In total, during the intensive observation period, I conducted over 150 hours of classroom observations and recorded over 400 pages of field notes (see Table 2).

My actions and role during classroom observations was context dependent. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) described points along a continuum that represent a researcher's role in participatory observations. Toward the beginning of the study I occupied what they would describe as a *passive observer* role, where I was present in the classroom, but remained quiet and out of the way. By the end of the study, after several weeks of building rapport with the first grade team, I frequently found myself in what DeWalt and DeWalt called *active participation*, where I sat

side-by-side with students and assisted with math problems or worked with a small group during writing time.

Table 2: Data generation

Data Source	Frequency	Duration	Participants
Interviews	1 each	35-50 minutes	8 first grade teachers ESL teacher Literacy Facilitator School Principal
Follow-up Interviews	5 2 2 2 1	20-60 minutes	Sheila Amanda Eliza Sarah School Principal
Classroom Observations	80	35 minutes-4 hours	8 first grade teachers ESL teacher
Lit Lab Observations	2	60 minutes	Sheila
Monthly Team Planning Session	3	3.5 hours	8 first grade teachers Literacy Facilitator School Principal
KidTalks Data Sessions	3	60 minutes	Entire first grade team
Follow-up Observations and Tutoring	12	7 hours	Entire first grade team with tutoring in Sheila and Sarah's classrooms

### Planning Sessions

In addition to classroom observations, I attended the first grade team's monthly half-day planning sessions. Known as Wacky Wednesdays, on these planning days the first grade team dispersed students to the special area team staff to allow classroom teachers a large block of uninterrupted time for collaborative planning. I also attended monthly Kidtalks sessions. These meetings were also



held on Wednesdays, one each month for an hour, to allow the first grade team to meet with school administrators and the literacy facilitators to review classroom and grade level data and make decisions in regard to which students would participate in the school's reading remediation program, known as the "Lit Lab."

In addition to formal observations and attendance in monthly meetings, I had the opportunity to observe the first grade team in more informal situations, like the school-wide celebrations and events. These informal opportunities proved to be the source of some of the richest data I collected, as teachers shared their personal beliefs about teaching and learning.

#### Interviews

During the initial two weeks of the study, I conducted formal interviews with all eight classroom teachers, as well as the ESL teacher and the school administrator. The interview protocol was intentionally open-ended to allow participants latitude in their responses (See Appendices A and B). Each of the interviews lasted from 35 minutes to 50 minutes and each was audiotaped using a digital voice recorder. I listened to and transcribed each of the interviews, in part or in full, prior to conducting the next as a method of increasing familiarity with data, and as a means of identifying emerging themes that informed subsequent, follow-up interviews. Throughout each of the interviews, I was deliberate in my efforts to suppress my prior understanding of instructional differentiation and grouping to allow minimal influence on participants' responses.

I recorded field notes with an Alpha-smart keyboard and then transferred them to Microsoft Word and coded them by date and the subject I observed.

Following each day of observations, I reviewed the field notes and expanded them with details I remembered as well as other insights. Appendix C contains a sample from the field note record. I maintained a data journal throughout the project where I kept printed copies of the field notes, as well as copies of the transcribed interviews. After reviewing the field notes and interviews, I was able to conduct both formal and informal member checks to clarify my interpretation of what I had seen and heard. In the case of Sheila and the data presented in Chapter Six, I conducted a separate follow-up interview to verify my understanding of her role within the Lit Lab, as well as her beliefs about reading and remediation in general.

### Data Analysis

Inductive analyses of the data generated for this project began with the first day of classroom observations as I began to look for recurrent themes and relationships (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). As is typical of qualitative inquiry, this analysis was recursive and ongoing (Wolcott, 1994) in the entire phase of intensive data collection and continued into the follow up phase that spanned the majority of the academic year.

### Analytic Writing

Throughout this process, I reflected on what I had recorded and added to my record in the form of written asides and commentaries (Emerson, et al., 2011). For example, the following figure contains an excerpt from my field note record during a series of observations I did in general education classrooms while some students were attending remediation in the Lit Lab.

Table 3: Fieldnote asides examples

Fieldnotes 10-15-13	Aside
<p>*In Elizabeth's room, she greets me with a joke from the back of the room and motions me to enter. I see a few of Sheila's kids in here, integrated into various groups.</p> <p>*Three are on the rug working on word endings- four are at a table working on blends- sh, ch, etc. *Elizabeth is at the table counting syllables with claps- the kids play phonics bingo on the rug.</p> <p>*There are two final students who sort words based on their beginning sounds that are blends.</p> <p>*Elizabeth says: okay, where can I add a vowel? Get your rubber band (she mimes stretching a rubber band between her hands) do you hear the U- where can I put it?</p>	<p>*How did the other teachers decide which groups to put Sheila's students into?</p> <p>*The materials that these students use are from the Florida Literacy Council. They are great activities, but dated and definitely show that Elizabeth is doing her own thing during this time. This supports what I noticed during the team planning, that she is willing to share what she does, but doesn't see why the rest of the team might be interested.</p>

Thus, asides and commentaries were tools I used to note impressions, insights and questions that arose through my reflection on the day's notes.

Further writing heavily characterized my analysis. For example, I engaged in writing "tales of the field" (Van Mannen, 2011), or attempts to "harmonize, mediate, or otherwise negotiate a tale of cultures" (p.138). During these writing sessions, I focused on instances, action and exchanges that appeared particularly meaningful based on the emerging themes I identified during the ongoing coding process. For example, I wrote a literary tale (Van Maanen) describing an episode in which Sheila appeared particularly adaptive to her students' needs (see Appendix D), and I wrote a critical tale (Van Maanen) describing a push-in teaching session involving Amanda and Sarah. This analytic writing in the form of extended narratives allowed me to identify the way in which "'members' meanings

emerge through interactions” (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 113) and to make cohesive connections across the data.

Writing vignettes also served as a useful tool for making sense of the data and bringing cohesion to the field notes (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). These vignettes allowed me to reflect on the relationship between what I theorized and the participants I observed. For example, I wrote a vignette describing how Eliza welcomed a new student, illuminating her perception of her classroom as a participatory learning community (Appendix E). Furthermore, I engaged in in-process memos, which Emerson, et al, (2010) assert are useful for noting patterns differences and similarities among the data collected. The following are excerpts from in-process memos:

- Two things- One is the literacy focus of this social studies lesson. While Sheila has taught the content with fidelity, she has fore fronted main idea as a literacy focus. This is the same thing I saw with the lesson about firefighters– there was more focus on reading than on how to get out of a burning house. Two, she just adjusted her lesson plan mid-lesson to accommodate the students– I think she realized that the activity is outside of their reach right now.
- I am in my car with the day nearly over. I had to stop taking notes and pitch in– the class was just too crazy to sit back and watch. I sense a general fatigue overcoming her– and I am concerned that my observations may be putting additional pressure on her, though I think she truly does appreciate the inspiration for reflection. Several times during this day, she communicated to me in various ways the feeling that she just can’t get done everything she would like– the kids are so important to her– and she is able to see what they need, she just can’t get to it. It must be very frustrating to constantly feel you have underperformed. For some teachers it may be better because they don’t see what can be done for the kids, but in this case, she knows.

After 13 weeks of in-process analyses, I began compressing and organizing data outlined by Emerson, et al. (2011). I began with open coding, where I read and re-

read the field record, making notes of various themes and relationships that emerged. During this phase, I used the track change feature and colored fonts in Microsoft Word to make notes and visual representations of the patterns I identified. In the case of the field notes, I made manual notations in the margins of my binder to assist in focusing my analysis. This initial coding phase allowed me to identify several overarching themes. I began to reflect on how I would present the data and who would be the intended audience, which allowed me to select three primary themes related to the guiding questions for this study.

### Coding

I then advanced into a process of focus coding Emerson et al., (2010), where I reviewed the entire corpus with these themes in mind. I began to piece together related data into integrative memos that evolved over time to comprise the data I subsequently present in the following three chapters. As Geertz (1973) suggested, this process of writing informed my interpretation of what I observed in the first grade classrooms at Madison Elementary. In the spirit of a sociocultural inquiry, I sought to explore how the interplay of teachers' lived experiences and current school contexts, combined with their roles in a professional community of practice contributed to the communal construction of the figured world of providing instruction to the English Learners within their first grade classrooms.

In this chapter, I have outlined a precedent for the use of a Vygotskian theoretical framework to explore how teachers make sense of their teaching and approach instruction for diverse learners. I described this framework and the various applications of sociocultural theory to contemporary research in the field

of education. I introduced the community of Madison, and its public elementary school, as well as the team of teachers who participated in the study. I then explained the use of participatory qualitative inquiry informed by a tradition of ethnographic fieldwork to generate a field record. I explained the approach of Emerson et al. (2011) to analyzing the data I generate as well as its appropriateness given the design of the study.

This dissertation study sought to use the method and procedures I have described to explore how teachers perceived and enacted instructional grouping and differentiation for English Learners within the figured world of first grade at Madison Elementary. Furthermore, it examined how teachers potentially improvised in the face of circumstances for which they have no prescribed course of action. In the following three chapters, I present my findings from the study, theorizing their significance in light of the guiding research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: “JUST RIGHT READING LEVELS”

Three hours into the first day of first grade, Sheila was sitting in the rocking chair at the front of her room with nineteen brand new first graders at her feet; she closed a picture book, “First Day Jitters” and announced:

Sheila: We are moving into our Reader’s Workshop time and I have something very special to share with you. Do you remember at the very end of Kindergarten when you picked your favorite five books from your book baggy? Well I have those baggies here with your books and a special note to you from your Kindergarten teachers.

The children returned to their seats, opened their baggies and pulled out their books, each of which was marked with a round, yellow sticker and a single letter of the alphabet. A young Hmong girl pulled Ds from her bag, while the child next to her unloaded his Gs. Across the room, one Latino boy pulled A’s from his bag.

Carlos: [Enthusiastically] Hey, these are the same books as last year!”

Madison Elementary School’s implementation of a Balanced Literacy program the year prior to this study brought with it sweeping changes in institutional practices and schedules that held constant across grade levels. These changes spanned Kindergarten, where Carlos and his classmates had spent the prior year through their projected departure at the end of fifth grade. Balanced Literacy permeated the classrooms and hallways of Madison, with no sense of apology for the sacrifice of all things unrelated to improving literacy skills. Associated with this reading program was a complex system of leveling and grouping that differed in many ways from the traditional ability grouping described in the Brookings Institute report (Loveless, 2013).

I begin the presentation of my findings with data that specifically explore how, in the language of teachers, students' reading levels (A, B, C, D, etc.) became synonymous with overall student ability and achievement to a team of first grade teachers. I theorize this data as they relate to the guiding questions for this sociocultural study of how a metro Charlotte first grade learning community understood and enacted instructional differentiation and grouping for the English Learners in their classrooms. Specifically, I examine how their professional subjectivities and institutional practices mediated and potentially caused them to improvise their approaches to these practices.

In this chapter, I describe the evolution and implementation of the figured world of Balanced Literacy at Madison and the way in which this program and its prescribed components managed how teachers grouped and labeled with alphabetic markers their students for literacy instruction. I then explore how the systematic implementation of Balanced Literacy generated the workshop model of instruction that was employed in almost every lesson I observed at Madison, and how this model of instruction influenced when and how teachers grouped their students. I theorize how this figured world of Balanced Literacy mediated teachers' perceptions of differentiation and their understanding of English Learners, ultimately defining them as struggling readers. I conclude by positioning my findings in dialogue with the contemporary scholarship describing the potential for the lived experiences and subjectivities of classroom teachers to influence their enactment of mandated or scripted curricula. Furthermore, I problematize the recasting of English Learners as struggling readers, suggesting that such a re-



casting represents a new deficit approach to working with English Learners that holds the potential to deemphasize the need to provide them with support specific to their English language development.

### A Focus on Reading

In April 2013, North Carolina General Assembly passed the Excellent Public Schools Act, a subsection of which was a statewide literacy program entitled *Read to Achieve* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013). *Read to Achieve* effectively put an end to social promotion of third graders across the state, making retention mandatory, with few exceptions, for any child not reading at grade level as assessed by the North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) reading assessment. The trickledown effect was a sense of urgency that permeated the first grade team at Madison— a sort of “do or die” mentality when it came to reading. Thus, in my first interview with Sheila, a primary participant and one of the first grade ESL cluster teachers, she described her desire to work with the most struggling readers. She explained:

The kids that are high, you want them to get that expected growth too. We can't just forget about them. But, with the new legislation for the third grade, where if you don't pass the EOG you do summer school and then you are retained, to me, this year is critical to getting these kids to read, and I feel like I am responsible for that.

This sense of responsibility for student progress as conceptualized solely through the development of literacy skills became the driving force for much of the instruction at Madison, as teachers in the primary grades operated in the shadow of the third grade deadline.

The first grade team that participated in this study consisted of eight teachers, three ESL cluster teachers (Sheila, Sarah and Eliza) and five general

education teachers (Elizabeth, Rhonda, Krista, Brenda and Jessica). The ensemble of the first grade team felt the stress of this new proficient reader deadline, allowing student progress within the leveled reading program to become the standard by which they gauged overall student achievement, academic ability and language proficiency.

For example, ESL cluster teacher Sarah, assigned to teach second grade the year prior, recalled an English Learner named Esteban who had arrived in her classroom as a newcomer. She described his year as successful, stating that he “grew a lot.” However, despite the fact that Esteban made significant progress in speaking and understanding English, Sarah was concerned that he would be unable to pass the end of grade assessments as a third grader, because he “was not where he should have been” when he left her.

Thus, teaching reading and developing proficient readers became the unquestioned priority for this team of teachers. A priority supported by the Principal Michaels and the entire school administration, which consisted of one Assistant Principal, two Literacy Facilitators and a Dean of Students. Its preeminence was visible in every aspect of the school’s operations, from posters on the wall: -“Just Read” and “Got Reading?”- to the allocation of time for planning.

Reading re-framed as “Balanced Literacy” had taken on a life of its own with a much greater significance than the simple ability to decode and comprehend text. The assessments generated by Balanced Reading and the categories they

created for student achievement were the tools by which teachers and even students framed much of the work they did, and what they accomplished.

### Balanced Literacy as Institutionalized Practice

During the period of data collection and the year previous, Madison Elementary had the institutional practice of selecting a central theme for professional development. Each year the school pooled its resources to either bring in experts in the selected field or send the appropriate staff members to workshops or courses that related to the targeted area for growth. For the 2012-2013 school year, the administrators of Madison enlisted the support of the Teachers College in Columbia (The Reading and Writing Project, 2010) to provide intensive professional development in the implementation of a Balanced Literacy program delivered through a workshop model of instruction. This program, like most Balanced Literacy programs, was intended to move the teachers at Madison away from what Madison's Literacy Facilitator Terrance referred to as "the dark years," where the use of basal readers and an emphasis on whole group instruction of reading skills and grammar elements dominated the school's literacy program.

Mrs. Terrance described Balanced Literacy as a middle ground in the pathway of the pendulum swinging between whole language and phonics-based literacy instruction. Balanced literacy, in general, emerged as a response to a report issued by the federal Reading First Panel that outlined essential components to early literacy instruction that eventually were coined the "Big Five" of Balanced Literacy. According to the report, in order to make adequate progress in reading, students need consistent, ongoing instruction in phonics, fluency, practice,

vocabulary growth, and comprehension (National Research Council, 1998). It was the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) model developed under the leadership of Calkins that Madison adopted, along with access to an accompanying series of workshops, coaching sessions, commercial products, all designed to prepare teachers to implement a Balanced Literacy approach to teaching reading (see also, Calkins, 2011, 2013).

On the school's webpage, Madison's literacy facilitators described Balanced Literacy as an approach to instruction that consists of several routine components present in daily instruction. The table below, adapted from their description, is an illustration of the school's interpretation of Balanced Literacy.

Table 4: Balanced Literacy at Madison

Components of Balanced Literacy	
Component	Description
Word Study	Through a variety of activities, students explore the alphabet, including the study of phonics, morphemes and sight words.
Interactive Read Aloud	The teacher reads a selected piece of literature, modeling skills taught in the mini lesson and stopping frequently to ask questions of the students in an effort to encourage them to think deeply about the text.
Shared Reading	Enlarged text is used by the teacher to model reading processes. The responsibility for reading the text is shared between the students and teacher.
Strategy Groups	These groups are also called guided reading groups and constitute a means by which teachers can meet with students who are currently assigned to similar reading levels. In these small groups, each student is given a copy of the text, which is read in unison, while the teacher emphasizes a strategy or skills that is needed by the entire group.

Table 4: Balanced Literacy at Madison (continued)

Independent Reading	During this time, students read at their “independent reading levels” for practice and are encouraged to respond to their text through sketching, writing and discussing.
Conferring	During the independent reading time, the teacher works one-on-one with student – teaching them a specific skill, setting goals and/or assessing their progress.

Therefore, while the focus of the literacy lesson in each classroom changed from day to day, the basic structure described above was consistent in all of the first grade classrooms at Madison. Teachers had the autonomy to spend more or less time on any given lesson, depending upon the needs of their students. However, communal planning and the schedule of benchmark assessments throughout the year resulted in rather uniform instruction across classrooms. The first grade team capitalized on this, frequently developing new ways to share resources and streamline preparation of materials for each lesson during their monthly planning sessions, as well as informal meetings distributed across the school year.

### Enacting Balanced Literacy

In preparation for the shift to Balanced Literacy, the school principal selected a cohort of teachers to attend a three-day workshop designed and facilitated by Columbia University’s Teachers College called the Reading & Writing Project (2010). The workshop occurred during one week of the summer of 2012, and Sheila was selected as the first grade representative to attend the training with one teacher from each of the other grades at Madison. The result was a “train the trainer” model of professional development, whereby Sheila was then charged with disseminating her newly acquired knowledge to her first grade

colleagues. Midway through the school year, three more teachers, Eliza, Elizabeth and Krista, from the first grade team attended additional training from representatives from Teachers College at another elementary school within the district.

Sheila shared that she was disappointed not to attend the second round of training, but was pleased to be able to observe a Teachers College staff developer who came to work with Madison's third grade team late in the school year. Overall, members of the first grade team agreed that the first year of Madison's Balanced Literacy program was somewhat experimental nature and, as Sheila described, "thrown at us full-force, like we are diving in."

Rather than introduce a new professional development theme for the 2013-2014 school year, Principal Michaels explained that he elected to continue a focus on Balanced Literacy, adding an emphasis on writing as "another layer." In addition to taking several staff members to the Reading & Writing Project workshops hosted at a local elementary school mid-year, Michaels brought in a staff developer from the project to observe and evaluate his staff's progress with implementing the Balanced Literacy program. Overall he described the current year's focus as "taking it a step further" once students have the foundations that were laid the prior year and "working with kids on an independent level" to become more self-aware, and encouraging them to "own some of their learning." Thus, the professional development focus at Madison underscored the continued hyper-emphasis on reading proficiency during the year of this study.

Overall, the first grade team positively received the Balanced Literacy program at Madison. Multiple participants commented in their interviews that they saw improvement in terms of reading skills and confidence very early on in the program's implementation. Perhaps more importantly, teachers considered the program a more individualized and appropriate way of teaching literacy. As Sheila explained,

It's funny how it comes full circle. I did Balanced Literacy in Ohio when I first started teaching and that's what we did. I loved it. So, when I came to North Carolina it was so completely different— it was the basal, it was Open Court. I just felt like I lost a lot of the love of teaching. So when I made the transfer to Madison- last year was the first year we did Balanced Literacy and I just felt like- I'm back where I was. I feel like I am back at my roots and I just love it. I just feel like this is how kids learn best.

Other members of the first grade team echoed Sheila's satisfaction with the program, expressing their appreciation for the confidence they believed it instilled in students who were now able to read independently at what the team described as their "just right" reading levels. For example, Eliza, one of the first grade ESL cluster teachers, expressed her appreciation for the higher quality books that accompanied the Balanced Literacy program, as opposed to the basal readers that were required with the previous literacy program. Similarly, Jessica, a first grade non-cluster teacher in her second year at Madison, found the individual goals prescribed by Balanced Literacy to be beneficial in meeting the unique needs of each of her students. Even the school's ESL teacher, Amanda, noted changes she

witnessed in her students over the course of the prior year, remarking on a renewed enthusiasm for reading and measurable growth in terms of reading comprehension.

### “Just Right” Reading Levels

One prominent component of the Balanced Literacy program implemented at Madison with the support of TCRWP was Guiding Reading as described by Fountas and Pinnell (Heinemann, 2012). Fountas and Pinnell, creators of a commercial reading program, described guided reading as “a teaching approach designed to help individual readers build an effective system for processing a variety of increasingly challenging texts over time” (Heinemann, 2010). In general, guided reading at Madison involved the leveling of books, and subsequently the children reading them, along guidelines offered by Fountas and Pinnell in order to ensure that students were reading texts appropriate for their reading abilities. Fountas and Pinnell provided a system for leveling books on a scale from A to Z. They also offered a book level to grade level correspondence illustrated in Table 5 (see also Appendix F).

Table 5: Fountas and Pinnell reading levels

Grade Level Goals	Fountas and Pinnell Levels	Lexile® Level Range Equivalents
Kindergarten	A, B, C, D	BR-450
Grade One	E, F, G, H, I, J	80-550
Grade Two	K, L, M	501-650
Grade Three	N, O, P	651-770
Grade Four	Q, R, S	771-860
Grade Five	T, U, V	861-899



Table 5: Fountas and Pinnell reading levels (continued)

Grade Six	W, X, Y	900-999
Grades Seven and Beyond	Z	1000-11000

*Note:* The Lexile® level equivalents adapted from Learning A-Z (n.d.).

The first grade team at Madison developed quarterly benchmarks by taking the district's standardized reading assessment benchmarks (beginning, middle and end of year) and cross-referencing them with those provided by Fountas and Pinnell. The result was grade level-book level correspondence that was similar to the ranking provided by Fountas and Pinnell (see Table 6).

Table 6: First grade text levels and benchmarks

End of Quarter	Expected Reading Level
First	F/G
Second	G/H
Third	H/I/J
Fourth	J/K

So, in summary, the school expected all students at Madison to read books categorized as Level K by the end of their first grade year.

### The Workshop Model

Madison had long ago implemented Writers Workshop described by Calkins and the TCRWP (The Reading and Writing Project, 2010). However, during the year of this study literacy, and to some degree math were also being delivered through the same workshop model. Principal Michaels explained that he

hoped that eventually even science and social studies would be delivered following the same structure, with all lessons being literacy based. His vision included a 10 to 15 minute mini lesson, which he described as a “content dump.” During this time the teacher would model the desired outcome, then students would be sent to practice it independently, freeing up the teacher to work with students in small groups or individually.

With relatively small variations, the structure of Readers Workshop and Writers Workshops, as the teacher at Madison referred to them, looked very much the same regardless of the classroom I was observing. The first grade team prioritized Readers Workshop within the daily schedule. In many rooms, they were the first class of the day when teachers believed students were the most attentive and easily engaged. The fourth week of school administrators even rearranged the master schedule at the request of one first grade ESL cluster teacher, Sarah, in order to move Readers Workshop from after lunch to the early morning so that her students would be more focused during this essential time of the day. Every child, including all English Learners regardless of proficiency level, participated in Readers Workshop, as its place in the daily schedule was “sacred”, with no pullout classes or special activities scheduled during this time.

### The Workshop Routine

Readers Workshop, as the first grade team enacted it within Balanced Literacy at Madison by the first grade team, was a highly ritualized practice that varied very little from day to day or classroom to classroom. To start, students prepared their reading space. Paired with a student with similar reading abilities,

students placed a bag of eight or nine books and a laminated folder at their desks or an assigned space on the floor. Students then gathered on a carpeted area at the back of the classroom for whole group instruction. Seated in front of the student, the teacher then delivered a mini lesson, utilizing an easel and pre-prepared, enlarged text. Potential mini-lesson topics included “ways to read,” “strategies to use when you get stuck” or “why we re-read.” These sessions often included brainstorming sessions and modeling and always had opportunities for students to “turn and talk”—a critical component of the mini-lesson where students discussed among themselves the answers to strategic questions posed by the teacher.

At the conclusion of the mini-lesson, students returned to their seats for independent reading practice. The goal was for 30 minutes of sustained independent reading time, during which time students, situated back-to-back with their partners, were discouraged from leaving their seats or talking to their peers. Meanwhile, the teacher typically conferred individually with four to five students, assessing their progress, teaching word attack strategies or setting goals with each student. Then each teacher conducted at least one guided reading group, where students of similar reading levels came together on the rug to read and discuss a text selected by the teacher, and to work on reading fluency. The conclusion of the workshop was a partner sharing time, during which students discussed their books or read aloud to their partners. Students were encouraged to keep notes, called “jots,” which related to the theme of the day’s mini lesson or identified areas that were challenging for students. These jots ideally served as the basis for the peer sharing.

## Expectations for Differentiation

At Madison, instructional differentiation was a frequent topic among the members of the first grade team. So important was differentiation that the entire first grade team attended a daylong in-service professional development entitled Differentiation Academy. In addition, first grade ESL cluster teacher Sarah's personal teacher improvement plan for the prior school year listed the development of differentiation skills as her primary objective. Non-cluster teacher Rhonda's role within the school district as a Professional Development Mentor Teacher provided further evidence of the importance of differentiation. Her primary responsibility in this role was to work with area teachers who were seeking or who had been asked to seek assistance in improving their skills in the area of differentiation.

Principal Michaels explained his expectations for differentiated instruction at Madison as follows,

So, when teachers are delivering their mini lesson we want them to be teaching to about 80-85 percent of their class, because that's the majority, right? So, the majority of your class needs X, so you teach X. Again, eight to ten minutes of X, they go off and they read, but then at that point, that's when the teacher tries to hit the rest. So, that 10 to 15% or 15 to 20% depending- it could be about four kids, that's where she pulls the small group and she starts to work with those kids where they are. Then, when she confers with those kids individually that's where that other time comes in- that independent time- like okay, I need to move you really further because you are a high level kid, or wow, we need to back all the way up with you because you just don't even have letter sound correspondence.

Principal Michaels's description of differentiation was coordinated with the structure of the workshop model in that it provided teachers the opportunity to confer with students both individually and in small groups. While there was

variance in how the first grade team defined differentiation, they also acknowledged what they viewed as a natural connection between the workshop model and differentiation.

#### “Meeting Them Where They Are”

The first grade team’s understanding of differentiation aligned to some degree with that of Mr. Michaels, with some notable differences. Sheila, one of the first grade ESL cluster teachers and a leader amongst her colleagues, described differentiation as “just what each child needs at that moment.” Noting that these needs can change daily, she emphasized the improvisation that accompanied differentiating instruction for every learner, especially when the ability levels in each classroom differed significantly. Sheila and other members of the team referred to differentiation as a “catch word” that was often misunderstood by colleagues, but that, simply put meant “getting at where they are at that moment.”

Another first grade cluster teacher, Sarah, defined differentiation in a bit more specific terms and described the processes she went through to adjust her instruction based on her understanding of her students’ abilities. She used Bloom’s Taxonomy as a means of encouraging “higher-level thinkers to go further.” For her “lower-level ones,” she discussed objectives that were outside their reach without backtracking to re-teach fundamental skills and fill voids in knowledge. In these instances, small group instruction was customary.

Sarah was not alone in including the use of small groups as a means of differentiation. Eliza, also a first grade ESL cluster teacher, referred to the

development of groups based on student ability, using the task of retelling as an example.

There would be some students who will just use mostly pictures and some words. I would expect my ESL students would be doing that. Then, there will be the next group that will be doing a little bit more within that same objective. Then my higher flyers, I would expect them to have more written words than pictures.

Eliza differentiated primarily through her expectations of students finished product. However, multiple means of differentiation were present in teachers' lessons and instruction. For example, recalling a time she felt a student would benefit from counters in order to solve a math problem, Bethany explained that she stopped instruction, supplied the student with the counters, and modeled how to use them. She described differentiation as "whatever they need at that moment to be successful in what we are doing," underscoring the spontaneous nature of improvising instruction to meet individual students' needs.

"It Differentiates Itself"

The first grade team at Madison often referred to the structure of the Readers Workshop as "naturally" differentiated to meet individual student's needs. They were not alone in this belief, as their principal articulated his expectations in terms of seeing differentiated instruction during classroom observations,

So, if they are following a true workshop model and they are meeting kids where they are based on their data- it's (differentiation's) very easily done. So, literally the majority gets this because this is what the majority needs and then when they break off and the teacher works with those kids individually and in small groups- that's when the differentiation comes in. So, really meeting kids where they need to be based on not only what they are seeing but what the data's saying and what formal assessments are saying.

Thus, it appeared that while the expectation for differentiation was high, Madison's administration did not expect teachers to design differentiated lesson plans or modify their approach to instruction. Rather, as Principal Michaels's comments suggested, if teachers implemented the workshop model with fidelity, the teachers were adequately addressing students' needs.

Principal Michaels's staff equally embraced his belief that differentiation was inherent in the structure of the workshop model. Each of the first grade teachers at some point referred to the manner by which instructional differentiation occurred in both the Readers and the Writers Workshops, with one non-ESL cluster teacher, Elizabeth, going as far as to say, "It differentiates itself." On the other hand, as another non-cluster teacher, Jessica articulated, the conferring process gave students "what they need at that time" and allowed teachers to set individualized goals with students. She added that the leveled books constituted another layer of differentiation, in that she encouraged students to choose from the books in their targeted reading range, ensuring that they were appropriate given their reading abilities.

It appeared that within the figured world of Balanced Literacy at Madison, the concepts of individual learning goals and the one-on-one attention garnered through conferring were part and parcel with differentiation. In addition, the act of determining students' "levels" and providing level-appropriate opportunities accordingly emerged here and in the comments of other first grade teachers as a cultural artifact representative of differentiated instruction as teachers enacted it at

Madison Elementary. First grade ESL cluster teacher Sarah's comments further emphasized the individualized nature of the workshop model:

I feel like our curriculum does a really good job— like it just kind of lends itself to [differentiation]. So, I think if I teach them the mini-lesson well and simply and clearly and then I can come alongside students as they are reading or writing and see where they're at visually, ELL or not, then I can do a quick assessment of how they are doing right then. I try to leave them with a teaching point for reading or writing and then make sure I follow up in the next few days with whether they are trying to apply that teaching point to their work or not.

Her belief that a workshop model served the unique needs of each student was evident, but her comment also spoke volumes about her conceptualization of the academic needs of English Learners. To Sarah, as well as to her colleagues, there was little need to approach the instruction of English Learners any differently than native-speaking students.

#### Differentiation and the Needs of English Learners

Each of the teachers on the team (Sheila, Eliza, Sarah, Elizabeth, Rhonda, Krista, Brenda and Jessica) had some prior experience working with English Learners, though that experience varied greatly, ranging from an internship experience with Latino students in the Bronx (Jessica) to teaching affluent internationals in Bolivia (Sarah). Brenda and Jessica, both non-cluster teachers and the most recent university graduates, were able to recall specific coursework that related to teaching diverse learners. In Jessica's case, she attended classes that specifically addressed English Learners and the development of academic language. However, both teachers explained that, in retrospect, these courses primarily focused on theory and did not adequately prepare them for the challenges of working in linguistically complex classrooms. Of all the teachers, only ESL



cluster teacher, Sarah, attended any professional development related to working with non-native speakers. She described the district's SIOP training she participated in the year prior to the study,

Yeah, it was great. I mean she was wonderful presenter and she gave us- I can't remember her name- but just gave us a lot of practical tips, which I need to go back and refresh my memory with. But, practical things that again are good for everyone in the class, but just happen to especially benefit my ELLs. I can't even think of a good example right now. A lot of it was like active things around the class, a lot that got them conversing with their classmates. That's the only formal training I've had.

Sarah's inability to recall specific details of the training minimized the likelihood that the skills and strategies presented in the workshop would emerge in her classroom.

However, despite the lack of formal training, many teachers on the first grade team were able to articulate their understanding of the instructional needs of English Learners and identify ways in which they might adapt their instruction to accommodate them. For example, non-cluster teacher Jessica shared the following strategies that she felt were beneficial when teaching English Learners:

Definitely, they need a lot of picture support and definitely giving them the opportunity to try to find things out. You might have to repeat directions, use hand signals, use gestures. It might be beneficial for them partnered with someone who kind of shows them the ropes a little bit- like a buddy. And, I think they need a lot of one on one time.

Another non-cluster teacher on the first grade team, Krista, also mentioned the need to provide visual support, to break down instruction and to take things step-by step. She recalled using flashcards and rote memory activities with English Learners the prior year, stating, "That's helpful for all children I think, but especially for them." Overall, Krista articulated a need to *demonstrate* rather than *explain*, as she felt that sometimes her instructions were too difficult, and "even

my top level kids get lost as to what they should be doing.” While Krista’s strategies might very well benefit English Learners in her room, her comments, like those of Sarah above, illuminate an underlying belief that the needs of English Learners are the same as struggling native speakers, eliminating the need to approach their instruction any differently than they might any student who is reading below grade level.

### English Learners or Struggling Readers?

Within Madison Elementary School there was a first-grade consensus that the instructional needs of English Learners were closely tied to the skills needed to become a proficient reader, i.e., successful at Balanced Literacy. When asked about how differentiation varied for English Learners, the majority of the team’s responses were confined instructional methods used with struggling readers:

Michelle: What do you think is the priority in terms of English language development with your English Learners?

Sheila: That’s really hard, I don’t know. I’m not sure how to answer that. Do you mean priority with their language or their reading?

Michelle: Well...with their English language development.

Sheila: Well, they are all different, having Spanish as her second language- Blanca does a lot of things that she does in her native language when she’s reading in English. Like she leaves the S’s off of words and things like that. So, for her, it would just be learning the grammar of the English language. With Kia and May, for them it’s like sight word development and learning those snap words that they can read quickly when they are learning how to read. Luis would probably be the same thing with that. I don’t know if that answers your question.

Michelle: Yes, it does. Most of those were things associated with reading.

Sheila: Now that you say it, I don’t ever really think about their language. I think mostly about their reading. Maybe I should be thinking about their language more. That comes out in writing a

lot. That does come out in writing, like when they are writing a story they are writing it how they speak. Then I have to teach them how to say that the correct way. You are making me reflect on that all night now. I think my priority is reading. It is teaching them to decode and read sight words and letter-sound correspondence.

Sheila believed she could easily gauge her students' progress, including her English Learners, by tracking their reading proficiency as indicated by their alphabetical progression through reading (Level A, B, C, etc.). Thus, to Sheila, supporting students in becoming proficient readers was synonymous with supporting their second language development.

Other participants quantified English Learners' language development in terms of their reading levels. For example, ESL cluster teacher Eliza, when asked about the progress of one newcomer, replied enthusiastically, "She's doing great! Yesterday she read a D." Even the school's ESL teacher, Amanda, had difficulty delineating between the two, as evidenced her response to what it means to differentiate for English Learners:

The way I've taken it is the children are leveled at this school based on their reading level, not necessary their language needs level, but it seems to go hand in hand. Of course, if I'm not a native speaker I'm probably going to be a lower level.

So, while Amanda acknowledged that students' reading levels would be impacted by their English proficiency, she felt this was an appropriate assessment of not only their reading ability, but their linguistic needs.

It is possible that this lack of distinction was a byproduct of the fervor surrounding reading that permeated the figured world of Madison- beginning with its administration. In fact, Principal Michaels also appeared to position the needs

of English Learners as indistinguishable from other students struggling to become proficient readers:

They generally need more of a vocabulary background- a lot of vocabulary work- more so than some of our regular, native speakers. But even our native speakers in first grade need a lot of vocabulary work too. Going back to foundations, so it might be like they need phonemic awareness or the phonics or the ability to decode in order to go ahead and move forward into the fluency pieces. So, if they are coming in and literally they are a newcomer, we've got to start all the way at the beginning of what reading is.

Principal Michaels echoed the first grade team's perception that the best way to make students proficient in English was to make them good readers. There was very little discussion of the need to support the cultural adjustment or social acclimation of newcomers at Madison.

The positioning of Balanced Literacy as a priority was also seen in Principal Michaels's criteria for selecting the teachers assigned to work with the ESL clusters, which he described as follows,

They just really have a strong background in knowing how to teach reading- and reading at a foundational level as well. So, it's not just, oh, I'm a great teacher because I love you- it's you're a strong teacher because of your proven track record according to several assessments that we've done over years to say that you can really move kids along at a nice rate. But it all comes back to who can really teach reading effectively and writing effectively versus just- Oh, you're just great with kids.

To Principal Michaels, experience with working with linguistically diverse students, or a teacher's desire to host the ESL cluster were superseded by the need to be strong reading teachers. Yet, it is important to emphasize that he based his choices on data that showed that his English Learners were making better data driven progress in classrooms where the teacher showed overall strength in reading instruction, i.e., Balanced Literacy.

Mr. Michaels's unapologetic emphasis on students' progression through reading levels shaped first grade teachers' curricular priorities. For example, one ESL cluster teacher, Sarah, described her vision for the English Learners in her room, "Right now the push is just to get them fluently reading- I would say...my goal as their teacher would be that they are fluent readers when they leave me." Similarly, when asked how she would assist an English Learner who was experiencing difficulty with comprehension, non-cluster teacher, Elizabeth, responded

I would do it just like I do my other guys – 'this seems to always be a problem for you, what can we do? Whenever you are reading from the page, you don't understand at all what is going on, so I need to come show you or you need pictures or that kind of thing.'

Of all of her colleagues, Elizabeth had the least amount of experience working with English Learners. Yet, she offered this solution with a confidence that suggested she did not feel she lacked the training or knowledge necessary to support English Learners, but rather that they had needs identical to that of their native-speaking peers, adding, "they (all of my students) are the same, in that at this level I think they are all learning new vocabulary." In formal interviews and informal discussions, the teachers on this team consistently expressed their belief that those practices they enacted to support the reading progress of their native-speaking students were equally adequate and appropriate for their English Learners.

#### (Not So Very) Differentiated Grouping Practices

In most discussions related to differentiation, teachers on this first grade team referenced small group instruction-a prevalent "artifact" of Balanced

Literacy. The guidelines of the program required teachers to pull small groups during the independent practice portion of the workshops. However, they spoke of two distinct types of grouping practices. Ability groups, which were often referred to as guided reading groups, were universally established based on the students' Fountas and Pinnell reading levels (Heinemann, 2012), where skills groups were formed based upon teacher observation or data collected from the mClass Reading 3D Assessment (Amplify, 2014) that was administered throughout the state. One first grade teacher, Jessica, articulated the difference:

Small group...there are two kinds. I like to do guided reading and strategy. So, guided reading I would pull a group that are all at the same level and then I would have them read and then I would decide what my teaching point would be on the spot-depending on what that group needed. Whereas, in a strategy group, I would pull a group that I know needs elaboration or know needs looking through the whole word. Then I would pull them and teach them that.

Yet, observations suggested that with the exception of ESL cluster teacher Eliza, who improvised a unique grouping strategy based primarily on skill-based data, reading levels seemed to be the primary predictor of how students were grouped for instruction, as well as how they were seated within the classroom.

English Learners were no exception to this grouping strategy used by the general education teachers. Although, at times, the presence and participation of Amanda, the school's ESL teacher, created differences in how teachers approached grouping. However, generally speaking, English Learners were treated just as their peers—grouped and seated according to reading ability. For example, Sheila kept a daily schedule on a clipboard to track her individual conferences and reading groups and to ensure that she did not overlook anyone. Every Tuesday and Thursday, she allotted time to pull and work with five of her students- four English

Learners and one EC student, all of whom were reading at the same level and progressing at a similar rate at the beginning of the school year. She explained that their shared reading level was the basis for the group's formation. When asked how she assessed the students' levels, she responded

I am really using the same assessment tools that I would use with my other kids. It's ironic because some of my ESL kids are further along than some of my native speakers now, which was surprising to me. So, I'm really using kind of the same strategies to group them- waiting during the conferring piece to see what they need to work on. And then I can group them that way too, but I am really not using anything other than what I am using for everybody.

Observations supported Sheila's statement throughout the figured world of Balanced Literacy at Madison. Ultimately, it was only one cultural artifact, the students' Fountas and Pinnell reading levels that mediated teachers' approaches to grouping, regardless of their native language or level of English proficiency.

Seating arrangements for the English Learners in Madison's first grade classrooms were yet another important consideration when exploring the social context of learning. In the case of this teaching team, seating was an integral part of the workshop model and how students engaged in classroom activities. For example, ESL cluster teacher Sarah positioned each of her struggling readers next to a more proficient reader and across the table from another struggling reader. She believed that this configuration allowed for interaction with both students of similar abilities as well as those who might be able to provide peer support.

Eliza positioned struggling readers together at a table that was closest to the word wall and other forms of visual support, as well as closer to her desk to provide support more efficiently. In all classrooms, during Readers Workshop, pairs consisted of students on the same reading levels, thus struggling readers read

with and discussed their reading with another struggling reader. Because English Learners were perceived as struggling readers in both Eliza's and Sarah's classrooms, their approaches to seating resulted in English Learners interacting and engaging in peer discussions with either other English Learners, or in most cases, with struggling readers.

### Discussion

In this chapter, I introduced the figured world of Balanced Literacy at Madison Elementary School as an institutional reform of sorts, constructed in reaction to previous literacy models that relied primarily on basal readers and direct phonics instruction. I described the positioning of reading instruction by the first grade team and the entire Madison community as the unquestionable primary focus, so much so that students became defined singularly by their reading proficiency. Analysis of interviews revealed that Madison's teachers believed the workshop model of literacy instruction required by the school's administration to be an adequate and universal method of differentiating instruction for their students, including those learning English as a non-native speaker. Furthermore, the first grade teachers' articulated perceptions of and enactment of instruction for English language development made apparent a communal positioning of English Learners as struggling readers. This recasting of linguistically diverse students within the figured world of Balanced Literacy produced the belief that there was little need to differentiate instruction based on the English language development needs of non-native speakers.



There appeared to be an unquestioning acceptance of the structure and processes related to the Readers Workshop model among first grade teachers at Madison Elementary. On many occasions, these teachers extolled its positive attributes and enumerated its benefits to their students. This underlying reverence manifested itself in moments such as the one in which one of the non-ESL cluster teacher, Krista, who was the most experienced first grade teacher at Madison, stopped a lively literacy debate among veteran team members during one planning session. She turned to her colleague, Brenda, a first-year teacher and recent graduate of Teachers College with a Masters/Balanced Literacy Specialist degree from the TCRWP said, “Alright Reading Guru, really, all I think that matters is what *you* think.” Seemingly, members of this particular community of practice bought into the workshop model and embraced its components, including guiding reading, to such a degree that ability grouping, when considered, seemed par for the course.

The first grade teachers at Madison, while well-intentioned in their service to the English Learners in their classrooms, appeared to position “third spaces” for literacy—teaching and learning that might generate possibilities for improvisation (see Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 1995) as unnecessary. This was likely due to their perception of the objective for every student to be achieving proficiency in reading according to the grade level standards set forth within this figured world of Balanced Literacy.

Rather, through their translation of the scripted curricula and in an effort to make sense of their teaching, the first grade teachers at Madison re-cast English

Learners as struggling readers who consequently stood to benefit from the program's processes and structures in the same manner as native-speaking students.

In conclusion, in the face of mediating elements, such as a mandated, standardized literacy curriculum and administrative expectations, the first grade team at Madison communally constructed the figured world of Balanced Literacy. Here, the workshop model, coupled with the complex system of leveling, labeling and ranking students, became a tool for making sense of and organizing student learning. Yet, there appeared to be no space within this figured world for being an English Learner- as these students were simply not part of the "script" (Gutiérrez et al., 1995). The first grade teachers, in an effort to incorporate English Learners into their interpretation of the world of Balanced Literacy, improvised their role within the program, recasting them as struggling readers. The result was that ESL-learning was positioned as superfluous, while reading was prioritized and perceived as a representation of academic achievement and overall school success.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ESL WITHIN THE FIGURED WORLD OF BALANCED LITERACY

On a Tuesday afternoon Writers Workshop in the Fall of 2013, Amanda, Madison Elementary School's ESL teacher, watched her colleague, Sarah, deliver her mini-lesson- writing about small moments. Dismissed to their seats for independent writing time, David, Ria, Yuri and Stefanie headed for their chairs to be stopped by Amanda.

Amanda: My friends, we are going to the table, remember, so meet me back there- it's time for our special club." [Turning to me] "It's not really what I want to do, pulling them, but how else am I supposed to serve them?"

Madison's ESL teacher, Amanda, who served English Learners in three of the participating first grade teachers' classrooms, struggled with meeting the expectations of both the teachers and school administrators while simultaneously providing for the needs of her students as she perceived them. Her work with first grade English Learners involved push-in and co-teaching sessions within the context of Balanced Literacy--a program in which Amada had no prior training.

Specifically, the focus of this chapter is Amanda's negotiation of Balanced Literacy and how her sense making of the program created at times conflicting understandings of who she was as a professional and what her work with English Learners achieved. I begin with a description of the ESL program at Madison Elementary School, and how the expectations of administrators and classroom teachers, in light of the mandated Balanced Literacy program, mediated Amanda's conflicted enactment of her professional self. I then illustrate how ESL teacher Amanda's sense of identity and belonging interacted with these expectations to

produce ambiguity in her role within the scripted literacy program, and subsequently, differential instruction for English Learners. I conclude with the argument that the standardized nature of literacy instruction at Madison contributed to the ambiguity of the role of the ESL teacher within the larger construct of Balanced Literacy.

#### Madison Elementary: A Push-In Pull-Out Program Model

The district to which Madison Elementary belonged maintained a central ESL office responsible for assuring compliance with state and federal legislation related to English Learners, as well providing professional development to the district's staff. Various institutional artifacts, such as a committee to oversee testing accommodations and the presence of ESL-certified staff were consistent from school to school. However, the district as a whole lacked a formal program model for serving English Learners in each school, leaving these decisions to individual principals. Until two years prior to this study, Madison enacted a pull-out program for serving its English Learners, as was the case with almost all elementary schools in the district. However, more recently, Madison began to experiment with more inclusive models, in the form of co-teaching and push-in instruction.

There were multiple reasons for this change in programming. Principal Michaels expressed concern with the districts' stand-alone ESL curriculum, which he believed differed significantly from the standard course of study taught in the general education classroom. It seemed counterintuitive to him to engage students in learning activities that might distract them from the core concepts that teachers

covered sequentially in each grade level in mainstream classrooms. In addition, he cited scheduling and time constraints as a major factor in moving toward inclusive models, wishing to avoid the time wasted in traveling to and from the ESL classroom for pull-out lessons. But most of all, Principal Michaels believed that the workshop model and Balanced Literacy program being used in classrooms throughout Madison were the best way to serve these students and that his classroom teachers were fully prepared and capable of meeting their needs.

Principal Michaels's rationale for implementing inclusive ESL models stemmed largely from his personal practical theory that the instructional requirements of English Learners and native speakers in the primary years were largely the same in that all students, he believed, needed to build larger vocabularies and acquire the skills necessary to become proficient readers. He acknowledged that English Learners generally arrived "with the largest deficits," and thus, he placed them with the teachers he felt were "strongest."

#### Amanda's "Evolving" Role

The actor most impacted by the shift from a pull-out program to an inclusive model was Madison's ESL teacher, Amanda. Amanda, a U.S.-born, White female in her late forties, identified strongly with both being Jewish and with being an involved parent of two teenage children attending school in the same district in which she taught. She began her career as a teacher in Florida, working in a self-contained ESL classroom, a position she loved dearly, for eight years. After a few years of part-time work in North Carolina while her children were very

young, she accepted a full-time position at Madison eight year prior to the study- becoming school's first (and only) ESL teacher.

Amanda's role within the school had been evolving over the previous three years, very much under the direction of the school's administration. With 18 years of experience working in an independent setting, she found the transition away from the traditional pull-out model to be complicated. Despite three years of discussions with her supervisors, Amanda described what she perceived to be fundamental ambiguity related to her role within the school:

At our school, because every school is different, we've been leaning toward, or working toward almost a completely push-in model. At first they were calling it co-teaching- they sent me to a co-teaching workshop with two teachers last year. It was just the word- they like the word co-teaching. But the more research I have done on co-teaching, it really is best if you are teaching with one teacher all day long, in the same class. Their terminology needs to be worked on. The program here is more like a push-in model- going in and supporting the ESL kids. We tried the co-teaching and it didn't work the way we had thought it would.

Amanda's was the only ESL teacher and she frequently expressed frustration with the fact that she alone was responsible for all of the English Learners in the school. She was not necessarily concerned with the workload, but rather the logistical difficulties in serving students in six different grade levels. She believed that getting to all of her students and devoting adequate time to each was the hardest part of her job. Thus, Amanda experienced tension between what she was asked to do and what she found practical to actually enact within the structure of the school.

In an effort to make co-teaching or push-in instruction more practical, Principal Michaels implemented a clustering program throughout the school. Depending on the number of students in each grade level, he grouped ESL students in two or three classrooms, allowing Amanda to serve several students at a time.

Cluster sizes varied, again dependent on the number of English Learners in each grade level. In the case of the first grade, there were two official ESL cluster classrooms at the beginning of this study. However, as was often the case, unforeseen circumstances placed two English Learners in another classroom after the start of the school year- in effect creating a third cluster to which Amanda needed to attend. The table below illustrates the distribution of English Learners and their general English proficiency levels in first grade classrooms at Madison Elementary.

Table 7: ESL cluster classrooms

Classroom Teacher	Newcomer	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
Sheila	0	4	0	4
Sarah	1	2	1	4
Eliza	0	1	1	2

Having three cluster classrooms meant that Amanda was required to work with three general education teachers (Sheila, Sarah and Eliza) to provide language services for the first grade English Learners. While she was openly doubtful as to the practicality and effectiveness of the inclusive programming at its onset, she shared examples of more recent successes, which she largely attributed to the dispositions of the cooperating teachers (Sheila, Sarah and Eliza) and an increased sense of belonging that she acquired as she gained confidence with the Balanced Literacy program. Amanda believed that her relationship with these teachers was ultimately what determined the success or failure of inclusive instruction.

### “An Arranged Marriage”

At its onset, Amanda openly struggled with the collaborative dynamics of inclusive instruction. Ironically, when asked her preference of program models, Amanda responded,

In my heart of hearts, I think that push-in is better than pull-out- but only when you have really great teachers. You have to have the personality for it; it's just like a marriage. We weren't asked, nobody was asked, it was assigned that you will be co-teaching with this person because they will have the ESL cluster. If they won't cooperate then it doesn't work.

Principal Michaels supported Amada's claim that she was not involved in the selection of cluster teachers. Furthermore, he added that while the general education teachers' personal interest and willingness were considerations, he ultimately selected cluster teachers based on their proven track record in “moving students forward.” At times, this appeared to result in tensions between the teachers assigned to work together. Thus, while Amanda and the ESL cluster teachers faced obstacles and challenges to inclusive models of instruction in terms of communal time for planning and disparate learning objectives, it was the interpersonal nature of the program that she perceived to be the biggest obstacle.

Issues of trust and power permeated discussions related to inclusive models and how the needs of English Learners were addressed at Madison. There appeared a general suspicion on the part of the first grade team as to what had been done in pull-out sessions in past years; however, this suspicion appeared closely connected to differential expectations for ESL instruction. Because the current culture within the school aligned with the figured world of Balanced Literacy, and because teachers viewed reading progress as an overall indicator of academic



success within this figured world, teachers at Madison felt strongly that Amanda should be teaching the same curriculum within the same structure that they were.

For example, Sheila, an ESL cluster teacher, expressed her preference for the new inclusive model as follows,

Um, I don't know what she did when she pulled out- so at least I know that there is face time when she is here. I'm trying to give her some tips and some guidance. I'm trying to model what I need for her to do, so that she can replicate that with the kids. I think it is better that she is pushing in. I was not fond of the idea at first, to be honest. But I think it's better that she is here with the teacher in the room than having them out in a tutor room or trailer where we have no idea what is being taught or not.

Sheila positioned Amanda as a support person, and consequently expected her to emulate her teaching and follow her lead in terms of learning objectives and methods for working with students. Eliza, the accidental first grade cluster teacher, also felt that while Amanda's role was to support English Learners, it was best she stick with the standard curriculum, stating that she should, "just basically reinforce the things that I teach in the mini lesson rather than something totally separate."

Issues of control and accountability seemed to lay at the center of the complex relationships between Amanda and the general education teachers. On several occasions, the first grade team joked among themselves about being control freaks. This need to oversee all aspects of their students' instruction (i.e. Sheila: "*I should be the one with them*") appeared to stem from teachers feeling limited in their time with students (i.e. Sarah: "*I just worry about getting to them all*") relative to the demands of the curriculum and in the face of imminent high-stakes assessments.

In addition to the need for control, the introduction of new institutional practices associated with Balanced Literacy, such as accountability programs that attributed student progress, or lack thereof, directly to individual classroom teachers fueled teachers' sense of ownership for their students and subsequently their practice. For example, when Sheila described her vision for Amanda's role in her classroom, she identified ways in which Amanda could assist her while she maintained control over the students in her room,

(I want her) conferring during reading time, conferring with the kids, finding out strengths and weaknesses and then giving that information to me so that I know what I need to work on with them too. And I'll be conferring with them too, I can't just rely on her, I'm going to be doing the same thing.

Similarly, when asked what resources would improve the ESL program, she responded, "If we had the money, the ESL clusters should have a fulltime assistant. Not for her to work with them, necessarily, but to free me up to work with them."

#### Amanda's Identity within the Figured World of Madison

How Amanda viewed her role and identity within Madison Elementary differed in significant ways from her colleagues. Table 8 provides an inventory of the many "hats" Amanda described herself as wearing as the ESL provider:

Table 8: Amanda's hats

Role	Description
Language Expert	I wear many hats. Mostly I am the ESL teacher, the only ESL teacher. I am community outreach to those who different languages. I am useful, I get together with all the teachers and set up interpreters and I sit in on IEPs when it regards my students. And, I am pretty much the resource to go to for this entire school if it has anything to do with language and I direct where the problem, or where the solution is.
Classroom Support	I don't ever interrupt the teacher because she is the one who is doing it. I'm really going in during reader's workshop and writing workshop when they are giving a quick mini-lesson. If I know that mini lesson before, or the skill that's being taught, then what I'll do is like brief it over before I get in the classroom, understand it, digest it, sit with the kids and when they are explaining something, I might pull up a visual, or I might whisper in their ear, or I might...when we do turn and talk and I see my kids not talking- not because they don't want to- but because they don't understand what's been asked. I will model it and say this is what it looks like. Whereas, the regular classroom teacher just doesn't do that or doesn't have time to do that. So, I'm kind of like...not their mommy but I'm sitting in there with them.
ESL Teacher- with independent objectives	I've made it very clear to these teachers that I'm here for them- any need, any problem, any question. Email me, text me, I'm always available. But, I've also made it very clear to them what my role is here. Because when I first started off they thought they could say, 'here's a paper Johnny didn't finish his math work'. I've made it very clear to them what my role is here as the ESL teacher and they've grown to respect that.
Specialized teacher for specified students	I'm working with your whole, entire class I don't have a problem helping the other children, but I feel that my job- being the only ESL teacher at this school- should really be focusing on my ESL students. So, sometimes I would be like- am I supposed to be helping all these other kids when I could actually be helping other students of mine?
Language Teacher	Last year I put my foot in my mouth. I was frustrated and I told (Principal Michaels), 'you know, I'm not a reading teaching, I'm a language teacher.' That didn't go over too well.

Amanda positioned herself in terms of what she could/would or could not/would not do, often in reaction to events or interactions she had with colleagues. Thus, it appeared as if Amanda's identity was mediated in large part in response to how she believed others to perceive it.

“Some Teachers are Willing...Some are Not”

Amanda also felt she had less of control and autonomy in the inclusive programs. The change, for her, represented a dramatic re-authoring of her figured world, as she transitioned from working almost entirely in isolation—conducting pullout classes in her own classroom according to a schedule she created—to working as part of an instructional community of practice. However, for Amanda, she did not always feel she occupied an equal space among the community's members. In fact, she often referred to ways in which ESL objectives and the ESL program in general occupied peripheral positions within the structure of the school as well as in the way she was being asked to teach. For example, in describing her co-teaching experiences she stated,

Some teachers are willing to give up a little bit and let you do some of the teaching. Some teachers are not, and that's a problem right there. It's still *their* (emphasis) classroom, it's not *your* (emphasis) classroom. And that became a problem. As you are trying to teach, you, the ESL teacher, you're sitting in class and the other teacher is teaching- and even when we had that open communication, could jump in when it's a language issue or grammar issue, but it's still not co-teaching. Co-teaching is where two teachers are really planning together and really teaching together. That has not happened at this school yet.

Yet, Amanda at times enacted agency in an attempt to assert her professional expertise and carve out spaces for herself within her targeted general education classrooms. She often did this by contributing dictionaries, graphic organizers or instructional materials, for the general education teachers to use in

their classrooms when working with English Learners. However, she harbored suspicions that these resources went unused in her absence, “It’s like they’re so wrapped up in their own thing that unless I provide it for them right then and there, I don’t know that they’re going to get used.” Therefore, Amanda shared the general education teachers’ perceptions that if she wanted to be certain that something got done, it was best if she just did it herself.

“All About Literacy, Literacy, Literacy!”

Amanda noted other school factors that led her to conclude that her role within the Madison, along with ESL in general, was not a priority. For example, she found it disturbing that her offer to provide professional development for Madison’s staff went unanswered: “I asked twice and I never got a response. That’s disappointing. Will I try it again next year? I don’t know.” She attributed the lack of response to the fact that the, “PLC thing has been all about literacy, literacy, literacy,” referencing the school’s unapologetic emphasis on reading instruction. Furthermore, Amanda felt that her participation in communal planning time was ultimately not effective because the general education teachers ‘have 600 other things that they have to do.’ Yet, she viewed the allocation of such time for the school’s Talent Development team, but not for ESL, as another sign that her program had taken a back seat to matters that were more important. Finally, Amanda viewed her lack of exposure to and preparation for teaching the Balanced Literacy program as symbolic of her diminished role within the school, noting that the recent decision to send her to a future two-day Calkins workshop made her “feel good.”

Throughout most of the first two years of Principal Michaels's implementation of Balanced Literacy, Amanda admitted she was doubtful as to the benefits. However, with time and through a process of improvisation, Amanda grew to appreciate certain aspects of the new program. For example, she made sense of the resulting reduction in her autonomy within the school community by emphasizing her relief in placing the burden of scheduling ESL services in the hands of her administrators. Similarly, she felt she no longer had to answer to the concerns of classroom teachers related to time- positioning herself as completely at the mercy of the school's administration. In addition, Amanda, on more than one occasion, referred to the growing confidence she saw in her students because "they were reading on their own levels," surrendering to the notion that the teaching of reading was positioned as paramount at the expense of English language development. Finally, in light of all the constraints she perceived within her figured world, she noted that the inclusive programs simply made more sense:

It's different, but the goal is to get these children to read. And I believe that the program, this Balanced Literacy, is a wonderful program. So, why would I pull a student out when they are in the middle of a literature story to go into the (ESL curriculum) story? My books just sit there and collect dust.

Thus, in the end, Amanda repositioned herself to some degree, improvising her role within Balanced Literacy by settling on providing support for the general curriculum.

#### Pushing into Balanced Literacy

Yet, despite Amanda's acceptance of her role as a support to the school's literacy program, she still had to implement the school's ESL program by providing "services" to Madison's English Learners. Despite the great deal of

energy spent defining exactly what this meant within Madison, what actually occurred was a hybrid program, where ESL support was provided in the general education classroom with residual characteristics of “traditional” ESL lessons. This approach created instances where teachers grouped English learners for instruction differently and more often than their English-speaking peers.

Amanda pushed into Sheila’s first grade ESL cluster classroom three days a week to work initially with four English Learners. At the beginning of the year, both Sheila and Amanda found the push-in sessions frustrating. Amanda felt out of place because she did not understand the Balanced Literacy program and felt generally uninformed as to what was happening in the classroom. Sheila explained that Amanda’s actions and lack of direction in the classroom were a distraction for her students,

Today wasn’t so bad, usually she is disruptive- she interrupts my mini lesson and talks while I am trying to teach. It is a distraction for the other children because they end up watching her instead of reading. I have not decided how to address this, it is hard for me. She asked me what she should do while she was in here, and I said that the best thing would be for her to be conferring and pulling her group- but she says she does not know how to do that. My question is, why– why does she not have the training she needs to have in order to teach the same things we are? That would be the best use of her time.

Over time and with practice, things improved during the push-in sessions.

Amanda observed Sheila’s teaching, emulated her actions, and began to adopt the lexicon of Balanced Literacy. However, her teaching resembled Sheila’s only so far as it occurred within the parameters and structure of the workshop model. She began to confer one on one with her students and pull small groups. However, both the types of lessons she taught, in terms of content and objective, and the frequency with which she grouped students differed from Sheila’s instructional

approach. The result for the English Learners in this classroom was a substantially different literacy experience than that of their native-speaking peers.

In terms of grouping, the structure of the ESL program mediated in some manner how both Amanda and Sheila grouped the English Learners. Sheila maintained a rigid schedule for pulling her guided reading groups to ensure that she met with each group at least once a week. As a rule, she did not pull or confer with the English Learners on the days that Amanda pushed in, as she believed this would interfere with Amanda's teaching. Because she also disliked pulling students for guided reading and conferring on the same day, she improvised by placing all the English Learners in the same guided reading group.

Similarly, Amanda, for reasons she felt were obvious, also pulled these same four students together on the three days a week she was in Sheila's room for what she called her "special book club." Thus, English Learners in Sheila's classroom were placed in small group contexts for reading instruction four times each week, compared with their peers who had small group reading only once a week. In addition, because this group was based on linguistic background versus skill development or reading level, the group was inflexible. The likelihood of one of its members passing into another group was almost nonexistent, she explained.

In terms of the content and objective for this small group instruction, there was also a great deal of variance. Sheila consistently taught and reinforced word attack skills that the first grade team had improvised (see Table 9) in an effort to promote independent reading at higher and higher levels, an articulated objective within the figured world of Balanced Literacy. She referred to charts around her



room that showed characters representing each skill, such as “Eagle Eye” (look at the picture), “Stretchy Snake” (sound the word out slowly) and “Chunky Monkey” (look for a familiar chunk within the word). A central theme of her small group teaching was to provide students with the tools necessary to be successful readers on their own.

Table 9: Madison’s word attack strategies

Strategy	Action
Eagle Eye	*Look at the picture for clues
Lips to Fish	*Get your lips ready *Say the first few sounds of the new word *Re-read the sentence
Chunky Monkey	*Look for a chunk that you know (-at, -an) *Look for a word part (-ing, -er)
Stretch Snake	*Stretch the word out slowly *Put the sounds together
Skippy the Frog	*Skip the word *Read to the end of the sentence *Hop back and READ IT, READ IT!
Tryin’ Lion	*Try to reread the sentence *Try a word that makes sense
Helpful Kangaroo	*Ask for help (after you have tried all of the other strategies)

During the small group sessions pulled and taught by Amanda, English Learners read leveled books in a fashion that mirrored Sheila’s guided reading groups on the surface. However, Amanda purposefully selected books that related to science and social studies concepts, as she believed that ESL students at Madison did not receive enough instruction in these subjects. While the students read, Amanda’s primary focus appeared to be guiding them in following the

routines of the lesson (“We come to the carpet for book club.”) and making sure that the ESL students were following directions (“Where is your book baggy, bring it with you”) and behaving (“readers stay in their seats during workshop time”) as expected.

These differences in objective and approach permeated the one-on-one conferences during the independent reading time as well. Sheila sat alongside four or five individual students during each workshop to listen to them read, assess their progress, take anecdotal notes and teach individual word attack skills from the Balanced Literacy program. She explained, “I try to leave each one with a specific teaching point to work on, and then I check back in on that the next time we meet.” Thus, Sheila’s conferences typically extended or reinforced recent mini-lessons and targeted individual areas for growth. Amanda focused more on *what* and *how* the ESL students were reading. While she did often reinforce the concept or skill covered in the mini-lesson (“Who is one of the characters?”), she continued to focus primarily on procedures (“Where is your sticky note? You need to have three today.”) and behaviors (“When I talk you should look at me.”). Thus, Readers Workshop was very different for students with dual membership to the figured worlds of Balanced Literacy and ESL in Sheila’s classroom.

#### Instructional Grouping and Teachers’ Practice

Sheila’s classroom was not the only context in which English Learners were grouped differently than their peers. Amanda also pushed in to another ESL cluster teacher, Sarah’s classroom to serve her four English Learners; however, in this case she came during Writers Workshop. The procedures for Writers

Workshop closely mirrored those for reading. Students attended a brief mini-lesson on the carpet, moved to their seats for independent practice and then concluded the workshop with some form of sharing. Amanda typically arrived during the mini-lesson, took a seat at the back of the carpet and listened as Sarah concluded her discussion of the writing strategy for that day.

On the days that Amanda pushed into Sarah's room, English Learners experienced a somewhat different structure to the writing lesson. Following the mini-lesson, Amanda pulled the four English Learners to a hexagon-shaped table in the back of the room to work in a small group setting with them. The remainder of the class worked independently at their seats while their teacher, Sarah came alongside them and worked one-on-one with as many children as time allowed during the workshop period.

An important component Writers Workshop prescribed the placement of students within the class to provide access to peers for quiet discussion related to their writing (Calkins, 2013). Sarah followed this guideline and also adhered to the recommendation that students be paired heterogeneously for writing to offset the homogeneous grouping that occurs during reading instruction, thus preventing struggling students from constantly being grouped together. The English Learners in Amanda's group, however, were not grouped according to ability, but rather by their designation as ESL students and they were expected to work silently unless they were interacting directly with Amanda.

In addition to the varied structure, the type of instruction that occurred during Writer's Workshop on the days that Amanda was in Sarah's room also

differed for the ESL students. Sarah, when conferring individually with students, referred to a goal sheet that she kept in each student's writing folder. She reviewed students' goals, assessed the progress toward reaching them and provided strategies for advancing their writing. Because all four of the English Learners in this classroom varied greatly in terms of their English proficiency, Amanda did not provide whole-group instruction for the four English Learners. Rather, she worked one-on-one with the newcomer in the group, while the other three students worked quietly alongside her. She frequently observed their work and offered suggestions, or coached them in how to spell a word. However, unlike her push-ins to Sheila's room, Amanda did not adopt the scripted strategies, procedures or lingo associated with Writer's Workshop.

#### Instructional Grouping and Institutional Structures

The infrastructure of the figured world of ESL at Madison also mediated teachers' approaches to differentiation and instructional grouping. For example, the second week of school, a late-enrolling Russian English Learner, Victoria, became a student in Eliza's first grade classroom. Although Eliza did indeed have one other nearly proficient English Learner in her class, her room had not been designated an ESL cluster classroom that Amanda needed to serve. However, because this child's mother requested language support for her daughter, there emerged a subsequent need either for the entire ESL schedule to be rearranged or for Amanda to improvise an alternate means of providing Victoria language support. The first grade team decided to pull her from her home classroom for

instruction in Sheila's room on the three days that Amanda pushed in for Reader's Workshop.

This arrangement had multiple consequences. First, Victoria happened to be one of two first grade ESL students who met the grade level benchmarks in reading. However, on the days she went to Sheila's room, Amanda grouped Victoria with the other English Learners in the room. This meant that at times, Victoria was assigned tasks that were not challenging for her, for instance on one occasion attending a guided reading lesson focused on a B-level book when her "just right" level was, in fact, E. Furthermore, in addition to being grouped three times a week in Sheila's room, Eliza also assigned Victoria a spot in a guided reading group in her room. Thus, she was grouped for reading instruction four times a week, versus the customary one time a week for students not being served by the ESL program. Finally, because this Victoria did not maintain a permanent spot in her own classroom for Readers Workshop, when she returned she was assigned to reading partners on a somewhat haphazard basis depending on the day.

#### Discussion: "When Figured Worlds Collide"

In this chapter, I outlined Madison's transition from pull-out ESL instruction to the Balanced Literacy model that redefined English Learners, for the most part, as struggling readers. This transition was troublesome for the school's ESL teacher, Amanda, who had limited exposure to the school's mandated Balanced Literacy program and who found the collaborative processes of inclusive models to be challenging. Similarly, Madison's first grade team was, at times, resistant to the new inclusive model, further problematizing its implementation. I

described how Amanda struggled to find space within Balanced Literacy, improvising instruction for her learners by ventriloquizing that of the first grade team, while simultaneously incorporating artifacts from the ESL lessons that she claimed as her own. Finally, I illustrated the manner whereby Balanced Literacy resulted in instructional grouping and differential learning experiences for the English Learners at Madison.

As I first began to observe these differences in grouping for English Learners, they seemed somewhat inconsequential given the fact that ESL services were not provided on a daily basis or for longer than an hour each day. However, it became apparent that the practices of the general education teachers were mediated by the ESL program structure and Amanda's instructional approach within the workshop model. Their reactions to these structures made the grouping of English Learners even more pervasive than native speakers. This additional grouping, coupled with grouping as a result of other institutionalized practices, meant that on any given day at Madison English Learners might be grouped together or with low-level readers for more than half of the instructional day.

Even as Amanda grew to incorporate elements of this figured world into her instruction, the lack of professional development related to teaching literacy prevented her from fully implementing the program with her students. Nor could she continue to enact the English language development lessons she had in the pull-out contexts of prior years. The result was that first grade English Learners at Madison spent more time in instructional groups and received differential instruction than their English-speaking peers.

In the end, Amanda felt thrust into Balanced Literacy, thus she positioned herself as a reluctant member- defining her role within school in a non-collaborative and sometimes contradictory fashion. Similarly, the ESL cluster teachers, secure in their positions, failed to make a place for Amanda. Subsequently, Amanda found herself in a no man's land- where the professional identity that had defined her for 18 years was no longer valued because Balanced Literacy had made all teachers reading teachers- and she, emphatically, was not one of them.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE FIGURED WORLD OF LIT LAB

Five groups of Eliza's first graders were huddled around toy cars, pushing lightly and noisily negotiating who would have the next turn pushing and comparing the speed of the car as they adjusted the force they exerted. With five minutes to go, two students, one boy and one girl—return from Lit Lab where they had been for the previous 90 minutes. Upon seeing the cars, Carlos approached one group, hovering behind his peers to watch. Unable to gain access to the activity Carlos moved on to a second group, and then a third- each time attempting to position himself as a member.

Eliza: [Noting his return for the first time] "Boys and girls, it's time to clean up. Science is over now- we need to prepare for writing."

Carlos: [Turning to me] "I have lots of cars at home!"

In this chapter, I describe an institutionalized structure called the Lit Lab intended for reading remediation at Madison Elementary. I begin with a narration of the first grade team's use of the Lit Lab, including the processes and procedures they constructed in relation to its operation. I then introduce Kid Talks, monthly team meetings during which the first grade teachers negotiated who went to Lit Lab and who did not. I explore instances when members of the first grade team, and in particular ESL cluster teacher Sheila, enacted agency in response to constraints imposed by the Lit Lab. In conclusion, I illustrate the differential instruction received by students in the Lit Lab and describe the varied activities that the teaching team designed dependent on the teaching context.

### The Lit Lab

In a centrally located, vacant classroom, the administrators of Madison Elementary created and installed a remedial reading program called the Lit Lab. In



essence, Lit Lab was a response to a policy articulated by the district’s prior superintendent that Madison’s administration continued to follow. The policy required all elementary school students reading below grade level to receive 60 minutes of strategic remediation each day. Furthermore, students scoring below yet another benchmark were required to receive 30 additional minutes, or 90 minutes in all, of intensive reading instruction in addition to the literacy time already allotted within the daily schedule. Subsequently, teachers positioned and referred to students assigned to Lit Lab as either “strategic” or “intensive” based on the number of minutes they attended each day. Table 10 represents the typical daily schedule for first grade students at Madison and illustrates when students attended Lit Lab relative to the rest of the school day.

Table 10: Lit Lab and the daily schedule at Madison

Time	Activity	Lit Lab
7:45-9:00	Readers Workshop	
9:00-10:00	RTI	Intensive and Strategic Students
10:00-10:30	Science or Social Studies	Intensive Students Only
10:30-11:00	Word Work (phonics/spelling)	
11:00-11:30	Lunch	
11:30-12:00	Recess and Read Aloud	

Table 10: Lit Lab and the daily schedule at Madison (continued)

12:00-1:00	Writers Workshop	
1:00-1:45	Specials (art, music, etc.)	
1:45-2:30	Math Workshop	

Students were admitted to the Lit Lab at Madison based upon their reading rank, as well as some additional circumstances, such as having an IEP. On any typical day, strategic and intensive students rotated through four literacy centers during the hour, each one focusing on a different literacy skill that believed to be essential to meeting the grade level benchmarks. At the end of the hour, intensive students remained in Lit Lab as their strategic peers returned to class, allowing time for two additional centers also based on reading skills.

In general, the first grade teachers at Madison believed the Lit Lab to be an effective means of remediating the skills needed to meet district and state reading benchmarks. The team spoke of the program with high regard and mentioned it often as a way of saving students who would otherwise fall through the cracks. As Sheila explained,

It is a really intense time. Those kids get lost in here (her classroom), in there they are in a small, focused group. They are getting everything they need in one neat little package and they can't get distracted.

Most of all, the team believed Lit Lab supported students in moving to higher reading levels, a priority among this team of teachers.

#### Kid Talk and the Chosen Ones

There was room in the Lit Lab program for 24 children at any given time. The school administrators provided classroom coverage during the instructional

day for one hour each month to allow for grade level data discussions sessions they called Kid Talks, where the first grade team met to discuss which children they would send to the Lit Lab for remediation services. In these meetings, the literacy facilitators reviewed multiple sources of data compiled by the classroom teachers and recommended the “bottom” 24 for entrance into the program, with the eight lowest-scoring students labeled “intensive.” Each member of the first grade team then presented their case for or against admittance for any student with whom they had direct contact.

There was much discussion in these Kid Talk sessions for “teacher discretion” and “gut feelings,” concerning who should and should not attend Lit Lab. Regardless, by the end of the hour, the team selected twenty-four students. The teachers then used informal assessments and running records to monitor these student bi-weekly throughout each month. Students showing progress, as many did, then exited the program to allow space for the admission of other students performing below the grade-level benchmark for reading. These assessments also allowed for movement between the intensive and strategic programs, as students presumably required less remediation as their reading skills improved.

Lit Lab celebrated its third anniversary during the year of the study. During its first year, the team excluded English Learners because they received services through the school’s ESL program. However, in the second year of its existence at Madison, one former team member successfully advocated for their inclusion. Thus, language proficiency was not a consideration in determining the 24 students selected, rather reading level and performance on standardized district

and state assessments played primary roles. Of the ten English Learners in the first grade at Madison, six attended Lit Lab daily. Thus, for each academic quarter of school year 2013, students labeled strategic received approximately 45 total hours of “intervention” outside of the classroom. Students classified as intensive spent about 67 hours each quarter, or approximately 268 hours throughout the school year, learning to read in the Lit Lab.

#### Agency and Advocacy in the Lit Lab

Of the three ESL cluster teachers I observed at Madison, I spent the most time with Sheila. Not only did her classroom represent a rich source of data, but I also found her willing to share and able to articulate the underlying subjectivities and experiences that mediated her teaching. Sheila enthusiastically declared reading to be her passion, with both a Master’s degree and National Teaching Boards Certification to support her claim. In her mid-thirties and a mother of two, Sheila believed teaching to be a challenging and noble profession. While only in her third year at Madison, she positioned herself as a leader among her colleagues. Indeed, they selected her to be Madison’s Teacher of the Year in the school year prior to this study. As a result, Sheila possessed a strong sense of belonging within the first grade learning community and Madison as a whole due in part to her expertise in Balanced Literacy instruction, which aligned with the school’s hyper focus on reading. She explained:

I know that my administration has my back. I know they believe in me. I also know that my team respects my knowledge. That wasn’t easy for me at first, finding a place with seven new colleagues. But, I think they know now how hard I work and that I am always doing what is best for the kids.

Thus Sheila, who described herself as outspoken, often found herself in front of her administrators, both as spokesperson for the first grade team and as an advocate for the children in her classroom. One significant example of this agency was her campaign to control the Lit Lab, in terms of who went, who taught and how the school enacted the whole process. This is not to say that Sheila did not believe the Lit Lab to be the solution to her four English Learners' reading troubles, but rather that she was concerned for the quality of instruction they received while they were out of her classroom.

When possible, Principal Michaels staffed the Lit Lab with teacher assistants he hand-selected based on their experience with reading instruction. Nevertheless, Sheila felt strongly that given her background in reading and her familiarity with the Balanced Literacy approach, students would ultimately benefit more from the program if she were teaching in it. Based on this belief, Sheila approached Principal Michaels and requested permission to disperse her students not assigned to Lit Lab, allowing her the flexibility to continue working with her most struggling students. As she explained:

I went to him this year and said I've got six kids that probably need to go in there, I feel invested, like I should be the one teaching this. Like, no offense but I'm the one that's with them all day, I've had the training, why aren't we doing it like that? He was like, I don't know, (laughter) good idea.

Because of her advocacy, Sheila became the lead Lit Lab instructor. Of Madison's five grade levels that attended Lit Lab each day, Sheila was the only classroom teacher to serve as an instructor. In this case, her personal belief ("I should personally teach my students who struggle the most") and sense of belonging appeared to compel her to move into action on behalf of her students.

Sheila's willingness to speak up regarding the quality of instructors in the Lit Lab was but one example of agency she enacted. In addition, she used agency to reconstruct the curriculum used with Lit Lab students by advocating for the replacement of two components used for the remedial centers in prior years. Instead, she offered to develop materials and supply resources that she believed better aligned with reading instruction she perceived to be effective. Despite the fact that it meant more work and more responsibility, Sheila felt confident that the resulting changes meant that her students' time in the Lit Lab would be more meaningful and productive.

Sheila believed the Lit Lab program was beneficial to her students, because becoming a proficient reader was paramount to all other learning. However, she was concerned about the amount of time these students spent grouped together. Furthermore, she worried about what their time out of the general education classroom meant in terms of exposure to the curriculum. Two of Sheila's students, both English Learners, were classified as intensive and thus assigned to Lit Lab for 90 minutes each day. This meant that these students missed instruction in science and social studies. Sheila perceived this as "unfair," noting that they missed the "fun stuff" like experiments with magnets and water. To address what she perceived as an injustice, she developed abbreviated versions of the missed lessons and found time in the day to give them an opportunity to participate in the day's activity.

Similarly, Sheila adjusted her grouping practices because she believed that her English Learners spent too much time together, and that her students in general

spent too much time grouped by their reading levels. Thus, she resisted the guidance of the school's math program, which called for independent practice in homogenous pairs, allowing students to choose their own partners or grouping them according to personality. These small glimpses of improvisation, where Sheila was able to adapt her practice within the constraints of the standardized classroom structure, characterized Sheila's approach to working with the diverse students in her room.

#### Negotiating Kid Talks

Lit Lab appeared to present opportunities for the enactment of agency among other members of the first grade team at Madison, as they negotiated how Lit Lab would operate and who would attend. Furthermore, the monthly Kid Talk meetings that ultimately mediated who attended Lit Lab appeared to be an arena for further opportunities for agency, both in the form of advocacy and improvisation. These meetings began with Madison's literacy facilitators distributing a spreadsheet that compiled the results of three formal independent reading assessments that were administered in the first grade classrooms at various times throughout the academic year. These sheets were color-coded with green representing students reading at grade level, yellow identifying students "at risk" and red highlighting any results below the grade level benchmark for that point in the year. The fact that students did not necessarily perform above or below grade level on all three assessments meant there was much room for discussion and negotiation of individual student's eligibility for Lit Lab.

The first grade teachers began these sessions by creating a “wish list” of students who they believed would benefit from Lit Lab. It was customary to provide rationale for this list, using informal data and teacher observation to substantiate their arguments. The teachers also presented their reasoning when omitting any students from the list whose scores did not reflect the current benchmark. For example, in an attempt to position one student as proficient, a non-cluster teacher, Elizabeth, stated “I know, all I see is red, red, red (referring to the color-coded spreadsheet), but what I see in my room is more yellow.” Similarly, Cluster Teacher Eliza argued for the removal of one student who was “not glowing red” because she believed this student was on the verge of a “growth spurt” and would be meeting benchmarks soon. These discussions were encouraged during Kid Talk, giving teachers some latitude to decide the context they believed best served each student.

The first grade team did not discuss English Learners as a student population during the Kid Talks I observed. Rather, they addressed each student individually, with reading proficiency remaining the primary indicator of academic achievement. Sheila argued that the required assessments were not accurate portrayals of her English Learners’ skills: “It’s not about the scores. You can see when they are making progress, you know it’s there– but the test isn’t going to show it.” However, despite her doubts as to their accuracy, she ultimately believed the Lit Lab was the best place for them, as it allowed for undistracted focus on developing them as proficient readers. Similarly, another cluster teacher, Sarah, advocated to have two of her English Learners admitted, despite the fact that one



was reading almost at grade level, stating that she believed the “individual attention” provided in Lit Lab would be beneficial. Even the accidental cluster teacher, Eliza, advocated for the inclusion of her nearly proficient Russian student, stating that the extra reading time would help her “catch up” and give her the “push” she needed.

Overall, six of the ten first grade English Learners occupied space within the Lit Lab. Moreover, all six remained there throughout the duration of the study. This is not to say that English Learners necessarily fell within the “bottom” 24 students in the first grade, but rather that their well-intentioned teachers believed that the Lit Lab was a viable and beneficial form of differentiating instruction to meet their needs. Given the fact that throughout the course of the study, they represented 25% of Lit Lab members, but only 4% of the first grade student population, it appeared that being an English Learner mediated in part how teachers at Madison grouped their students for instruction.

#### Differential Instruction within the Figured World of Lit Lab

I scheduled a series of observations that allowed me to alternate between the Lit Lab and the other first grade classrooms in an attempt to understand how instruction within each context differed. During these sessions I began in the Lit Lab and watched the first few rotations, thus I was able to observe all of the lessons each group would experience over the course of the entire hour. I then travelled through the other first grade classrooms, noting the activities that the classroom teachers had designed. When possible, I informally discussed with the first grade teachers the learning objectives and rationale for their lessons.

## Learning in the Lit Lab

A typical day for strategic students in the figured world of Lit Lab involved four learning centers, each led by an instructor with six students in each group. These groups were random, and the students proceeded through the centers in a clockwise direction. Each station resembled a mini-classroom, with a whiteboard and desks facing the instructor, all within the larger room that housed Lit Lab. Appendix G contains sample from the field record generated during one Lit Lab observation.

The students entered the lab and were quickly ushered to their seats. The instructors, a team of teaching assistants with one lead teacher, stood waiting as they entered and rushed them to prepare for class. Sheila, a primary participant from the first grade team, shared with me that the team had hoped to have 15 minutes for each lesson, but due to travel time, they lasted only 12 minutes each. Sheila felt this time was insufficient given all she hoped to accomplish each day. Thus, there was much clock-watching during Lit Lab, as bells and buzzers signified the time for students to shuffle to the next center.

In the first center, students participated in a guided reading session of, for example, a D-level book called *The Surprise*. The short text centered on encounters with unexpected animals in unlikely places, while simultaneously emphasizing long vowel sounds. Each group of six students read the book together seated in a semi-circle led by an instructor sitting on a chair in front of them. After two readings, the lesson concluded with the reinforcement of various

word attack skills, like “what chunks do you see in the word *lucky*” and “we can stretch that word by starting with the sound s.”

In the second center, an instructor worked with students on a “beginning and ending sounds” lesson. Here students held up a word card that ended or began with any particular sound and waited until the instructor acknowledged their response as correct or incorrect.

The third station involved practice making and reading nonsense words formed with magnetic letters on the back of a metallic cookie sheet. ESL cluster teacher Sheila explained that the school’s literacy facilitators designed this particular center to prepare students for the district’s standardized phonics assessment (“DIBELS”, or the Dynamic Indicator of Early Literacy Skills assessment) administered quarterly but also used informally and more frequently to determine Lit Lab status. The final station was “word work,” where students manipulated letter cards to create and then recreate the various words dictated by the instructor.

Students were familiar with the four activities that comprised the strategic Lit Lab time. Not only did the activities stay the same from day to day, but they were also elements of the Balanced Literacy program enacted in the students’ homeroom classrooms. The books used in guiding reading might change, and the letters used during word work varied from day to day, but the core activities and procedures remained the same. The students required few directions as each activity had become a ritualized routine to both students and the instructor. Everybody seemed to know what to do and how the Lit Lab worked—and this

generally did not involve extensive peer-to-peer interaction. Rather, instruction was teacher-driven with an emphasis less on discovery and more on drill.

#### Learning Outside of Lit Lab

There was a strict policy at Madison that there would be no core instruction during the strategic 60-minute block of time used for Lit Lab. Instead, Principal Michaels directed teachers to use this time to provide differentiated instruction based on computerized assessment data that identified un-mastered skills and weaknesses in students' academic progress. Teachers and administrators referred to this time as "RTI" or "Response to Instruction." The additional 30-minute, intensive block of time was used for science and social studies, thus intensive students were, for the most part, excluded from instruction in these content areas.

In theory, teachers could use RTI to remediate math skills or to provide accelerated activities for students whose test scores exceeded benchmarks. However, the first grade team universally agreed to use the time to build specific literacy skills that district assessments identified as underdeveloped. However, while the team discussed and shared ideas and agreed on its primary objective, RTI appeared to emerge as an opportunity for teachers to experiment with new ideas and assert their own teaching style. This innovation was evident from the varied activities they designed as well as through their rationale for each, which teachers shared as I observed their enactment of RTI in their individual classrooms.

Elizabeth, a first grade team member who was not an ESL cluster teacher, articulated the leeway for creativity that RTI allowed her. On one occasion when I

entered her room I found students working in pairs, dispersed across the classroom engaged in varied activities. As I walked around the room, I observed students playing word games, attempting a “phonics challenge” in pairs on a classroom computer, or completing a writing activity. Elizabeth worked with six students at a small table in the front of the room.

Elizabeth explained enthusiastically that she was trying a completely new approach to RTI, something she referred to as a “1:00 AM idea.” She paired her students based on personality and compatibility, with the intention of changing “working partners” each month. Using data from district assessments, Elizabeth identified a series of skills she felt would be the most beneficial to work on during RTI. She then prepared several activities comprised primarily of games and puzzles for each skill, placing them in a file folder where students could easily access them. Elizabeth assigned each pair a skill and allowed them to work through the activities in the order they pleased, repeating any that they found to be interesting or engaging. When students completed an activity, they placed their nametags next to the finished product, snapped a picture with Elizabeth’s iPad and moved on to the next. This student-directed, independent style of learning allowed Elizabeth to work in small groups with students in need of support for any particular skill or concept. It also allowed Elizabeth additional time to review her students’ work and assess for mastery of the skills via photographs, which she also found to be a convenient platform for sharing with parents.

Each of the first grade teachers used the RTI time in slightly different ways. Some teachers had multiple centers prepared and students worked on two or

three different tasks a day. One had five rotating stations, where small groups of students worked on one task each day, completing all five by the end of the week. The activities and structure of RTI varied from room to room and day to day, but literacy remained its primary focus.

While both the students in Lit Lab and the students in their homeroom classrooms worked on literacy skills, I observed three notable differences in the type of learning these students did. First, the Lit Lab students were engaged in teacher-led, question/answer-style mini lessons, while their peers participated in student-centered and student-directed activities that allowed for peer interaction and problem solving. Second, the activities outside of Lit Lab changed on a daily or weekly basis, in both form and content, allowing for exposure to a wide variety of learning possibilities. Finally, the grouping associated with Lit Lab was rigid—the only possibility for mobility was meeting district benchmarks and exiting the program. Conversely, within the broader first grade community, RTI appeared to hold potential for varied and fluid formats of instructional grouping. Thus, a student's assignment to the Lit Lab represented a somewhat high-stakes scenario for first graders at Madison.

### Discussion

In this chapter, I described the Lit Lab, an institutionalized structure designed as a tool for reading remediation at Madison Elementary. I outlined the agreed-upon procedures and processes that ultimately mediated how teachers perceived and enacted instructional differentiation and grouping. In addition, I described ways in which teachers on the first grade team employed agency as a

tool for constructing spaces they perceived as more equitable and advantageous for their English Learners. Lastly, I illustrated the type of instruction experienced by the 24 Lit Lab students, contrasting it with that of the general first grade learning community. Lit Lab students experienced lessons focused on rote learning and repetition while teachers grouped non-Lit Lab students flexibly for student-centered activities that called for collaboration and problem solving. The first grade team used the RTI block of time as a space for innovation and creativity, experimenting with new strategies and exploring different approaches to instructional grouping. Students in the RTI setting engaged in activities that were student-directed and collaborative. The first grade team perceived both RTI and Lit Lab as opportunities to build literacy skills, an unquestioned priority. Yet, because Lit Lab was, in essence, a continuation of the Balanced Literacy curriculum, the learning experiences of its participants were somewhat monochromatic in nature when compared to those of their peers. Furthermore, students labeled intensive did not receive exposure to science and social studies due to their placement in the Lit Lab.

The first grade team of teachers at Madison articulated their respect for the Lit Lab and their belief in how it might improve their students' reading skills. With limited time in the day and multiple, sometimes conflicting demands, these teachers perceived Lit Lab as a means of fixing struggling readers. Because this teaching team perceived the needs of their English Learners as the same as their native speakers, it seemed logical that they would equally benefit from the concentrated reading remediation provided in Lit Lab. The result was that the first

grade English Learners at Madison Elementary spent a disproportionate amount of time in groups, and in the case of the Lit Lab, in potentially limited learning contexts.

However, while Lit Lab represented a potentially constraining institutional structure within the figured world of Madison's first grade learning community, it also appeared to be a space for limited agency among the team's members. Monthly Kid Talks sessions represented an opportunity for teachers on this team to challenge data they believed to be misleading, and subsequently negotiate and position their students based on classroom observations and professional judgment. Furthermore, Sheila tapped herself to lead the lab and redesign the curriculum because she felt she knew better how to give the students what they needed. These small instances of improvisation and agency characterized the first grade team at Madison and provided insight into the lived experiences and professional subjectivities that shaped their teaching.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with a discussion of the recent Brookings Institute Report that revealed an alarming resurgence of ability grouping in U.S. classrooms (Loveless, 2013). The findings of the report suggest, perhaps, that teachers enact policy in somewhat conflicted contexts. While given a great deal of latitude and power behind the closed doors of their classrooms, teachers find themselves constrained by institutional practices and mandated curricula that influence how they approach instruction for their students.

The act of teaching potentially becomes more conflicted in the face of diverse student populations that do not quite fit the mold of increasingly standardized classrooms in the era of accountability. In the case of English learners, teachers must decide daily, and often in the heat of the moment, whether to provide the instruction necessary to prepare them for the high-stakes assessments they will encounter, or whether instead to provide the types of instruction and activities that will foster English language development. Furthermore, they must improvise these pedagogical decisions in light of institutional artifacts, such as team expectations and mandated literacy programs, which influence their perceptions and actions.

Therefore, it becomes important to understand on a micro level these influences, and how they interact with teachers' lived experiences to shape their

perceptions of students and learning. Macro-level research examines student performance and teacher effectiveness, but the resulting data provide an incomplete illustration of how teaching actually happens and, perhaps, why. Thus, the Brookings Report is useful in alerting us that ability grouping is alive and well in U.S. classrooms, but it is micro-level, descriptive studies that provide the thick description necessary to understand in what contexts it occurs.

I designed this dissertation study in an effort to explore and describe how the professional subjectivities and lived experiences of teachers interact with the institutionalized practices of their figured worlds to shape how they perceive and enact instruction for English Learners. Specifically, there is a need to understand their perceptions and enactment of differentiation and ability grouping in the context of the complicated environments in which they teach. I reiterate that the study was designed and carried out from a sociocultural perspective of teachers and teaching. I used participatory qualitative inquiry informed by a tradition of ethnographic fieldwork (Emerson, et al., 2010) to explore these guiding questions:

- How in the setting of a metro Charlotte first grade learning community, do general education teachers understand and enact instructional grouping for English Learners in their classrooms?
- What professional subjectivities and institutional practices mediate why and how general education classroom teachers group their English Learners for instruction?
- How do the same teachers potentially "improvise" instructional grouping and to what ends?

In Chapter Four, I began the presentation of my findings by introducing the Balanced Literacy program at Madison Elementary. As a foundation, I explained recent legislation and high stakes testing that propelled reading and its instruction to the top of the list of curricular priorities. As a result, the school implemented a Balanced Literacy program modeled after Teachers College's Reading and Writing program (The Reading & Writing Project, 2010). Subsequently, Madison's teachers moved to a workshop model of instruction in nearly every content area. I described the positive feelings of the first grade team toward the new program and detailed its implementation. I emphasized in particular the leveling of students according to their reading ability and their subsequent labeling with alphabetic markers that the first grade teachers used to form instructional groups. These procedures and processes were no different for Madison's first grade English Learners, regardless of their language proficiency. In fact, the data revealed that, in most cases, the first grade team perceived little need to differentiate instruction or assessment for the English Learners. Moreover, I described how the school-wide hyper-focus on reading and reading achievement overshadowed the English development needs of English Learners across the first grade. The result was that, in light of the demands of Balanced Literacy, the first grade team reframed English Learners as struggling readers and, for the most part, utilized the same approach to supporting their progress as they might any other students who was performing below grade level. Chapter Four concluded with a discussion of this perception of English Learners as struggling readers. I argued that this means of classifying linguistically diverse students potentially reinforced deficit perceptions by failing

to recognize the funds of knowledge (N. Gonzalez et al., 2005) they bring to the classroom. Furthermore, I suggested that by not acknowledging the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterized these students, the first grade team reduced the possibility for “third spaces” (Gutiérrez et al., 1995) that would allow for improvisation and co-constructed learning opportunities within the figured world of Balanced Literacy.

In Chapter 5, I described the ESL program at Madison Elementary. Madison followed the national trend toward more inclusive ESL models for serving English Learners by implementing a “push-in” model the year prior to the study. I introduced Amanda, the school’s ESL teacher, and discussed the challenges she faced with the new model after teaching in an independent setting for 18 years. She shared her frustrations and beliefs that the ESL program at Madison occupied space in the periphery of Madison’s priorities, and that she had not received adequate professional development related to Balanced Literacy. Data from interviews with Amanda highlighted her resistance to push-in teaching because she was unable to carve a space for herself within the structure of the workshop model used in Madison’s first grade classrooms. In this chapter, I also described the first grade team’s resistance to the new inclusive program, and perhaps, to the ESL program in general. There appeared to be incongruence in the expectations for Amanda’s role during push-in sessions, as many of the first grade team perceived her to be a support person instead of a fully-licensed teacher with professional expertise. Thus, communication and collaborative planning were virtually non-existent, causing Amanda to struggle even more in the context of

Balanced Literacy program. Ultimately, Amanda learned to emulate the teaching of the ESL cluster teachers with whom she worked. However, while Amanda appeared on the surface to be following the Balanced Literacy program, she continued to incorporate fundamentally different objectives into her teaching. The resulting “push in-pull out” sessions led to increased instructional grouping for the English Learners at Madison. I concluded this data chapter theorizing that the structure of the Balanced Literacy program diminished Amanda’s role with the school community. Furthermore, I argued that Amanda was unable to find a space for herself because of the resistance of the stakeholders to the new inclusive model.

In Chapter Six I introduced the figured world of Lit Lab, an institutional structure developed by Madison’s administration as a tool for reading remediation. I began by outlining the procedures and processes associated with the program. Lit Lab was a daily block of time during which the first grade teacher collectively sent 24 students to a separate room for either 60 or 90 minutes of concentrated reading instruction. The first grade team determined who would, or would not, attend Lit Lab during a monthly data analysis session called Kid Talks. I explained that, while standardized assessment data was a primary determinant, the teaching team also used informal classroom data to negotiate the list of attendees. Thus, Kid Talks appeared to be a space in which the first grade teachers enacted agency to position their students in what they perceived to be the most beneficial setting. I described additional occasions that I observed agency associated with the Lit Lab. I introduced Sheila, as a leader among the first grade team with a strong

sense of belonging and the confidence to take action to make changes she felt were beneficial to her students. Sheila approached her principal to request a restructuring of the Lit Lab, which resulted in her becoming its lead teacher. Furthermore, she advocated for an overhaul of the program's curriculum. I concluded Chapter Six with a comparison of the learning opportunities for first grade students dependent on their whether they attended Lit Lab or not. While both groups received literacy instruction, the quality of the instruction differed. Students in Lit Lab received rote, teacher-directed instruction that drew from various components of the Balanced Literacy program. Conversely, the first grade team designed student-centered activities that provided opportunities for peer interaction and critical thinking. Furthermore, grouping within the Lit Lab was static, as the students rotated through learning stations in homogeneous groups. In contrast, there appeared to be opportunities for flexible and dynamic grouping structures for students not attending Lit Lab. Ultimately, I argued that while the Lit Lab program allowed for small glimpses of teacher agency, the drive toward reading proficiency overshadowed these moments of advocacy. Thus, students attending Lit Lab, a disproportionate number of whom were English Learners, experienced increased ability grouping and differential learning opportunities with restricted access to the curriculum.

To recapitulate, this dissertation study was not a program evaluation of Balanced Literacy; neither did I seek to link student achievement to the choices the first grade team or individual teachers made. Rather, here I have focused on teachers' negotiation of the fluctuating curricular directions that Madison

Elementary School had taken— and in particular, how they understood and enacted differentiation and ability grouping in the context of "Balanced Literacy."

My observations at Madison Elementary School did not contradict the findings of the Brookings Report (Loveless, 2013). Indeed, teachers unapologetically arranged and rearranged their students, including their English Learners, multiple times a day, either in pairs or in small groups to receive instruction and participate in classroom activities. However, the Brookings Report may have fallen short in describing why and how teachers make sense of groups within the context of their own classrooms, and as actors charged with enacting a mandated curriculum. What I observed at Madison revealed that teaching is a complex endeavor and that teachers are indeed, at times, conflicted in their approaches to designing instruction for diverse student populations. Understanding these tensions holds the potential to inform practice and suggest areas for further exploration. Thus, I now turn to a discussion of the implications of this study.

### Implications for Practice

#### 1) The Evolving Role of ESL Teachers

The role of the ESL teacher in PK-12 settings is rapidly changing in response to myriad influences, including school-level considerations and legislative mandates (Trickett et al., 2012). In February of 2013, leaders of TESOL International Association convened for the purpose of discussing and responding to these changes, particularly in light of the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. The results of this meeting were shared via a

report entitled *Implementing the Common Core State Standards for English Learners: The Changing Role of the ESL Teacher* (Staehr Fenner, 2013). Leaders in the field of TESL, including teachers, administrators and researchers concluded that, generally speaking, the current role of ESL teachers in the PK-12 context is problematic.

The report cited insufficient teacher preparation, on the part of ESL and content area teachers, for supporting English Learners in meeting the demands of rigorous programs such as the Common Core. They faulted systemic obstacles, such as the availability of qualified ESL teachers as well as the definition of Highly Qualified teachers under NCLB, which effectively excludes ESL as a content area, for weakening ESL programs. In addition, the report articulated contextual issues, such as ESL teacher marginalization and lack of professional development, as further complicating their role within the school community. Underlying all of the concerns outlined in the report was a lack of uniformity and clarity in expectations and responsibilities for ESL teachers in general, compounding the challenge of promoting effective models of supporting English Learners in content classrooms.

The experiences of Madison's ESL teacher, Amanda, mirrored TESOL's report in many ways. She struggled to reposition herself within the new, inclusive model of instruction, and in the end was only partially successful. Because Amanda was not a reading teacher and because she did not receive professional development in the Balanced Literacy program, she was unprepared for the type of teaching she was asked to do. Furthermore, as is often the case in elementary



schools, it appeared as if the burden of initiating collaborative endeavors fell squarely on Amanda's shoulders. Both the school's administration and the first grade team clearly defined their priorities (implementing balanced literacy and teaching reading), and it was left up to Amanda to find a way to fit in.

The implementation of the Common Core and the movement toward inclusive ESL programs calls for a reevaluation of the role ESL teachers in the elementary school setting. Where ESL teachers have traditionally been marginalized and located (both literally and symbolically) in the periphery of the school community (Olsen, 1997), the time has come to position them more centrally in terms of access to training, planning and decision-making. School administrators perhaps should begin by acknowledging the specialized knowledge and expertise that ESL teachers stand to offer by positioning them as leaders, and by making available opportunities that allow them to share this expertise with their colleagues. Furthermore, because the demand for collaboration that accompanies inclusive programming draws out the dialectic nature of the ESL teacher's position, administrators, general education teachers and ESL teachers must work together in clearly defining how each party will contribute to the successful enactment of instruction for English learners. Teachers from both fields should be held accountable for participating in decision making related to collaboration in terms of when and how it will happen. Equally important, administrators must ensure that the resulting program is implemented with fidelity, ensuring that all parties contribute adequately and appropriately.

Colleges of education that prepare ESL teachers for service similarly need to update their understandings of how and what their graduates will be teaching. Programs of study for these teachers should include coursework related to content (i.e. literacy, science, math and social studies) given the ever-increasing presence of ESL teachers in the general education setting. Furthermore, ESL teacher candidates stand to benefit from clinical experiences that align with these demands so that they will have a clear understanding of what will be asked of them in their future school communities.

## 2) The Implementation of Balanced Literacy

In a sociocultural study particularly relevant to this dissertation, Maloch, Worthy, Hampton, Hungerford-Kresser, & Semingson (2013) examined ability grouping in first grade classrooms following the implementation of Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program. They found that teachers' perceptions of district policy and the program's guidelines interacted with their subjectivities, experiences and beliefs to produce classroom instruction that often varied significantly from the intended curriculum. Maloch, et al. noted critical differences in the enactment of the curriculum based on teachers' experience and enthusiasm for the mandated literacy program. One teacher they described felt strongly that guided reading was the best model for reading instruction and subsequently strove to implement the program with fidelity. These researchers found that her rigid reliance on the program's structure and organization caused her to move away from "the spirit of guided reading" (p. 305).

Similar to the teachers at Madison, one of Maloch, et al.'s (2013) focal teachers became fixated on moving students through the reading process in a structured and linear manner that is inconsistent with how learning actually occurs. They observed a hyper-focus on organizing students and materials according to their reading levels, something that Fountas and Pinnell strongly discouraged.

Within the figured world of Balanced Literacy at Madison, the leveling and sorting of students were widely accepted practices because they aligned with the program and promoted efficiency. Even the school's administration and literacy specialists viewed ability grouping positively because they believed the groups to be flexible and fluid. Yet, what I observed at Madison contradicted this expectation.

In addition, there appeared to be a missed opportunity at Madison in terms of developing content knowledge and vocabulary during the implementation of their Balanced Literacy program. While there was discussion of text type (fiction or non-fiction) and genre, no real emphasis was placed on what the students were actually reading. The first grade teachers prioritized the level of each student's books over the subject matter they contained. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) call for students to read complex texts that will prepare them for college and beyond. The early grades seem to be a logical time to provide exposure to books that build a foundation for content learning in areas such as social studies and science. This becomes increasingly important in schools like Madison, where English learners and students reading below grade level

benchmarks are removed from the classroom during instruction in these areas for reading remediation.

Schools such as Madison, that are implementing new programs and rethinking traditional approaches, might benefit from an outsider's perspective as a form of follow-up. By inviting in an expert from the field to evaluate a program's implementation, they potentially safeguard against long-term harm caused by misinterpretation of policy or enactment that does not align with the program's objectives. They may also reveal missed opportunities and areas where minor changes will greatly enhance the program's potential for positive outcomes.

### 3) Collaboration in Face of Commodified Curricula

The movement toward collaborative models of instruction for English learners presents itself as an alternative to ESL pull-out programs that have historically marginalized immigrant students and segregated them from the broader school community. Yet, the abundance of instructional grouping for English Learners at Madison contradicted the trend toward more inclusive models that ideologically rescue students from the remedial, dead-end language support programs that Valdés (2001) described as ESL ghettos. In fact, the data revealed that English Learners experienced additional time in instructional groups because of the structure of Madison's ESL program and the failure of Madison's teachers to collaborate effectively. Contemporary scholars (DelliCarpini, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2013; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Honigsfeld, 2009; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012b; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012a) have written prolifically on the topic of collaboration and caution that implementing inclusive models

should be a slow, carefully planned, and well-supported process. Furthermore, they argue that the collaboration required by inclusive models work best when invested teachers engage in it voluntarily. These conditions did not characterize the ESL program at Madison.

Martin-Beltran and Percy (2012) argue that standardized curricula can serve as a platform for collaboration, allowing ESL and general education teachers a common ground from which to work. Yet, they found that teachers who had ample time to co-plan and collaborate face-to-face relied less on the standardized curriculum, drawing instead on their collective professional knowledge to plan instruction for their English Learners. Conversely, teachers who were not given opportunities to plan relied heavily on the standardized curriculum as a communication tool and reference point, in essence, replacing the need to actually collaborate. I would argue, however, that the type of collaboration Martin-Beltran and Percy describe, which mirrored what I observed at Madison, where ESL teachers are responsible for looking at pacing guides and lesson plans to figure out what general education teachers are doing, is not true collaboration. Furthermore, it is unlikely to result in the innovation and collective creativity needed to meet the needs of English Learners being educated within the context of a standardized curriculum.

As a “case in contrast” (p. 438), Martin-Beltran and Percy (2012) describe an ESL and general education teacher who came together with a sincere interest in collaborating to meet the needs of their English Learners. They were given the latitude to move away from the standardized curriculum and co-construct units of

study that were specifically designed to address the needs of their English Learners. They met on a consistent basis to share ideas and engage in “face-to-face negotiation of the teaching and learning goals (p.438).” Opportunities like this did not exist at Madison, nor did the teachers appear to seek them. Rather, they positioned themselves as powerless to operate outside of the mandated norm in terms of instructional structures and program models. In the end, collaboration in the form of emailing lesson plans and quick chats at the beginning of push in session was not sufficient to support the type of instruction that Madison’s administration foresaw when it implemented an inclusive model for its English Learners.

TESOL’s report (Staehr Fenner, 2013) highlighted the sentiments of ESL teachers who felt collaborative models of instruction thrust them involuntarily into partnerships with colleagues in the general education classroom, referring to such programs as “arranged marriages.” Ironically, Amanda used this very same phrase in describing her relationships with her cooperating teachers. Neither she, nor the ESL cluster teachers were given a voice in the process, and subsequently, there was an undertone of resistance that characterized all things related to ESL at Madison.

The experiences of the teachers at Madison suggests that when inclusive models are implemented without elements of support there exists the potential for the old model to have residual and lasting impacts on the new one. The result in the case of Madison, was what I consider a “push-in, pull-out” model, where English Learners are grouped based on their linguistic background and given

differential instruction within the physical context of their general education classroom. In essence, pushing in to pull out defeats the purpose of instituting an inclusive program and potentially negates the benefits of both program models.

I do not suggest a return to traditional ESL pull-out programs that are generally problematic in that they stigmatize participants, reduce exposure to the general curriculum and in essence represent another form of ability grouping. Rather, I argue that inclusive ESL programs could, perhaps, become more fully developed if they were implemented in careful and calculated ways to ensure that all stakeholders are given time to adjust to their new roles within the school community. In addition, administrators must be prepared to provide the resources and support required to successfully implement inclusive models. Communal planning time is a basic necessity, as is comprehensive professional development that provides the knowledge and skills needed on both sides of the teaching partnership. Similarly, general education teachers assigned to teach in collaborative settings may benefit from opportunities to share ideas and observe each other's teaching. Furthermore, both ESL teachers and general education teachers should be included in advance planning decisions such as who will be selected to teach, who will partner with whom, and how they structure their collective approach to serving their students.

In light of the Common Core's emphasis on cross-curricular connections, all teachers, but in particular ESL teachers, need preparation in how to engage in collaborative teaching. This preparation should begin during their teacher education programs and continue with in-service professional development.

Furthermore, it should provide hands-on opportunities such as pre-service field observations of collaborative teaching contexts or in-service opportunities to observe successful inclusive teaching.

### Implications for Research

#### 1) Identity of English Learners within the Context of Balanced Literacy

While it may be true that English Learners become better readers in programs similar to the one I described at Madison, the ideological underpinning of this re-casting is concerning and merits further examination. Progress has been made over the past decade to move away from such deficit-oriented classifications of linguistically diverse students. Assigning labels such as “at risk,” “struggling” or “below-grade level” to the reading abilities of English Learners represents a step backward in the movement to position non-native speakers in more additive terms, such as emerging bilinguals (O. García & Kleifgen, 2010), or in this case, as dual language learners (Goldenberg, Hicks, & Lit, 2013). In fact, while they underscore the monolingual nature of many U.S. classrooms, even the commonly used labels of English Learner and English Language Learner perpetuate a deficit perception of linguistically diverse students, as both suggest that the student has been unsuccessful in completing the process of becoming proficient in English. As Orellana and Gutiérrez (2006) suggested, assigning labels that describe a problem to a group of students distracts us from analyzing the underlying institutional structures and inequalities interwoven throughout the context in which they learn.

There are inarguably benefits to inclusive models for serving English learners. However, when not properly implemented, such programs appear



reminiscent of the archaic “sink or swim” approach to educating non-native English speakers in that there is little or no room to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity. Furthermore, while it may be efficient or convenient to implement the same interventions for English Learners and native speakers with underdeveloped reading skills, the labeling of English Learners as struggling readers potentially deemphasizes the need for all classroom teachers to be exposed to what is entailed in learning in a second (or subsequent language). Teachers attuned to second language development processes who are, thus able to see past low assessment scores to discover students’ existing skills and knowledge, stand to accelerate English acquisition and promote academic success for English Learners (T. Lucas et al., 2008).

Finally, ignoring students’ linguistic heritage to focus only on their ability to decode in the language of instruction is an oversimplification of the learning process. The diverse cultural backgrounds of English Learners influences every aspect of their school experiences and hold the potential to contribute in meaningful ways to the classroom community. By failing to acknowledge that diversity by applying a label (i.e. struggling reader) that dictates a familiar course of action, educators are, in effect, stripping these young learners of a significant part of their cultural identities.

More research is needed to assess the scope of this repositioning and to determine to what degree experts are comfortable with yet another deficit approach to educating linguistically diverse students. Furthermore, an examination of how Colleges of Education are preparing future teachers to discuss linguistic diversity,

or any type of diversity for that matter, is needed in order to foster more additive and inclusive approaches to working with a broad range of students. Finally, research should explore the long-term implications of labeling English Learners based on their academic shortcomings in terms of the identity development and self-perceptions of these students.

## 2) Organizational Dynamics and School Structures

While this study examined a team of teachers and their enactment of instruction within a first grade community of practice, it is important to consider the broader context in which the team operated. Underlying teachers' actions and perceptions are organizational dynamics and school structures that mediate and constrain a wide range of activities including how teachers approach instruction, how they interact with their colleagues and how they respond to administrative mandates.

At Madison Elementary there appeared to be several organizational dynamics that resulted in tensions surrounding conflicting beliefs, challenged assumptions and trust. The most visible of these was the almost universally shared belief that teaching reading was an unquestionable priority throughout the school community. This belief originated with the school's principal who was dedicated to developing a school culture that emphasized the ability to read as a valued skill. Thus, at Madison, good readers were promising students and good reading teachers were effective educators. The result of this belief was the positioning of teachers and students based on their willingness and capacity to align themselves with school's objectives. Those teachers who prioritized other objectives, as was the

case with the Madison's ESL teacher, were viewed as operating outside the norm and deviating from the prescribed plan. Issues of trust and, ultimately, resistance arose from the conflicting goals and perceptions of the school's staff.

In addition, the allocation of time was a dynamic within the structure of the school that weighed heavily on how teachers approached instruction and how they perceived academic priorities. Readers Workshop and Lit Lab were both guarded times within school schedule, where the school principal prohibited any type of disruption. Yet, science and social studies were subjects that could be missed in the face of conflicting demands. Thus, teachers viewed reading and writing as more valuable. Similarly, time was allotted within the school day for analyzing student data and planning literacy instruction. However, there was not time set aside for collaborative planning between the ESL teacher and the ESL cluster teachers, or was there time or resources allocated to providing the professional development necessary to support inclusive programming. Subsequently, these initiatives were perceived as unimportant and devalued within the school community.

Both the development of Madison's school culture of reading and the allocation of time within the school structure are primarily functions of the school's principal. Just as teachers do not operate within a vacuum, neither do school administrators. This study did not explore in depth the macro systems and artifacts that influence how individual administrators operate, be those legislative or district requisites, high-stakes testing or community pressure. Descriptive studies similar in design to the current study, but focused on school administrators,

could potentially illuminate administrative decision-making processes that ultimately trickle down to individual classrooms. These insights would greatly expand our understanding of the multiple translations of policy before it is ultimately enacted.

### 3) Standardized Literacy Instruction and English Learners

As “Balanced Literacy” increasingly takes its place in elementary schools across the country, scholarship related to its enactments surfaces within the literature (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013; Falchi, Axelrod, & Genishi, 2013; Maloch et al., 2013; O'Day, 2009; Siegel & Lukas, 2008; Yoon, 2013). However, to date, the vast majority of this work has focused on the program's implementation in various classroom contexts.

Similarly, this dissertation study did not describe specifically the academic progress of English Learners within the context of Balanced Literacy, either qualitatively or quantitatively. With the exception of O'Day's (2009) examination of Sacramento's implementation of Balanced Literacy, few studies have explored how English Learners fare in the context of such standardized literacy programs. I argue that research is needed to explore the relationship between a program such as Balanced Literacy and the short term and long term academic achievement of immigrant children. Furthermore, it would be insightful to understand the implications of Balanced Literacy on the rate of English language development for these same students in the context of monolingual classrooms.

### 3) Beyond Knowledge and the Question of Thoughtfully Adaptive Teaching

Throughout the dissertation, I have referred to the work of Fairbanks et al. (2010) in exploring why some teachers are able to rely on their personal practical theories, belonging, identity and vision to stretch beyond the mere application of knowledge to respond to their students' diversities in meaningful ways. Using this framework to examine the way that the first grade teachers at Madison constructed and enacted their figured worlds illuminated the connection between these four perspectives.

The first grade teachers at Madison, in general, believed that learning to read was the highest priority for first grade students, and this was a belief that went uncontested throughout the course of the study. Thus, this personal theory—"reading comes first"—was the driving force for their decision-making within their individual classrooms. Similarly, their visions for their students—that they would leave first grade as proficient readers—aligned nicely with this belief and provided a platform for making sense of their teaching. The presence of English Learners, who did not always respond as expected to traditional literacy instruction, represented a challenge to these teachers' personal theories. In order to reconcile it all, they improvised and adapted to meet these students' needs as they perceived them, yet only within the parameters of the Balanced Literacy program.

The objective of this study was not to evaluate or assess this team of teachers and their approach to working with English Learners. Rather, I sought to describe their perceptions and illuminate the complexity of their figured worlds. What I observed at Madison were glimpses of what Fairbanks et al. (2010) might

call thoughtfully adaptive teaching, where the teachers adjusted their approaches or exercised agency to make space for the English Learners. However, I argue that these instances were, perhaps, overshadowed by the dominant discourse of Balanced Literacy that permeated Madison's entire learning community.

Fairbanks (2010) and her colleagues began a long-overdue conversation that addressed, in effect, what characteristics contribute to becoming a teacher who is able to build meaningful relationships with diverse students while simultaneously negotiating the complexities of the classroom. In fact, initiating this dialogue was the purpose of their work— one that I support in light of my research at Madison. In the spirit of Fairbanks, et al., I am not suggesting studies that attempt to label and categorize individual teachers or dissect teaching in general. Rather, I believe it is important to build upon their discussion in consideration of what teachers of education can do to support the development and self-awareness of teachers' beliefs, visions, sense of belong and identities. Perhaps even more importantly, research is needed to explore how teacher educators might lead future teachers in making sense of these characteristics in the face of the complex and dynamic realities in which they teach.

The implementation of the Common Core within the era of accountability compels educators to assess and reevaluate traditional school structures and practices. Furthermore, we must consider how accompanying initiatives, such as standardized literacy programs and high stakes assessments, redefine the roles of teachers within the dynamic contexts of contemporary classrooms. Certainly, there is much to be gained from wide-scale studies of how policy is implemented and,

subsequently, how the implementation affects achievement. However, there is equally as much to be learned from focused, descriptive analyses of teachers, and how their lived experiences interact with institutional structures to influence how they enact policy within their individual classrooms. This dissertation study sought to provide such an analysis, through thick description and interpretation, of the complex and conflicted figured worlds in which teachers operate.

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## APPENDIX A: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Instructional Differentiation and Grouping

What does instructional differentiation mean to you? What does it look like in your classroom? Give an example.

What are your approaches to instructional grouping for the students in your classroom? Give an example.

When might you group students for instruction? What strategies do you use when creating groups? Give an example.

How does classroom/institutional data inform who you use instructional grouping? Give examples.

### Working with English Learners

How do you approach instructional grouping for English Learners? Give an example.

How do you think the instructional needs of English Learners compare to your native speakers? How do their abilities vary? Give examples.

What are some personal practical theories/beliefs you have about English Learners? Give examples.

### Beliefs about Teaching and Identity

Can you describe your vision of yourself as an educator?

What sort of sense of belonging do you have in your school? How did that (not) come about and what does it mean in terms of your professional identity?

Talk about yourself as a professional and how that identity has evolved over time?



## APPENDIX B: ADMINISTRATOR PROTOCOL

### Working with English Learners

How do the instructional needs of English Learners differ from that of native English speakers? Give examples.

What characteristics do you look for in a teacher that you assign to work with your English Learners?

What is your vision for the English Learners in your school?

### Instructional Differentiation

What does instructional differentiation mean to you and what does it look like when you see it in a classroom? Give examples.

What are your expectations in terms of instructional differentiation?

What criteria/data do you expect teachers to use when creating instructional groups?

### Professional Development

Talk about professional development at Madison. What is the focus and objective?

Have you had opportunities for professional development related to instructional differentiation or grouping?

## APPENDIX C: SAMPLE FROM THE FIELD NOTE RECORD

August 26, 2013 9:05 AM

The literacy facilitator comes in and says loudly- I love it, they are already reading. She asks about the missing child. Well, at least she is not here, so we don't have to worry about dismissing her.

Sheila comes to Bianca and puts an arm around her. She speaks so quietly I cannot hear her, and I am sitting right next to her. Sheila points to some of the pictures and says, "do you celebrate Christmas"

Bianca: That's a Christmas tree.

Sheila: Do you know this girl, the one that is in all of the Clifford books? That's Emily Elizabeth. Who was your teacher last year? Do you see a note from her?

Sheila: Do you have a dog? (yes) You have five dogs, my goodness.

Bianca reads a line from the book and Sheila says, "Very good." She reads the whole story- Sheila says "good" stands up and says, "Alright, now we are going to do our partner sharing." The kids turn to each other and talk about one of the books they read.

H'Mika is not sharing. Sheila goes over her and says, "Can you share?" She turns toward the girls next to her. It is impossible to hear what she says, but they interact briefly.

Amanda (ESL teacher) walks in and says something quietly to H'Mika. She comes over and loudly says hello to Bianca, asks for a hug. Then goes to Carlos, asks for a hug. "Are you going to work harder this year? Are you going to do a good job?" She crouches down and chats with Carlos. She has him read a little from his book. She stops listening to Carlos and then says to H'Mika, "Are you going to open your book so I can hear you read?"

Amanda: "Get up, come over here. She has H'Mika move to a seat so she has Carlos on one side and H'Mika on the other. She continues talking with the kids and Carlos shows her the picture he drew.

Sheila: (as a method of gaining students' attention) "Boom, Boom... (students chant: POW) Listen... (students chant: NOW). She gives instructions for the students to put the baggies in the red pocket on the back of their chair. Amanda tells H'Mika to put it in the pocket, repeats Sheila's instructions, and manages Carlos, who has gotten up and is wandering.

Sheila and Amanda discuss the missing child, Sheila: Does she have a sibling?

Amanda: Yes, and I have seen him.

Sheila: I need to know if she is a bus rider.

Amanda goes to the phone and calls someone, stands in the hall.

Amanda comes back and hovers over H'Mika and Carlos. She speaks with another child about snack and asks how the students are getting home. She turns to Bianca and asks how she is getting home.

Amanda to Sheila: You know, I actually don't have a sibling on that child. How are you supposed to know how she gets home?

Sheila: There are papers they were supposed to bring back. They came to the meet the teacher, but they did not return the papers. I need to know by tomorrow.

9:35 AM

## APPENDIX D: ANALYTIC WRITING SAMPLE: LITERARY TALE

## Breakfast with Sheila

It is just before the last morning bell rings and Sheila is in her room, crouched low so as to be able to look into the face of a young student who is visibly upset. He has just finished unpacking his backpack and discovered that his lunch is missing. Sheila places her hands on each of his arms and says in a quiet voice, "It is okay- you can buy a lunch today. Your mommy probably just forgot to put it in there because Mommies have so much to think about. Don't be upset about it- we will make sure you get something good to eat." Sheila knows that mommies have a lot to think about because she has her own two children, ages two and four.

H'Mika and Sylvia arrive at the door just as the tardy bell rings, holding each other's hand and carrying oversized white sacks made from wax paper in the other. As is typical, H'Mika is wearing a dress perhaps more intended for Sunday school and both girls are grinning widely. The sacks the girls are carrying hold their breakfasts- provided free of charge by the school district as part of a recent initiative to ensure that every child begins their school day prepared to learn. It is literally impossible to pay for breakfast at school- all children, regardless of their family's income are included.

Sheila has not shared this bit of information with her class, knowing that most eat at home but would still love the opportunity to explore the sprawling campus Madison Elementary and avoid doing the morning work that posted on the board in anticipation of their arrival. However, Sheila suspects that H'Mika and

Sylvia have older siblings and a network of neighborhood family friends who have alerted the girls to this program and they have been eating their breakfast at school since the beginning of the week. Carlos, another English Learner in the class, has also caught on to the fun and declared yesterday that he had not eaten his breakfast at home. Breakfast had ended, so Sheila was not able to send him, but William was faster today and subsequently is seated at the hexagonal table enjoying his meal. "I don't tell the kids about breakfast- or the fact that it is free. He saw the girls eating yesterday. I'm sure he ate at home, but I can't say no- God help me if I am wrong and he needs it." The intention is that the children eat in the cafeteria and return to their classroom before the start of the day, but for those who arrive with less than 15 minutes, as was the case with all three of Sheila's students, there are take-out sacks available.

Sheila quietly sighs and seats the girls at the hexagon table with Carlos. She addresses the class, stating, "We are going to start in 5 minutes- I am running behind this morning and I need to send some emails to parents and check your folders. The next 5 minutes should be quiet- this is independent reading time." As she talks she bends over the girls' food and opens the milk, cereal, and orange juice. "Do you want this milk in your cereal?" she asks, "oh, you got chocolate milk." She continues getting the girls settled with their breakfast, opening their cheese sticks while simultaneously answering the questions posed by students seated at their tables about the daily schedule. She reminds them again that this is supposed to be a quiet time. "Okay girls, you need to hurry- this is our reading time." As she walks away, H'Mika pours her chocolate milk in her cereal and

Shiela makes a face at me. She says to them quietly, “Girls, if you are going to go to breakfast every morning you need to get to school a little earlier. Our day is starting now. And when you get here, you need to come in, put your things away, grab your nametags and go to the cafeteria. There is no time for chatting and no time for hanging out.”

Wade begins the daily lesson, explaining that, while yesterday was Wacky Wednesday, today they would be back on their normal daily schedule. Sylvia and H’Mika are slurping their juices intentionally and on several occasions Sheila reminds them that they need to hurry. She notices that Carlos has been done for a while and tells him it is time to go to his seat and start his reading. He stands up and leaves, but the girls continue slurping and chatting. As Sheila heads toward the classroom computers, she notices that the space where Carlos was seated is still strewn with trash so she sends him to clean up his mess. After checking something on the computer she summons the boy who was crying a short time ago and says very quietly to him, “Brian, your mother emailed me just now—she said you circled today on the calendar as a day you would buy because it is hamburgers and you can buy chocolate milk.” The boy nods, smiles and returns to his seat.

Sheila calls the students to carpet in the back of the room to begin the mini-lesson for Reader’s Workshop. Today’s lesson is about making connection and she is using a book she shared yesterday, *Ruby the Copycat*, as an example-modeling connections that can be made between the book and the lives of her students. She looks up and sees the girls still seated at the hexagon table enjoying their meal and says, “Girls, I have given you 10 minutes to eat, it is time to finish

up and put that away. Throw your liquids in the sink.” She goes over and helps the girls clean up and asks Sylvia if she wants to finish her cheese at snack time. Sylvia rarely brings a snack to school and nods at Sheila’s suggestion. “Okay, I will put this on my desk and you can eat it there later.”

Sheila is not frustrated by the breakfast thing, though it is certainly inconvenient. She takes it in stride and just goes about the business of setting up for the day. These kids are seemingly unaware and unbothered by the fact that they are the only ones eating their breakfast in the classroom. Similarly, the other kids watch their interactions with Sheila, but do not seem concerned that these students are doing something so entirely different from them, somehow know intuitively that they would not be given the same leeway if they asked. Sylvia has joined Wade on the carpet (remembering to get the pencil she was asked to bring!) but H’Mika is still setting up her spot—she is not in any hurry. It is 8:07 before she joins her peers—22 minutes after the late bell rang.

## APPENDIX E: ANALYTIC WRITING SAMPLE: VIGNETTE

## Victoria's First Day of School

Eliza calls each of the tables to join her at the carpet at the front of the room, first the green, then the red and blue and finally the yellow table is asked to join her. She tells the children to sit along the perimeter of the carpet and Victoria looks around at her peers. Many move to the outer edge of the carpet, but a few linger and Leyla is uncertain what she is supposed to do. Eliza takes a few moments to get the students settled reminding them that perimeter means along the edge. She uses her hands to demonstrate where she would like the children to sit. During this time, Victoria has managed to situate herself in the center of the formation, and Eliza gently repositions her by placing her in line with her peers.

Eliza asks each of the students to go around the circle and state their names as a means of introducing themselves. She then asks if any of them have any questions for Victoria. One child asks, "Why did you come from so far away?" and Eliza encourages her to answer by adding, "Yes, you came on an airplane, where were you, Victoria?" She responds that she was visiting her grandmother and grandfather in Israel and Eliza enthusiastically tells the children that Israel is a nice place with lots of fruits and vegetables. She then asks Victoria if she was practicing a language while she was there and Victoria tells the class that she speaks Russian. "Yes," Eliza says, "Victoria speaks two languages, Russian and English. Raise your hand if you speak two languages. Several children raise their hands, despite the fact that English is the only language they speak. Ironically, Vedanta, a tri-lingual English Learner in the group does not raise his hand.



As Eliza begins to wrap up the introductions, one child raises her hand and says, “You look so beautiful, I think I want to be your friend.” Victoria smiles and Eliza compliments the student for her kind words, stating, “What a nice thing to say on someone’s first day, I think Victoria is going to have a nice time here.” She concludes by telling the students, “Now our class is complete. We were missing one piece, but now we are complete.”

## APPENDIX F: FOUNTAS AND PINNELL FIRST GRADE READING LEVELS

Level	Characteristics
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one line of one to six words per page</li> <li>• easy-to-see print</li> <li>• ample space between words</li> <li>• simple topics familiar to children</li> <li>• almost exact word/picture match</li> <li>• highly repetitive</li> </ul>
<b>B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simple story line or single idea</li> <li>• one or two lines of print per page</li> <li>• direct correspondence between text and pictures, but may have some “tricky” spots requiring more attention to print</li> <li>• variety of punctuation</li> <li>• repeating patterns</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiar topics</li> <li>• simple sentences may have introductory clauses set off by punctuation</li> <li>• text may be patterned but is not as predictable as in Levels A and B</li> </ul>
<b>D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiar topics</li> <li>• introduce new, more abstract ideas</li> <li>• illustrations support the text but more attention to print is required</li> <li>• text contains more multi-syllable words and full range of punctuation</li> </ul>
<b>E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more or longer episodes</li> <li>• informational books present more complex ideas</li> <li>• more pages or more lines of text on each page</li> <li>• sentences carry over several pages</li> <li>• more complex punctuation</li> <li>• more variety in font size</li> <li>• more characters, though not well developed</li> </ul>
<b>F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concepts presented are more distant from familiar topics and may include abstract ideas</li> <li>• greater variety of vocabulary</li> <li>• text reflects patterns of written, rather than oral, language</li> <li>• may have unusual language patterns or technical words</li> </ul>

<p>G</p> <p>H</p> <p>I</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• several episodes</li> <li>• several characters whose actions require interpretation</li> <li>• longer sentences with embedded clauses</li> <li>• more multisyllable words &amp; irregular words</li> <li>• many texts feature phrases starting at the left margin</li> <li>• a great deal of dialogue</li> <li>• still illustrations on almost every page</li> </ul>
<p>J</p> <p>K</p> <p>L</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a great deal of dialogue (speaker usually assigned) many adjectives &amp; adverbs</li> <li>• one main plot with several episodes—though usually one day</li> <li>• words kids do not use in spoken language, connotations of words</li> <li>• illustrations enhance enjoyment and help with visualization of the story</li> <li>• full range of genres (not a great deal of background knowledge needed, though)</li> <li>• character development begins to be seen</li> </ul>

Note: Descriptions Adapted from Arizona State University (Arizona State University, 2011).

## APPENDIX G: LIT LAB FIELD NOTE SAMPLE

9:00 Lit Lab

The students and teachers have only been doing this a week and they are already a well-oiled machine. Sheila's children line up and she leads them into the hall- the students separate and go into the various classrooms they have been assigned to disperse into without being told where to go.

I see David come down the hall from L's room and say hello. He will not speak to me.

Lit Lab is a rather sterile room- but the presence of the kids brings it to life. There are four work areas. One is a round table which Sheila eventually takes a seat at with six children at a round table. They are doing guided reading- today's story is Too Much Ketchup. I hear her using the same vocabulary and terminology that use in readers workshop (consistently across the grade level)

Behind me there is a group of desks arranged in a V. A large man who is a new TA at the school is standing in front of the white board that faces the desks. He is doing word work with the kids. They have the little folders with the little letters and they rearrange them based on his dictations.

"The word they are working on is he. Add a letter to he and you can spell she", etc.

This is a scripted program that I've seen in the classroom- it is not something that the teachers particularly enjoy doing with the kids.

Behind the partition there is a rectangular group of desks where the students work on word formation? They write dictated words on a laminated piece of paper. The TA teaching this group is a parent at the school. She has placed partitions all around her space and turned it into a mini classroom. She has a turtle that sends the message, "I will try my best" and a joke of the day posted on the board. She talks to each child as they get ready to rotate and asks them if they read the night before. Posted on the wall to the right of her are the reading strategy posters that the entire team is using.

By the end of the first session Sheila has released the kids to read the story on their own. She confers with two students during this time.

The TA at the board has his sweater mis-buttoned speaks with an effeminate voice: "Ho, do you have ho or he? Santa says ho ho ho", he reads from his script.

The final station is phonemic awareness. The TA is holding up the old Open Court sound cards.

At the phonics station the teacher has passed out plastic alphabet letters and asks each student to tell them what the sound is.