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This self-study focused on an intervention specialist’s decision-making process in designing instruction for students with special needs and those at risk in learning. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provided the lens through which this research was conceptualized and viewed. The purpose of this research study was to utilize a reflective thinking practice in examining my part of the teaching/learning cycle discerning what information lead to decisions in creating scaffolds for students’ zone of proximal development. The findings included: (a) the practitioner ignited an invitation to learn and be motivated, designed scaffolds, and created environments to encourage student empowerment; (b) personal attention was directed to those tensions that required change by igniting a problem solving sequence that offered possible strategies and solutions; and (c) outside factors including institutional influences, limitations, and interruptions distracted the practitioner from the primary purpose of teaching. The findings of this study offered the following implications for intervention specialists. First, a reflective thinking practice enables an intervention specialist to discern thoughts that transpire from school/societal deliberations
and those that result from his/her own viewpoint. In grappling with the contradictory messages of these two forces a practitioner develops his/her voice and the self-knowledge needed to define his/her position within a given tension. Second, incorporating the element of play into daily lessons encourages children to acquire greater attention to task, thus, increasing cognitive development. Third, the development of individualized scaffolds employs a deconstructive / reconstructive nature to achieve independence in skill execution.
DEDICATION

To my parents, Rosemary and Robert Krivos, for teaching me lifelong values that enabled me to endure and achieve throughout this doctoral studies journey.

Mom, thank you for modeling and thus, instilling in me the following qualities: (a) work ethic, (b) a desire to be involved in life, and (c) a yearning to pursue my dreams. Of course, when you were alive I objected to these lessons. Once you passed I came to understand your teachings.

Dad, thank you for constantly exhibiting three ideals – patience, kindness and acceptance. Even in your last months on earth you never forgot to acknowledge your appreciation of my visit. Sunday evenings were particularly special when we played music together. I think we both needed the other playing by our side to show off our talents. I was amazed that you could play the piano, accordion, or Melodica, without music and harmonize to the melody in the moment. You knew so many tunes from your past, even when you didn’t know names of the residents you had lived with for nine years. You always teased me for needing music to play the piano. I wonder if we both came to a different understanding of the term “musician” during those performances together. Thank you for the great joy you brought to everyone in attendance, especially me. On those evenings you created the outside circle of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development that permitted me to let go of the anxiety of having to perform perfectly.
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PROLOGUE

I am an intervention specialist with a disability teaching in an inclusive classroom. My disability is managed by using a motorized scooter throughout the school day. Fifteen years ago that scooter symbolized freedom. With the use of this tool I gained physical independence by no longer needing the assistance of others to help me move around. However, this scooter also made me look different and drew attention to me. I was very self-conscious about my metallic blue ride, and would not share my story. Wherever I went I felt that every eye turned toward my direction with unvoiced questions. These feelings stemmed from my own unresolved issues with my disability, and the desire to be as normal as possible. I tried to carry on as if the disability did not exist. I worked tirelessly to stay positive, simply soldiering on past my challenges.

Today my routines to ensure good health are well established and thus second nature. My story as a teacher is intertwined with my recovery, for it was the act of teaching that brought me daily joy and kept the focus off my illness. Teaching came naturally to me, and I gained great satisfaction in designing lessons the students would enjoy. This purpose created strength that outweighed the challenges I faced.

The journey of facing my doubts and finding the core of my nature as a teacher began in dealing with my disability. My disability was caused by breast cancer in 1996, or rather the medicine I chose to prevent the cancer from spreading. Chemotherapy enlarged my heart to such an extent that I nearly qualified for a heart transplant by 1999. When I reflect on that last visit with the transplant physician in 2000, I realize that the words I recall him saying, “You will be worse on your next visit,” spurred me to change
the path I was traveling. Within the next few days I purchased a treadmill and began my extremely slow climb back to health. I took an extended leave of absence, receiving many donated sick days from co-workers. After five months rest at home I returned to work; my goal was to make it through one school day at a time. I secured a motorized scooter to conserve energy, used oxygen at night, ate a low-sodium and low potassium diet, wore compression stockings, etc. I refused to acknowledge my inner turmoil to myself, let alone voice my thoughts to the outside world.

In the spring of 2012 a message popped up in my email account describing a new class for doctoral students at Kent State University entitled Practitioner Research. I had not been enrolled in classes since 2010 for several reasons. First, I had hoped to save my marriage of 33 years. Next, I was trying to write about my findings for a year-long research project I had completed. I failed on both accounts. Furthermore, my younger sister and mother-in-law had passed away in the summer of 2011. Additionally, I had spent nearly six weeks of the summer of 2011 in the hospital as doctors tried medications and procedures to strengthen my heart. A year later I was still emotionally and physically fatigued. I was not sure I had the stamina to complete this class, but followed my urgings.

I found I liked this type of research and could relate to self-study. I also realized that I lived with many contradictions that had previously gone unnoticed. For example, in my role as a teacher I never questioned the necessity of giving homework or pestering students to complete an assignment. As a student, I hoped that professors would lessen the workload and laughed when I heard myself say, “I hate homework!” Overall, I began
focusing on myself as a learner. Therefore, when the concept of metacognition surfaced during a discussion with a peer my interest was piqued. Once again I went with my gut instinct, purchased books on the subject, and began reading. I loved the literature and this concept, which immediately allowed me to attend to information about myself that had previously remained hidden.

I relied upon a framework of metacognition to develop self-truths. As I read about this concept I initially developed chart after chart of categories of information. I could not connect the vast amounts of material I was taking in without visual representation. After categorizing this material, I read and reread it, trying to get a sense of the concept of metacognition. At first, I was startled by the judgmental thoughts I had of my own actions. For example, during a professional teacher development activity the presenter showed us a single slide of three sets of random numbers. Our task: describe how the numbers were related. At the end of the two-minute thinking period I had nothing. I felt shame and wanted to quit. I remained silent as my peers shared their thoughts. I further condemned myself for not being smart enough to see what others saw, plus a quitter. I was astonished at the extent of my own critical nature.

On another occasion, I recognized that random memories presented themselves to my conscious mind like “warm fuzzies.” I recalled a family of tiny clay bunnies I had made that camped out in my desk when I was in first grade. I’d think, “What a lovely memory.” I started to pay attention to how I operated in the world – I was fascinated. I could not cause these self-truths to appear at will, or direct them in any manner. This caused me to keep my focus on myself so I wouldn’t miss out on some new fact about
me. These personal connections helped me to build my concept of reflection, and its fundamental relationship to metacognition. I was filling up my metacognitive framework with tidbits of personal information in the cubbyholes I had organized. My concept of metacognition was growing, as well as my openness to self-reflective practices.

Designing a chart of the history of metacognition promoted a connection between myself and humanity. I entitled the shortened segment of that chart “The Archives of Reflective Thought.” The following research has now become a part of my collection to understanding my personal history.

Pina Tarricone’s book The Taxonomy of Metacognition, and Metacognition co-authored by John Dunlosky and Janet Metcalfe, revealed that memory and self-reflection have been evident in cultures since ancient times. Philosophers throughout the ages provided examples of language and actions that became my pivotal point in building a personal framework to developing reflective practices. These included: Socrates’ (399 BC) “Life without enquiry is not worth living” (Tarricone, 2011, p. 13); Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) memories are demonstrated through mental imagery connecting perception and conception (Tarricone, 2011, p. 13); the Middle Ages’ Abbey Memory System that relied upon external guides and complex mnemonics to guide one’s memory training (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009, p. 11); and Spinoza’s (1632-1677) reflection incorporates an understanding and awareness of one’s own learning processes as it necessitates the application of processes, strategies, aids and methods to an idea (Tarricone, 2011, pg. 14).
The overall theme is focus on one’s self. With this theme of gazing inward for understanding, rather than looking outward for information, I began to value my own thoughts and ideas. Outside information was now filtered through me rather than stacking up in piles around me. My personal attitudes toward a topic began to emerge, and I stopped attaching to the viewpoints of people surrounding me.

With this newly acquired value of myself, I took notice of two incidents during a doctoral class. These occurred when classmates delivered presentations on well-known theorists. The first occasion transpired during a presentation on Nel Noddings and her conceptualization of caring. The group displayed a math problem for which I could not understand the solution. I wanted nothing to do with my peer’s caring nature as they tried to explain this solution from their viewpoint. The more they attempted to help, the more anxious I became, feeling the need to simply disappear. I despised the attention I gained from my inability to understand. The second episode arose during a presentation on Vygotsky. The class was asked to build the tallest structure possible using spaghetti noodles and marshmallows. We were not permitted to talk. After my initial attempt, I completely stopped trying for I knew I could not work further without assistance. In the next trial we were given the same task and a partner. This time, I was exhilarated as my partner and I discussed various solutions while we worked. I discovered that on this occasion my work stoppage did not mean I was “a quitter.” Vygotsky’s theories were helping me understand that I needed others’ input to remain engaged in the task. His theories were beginning to present themselves in a very personal nature to my learning—instead of focusing on what I cannot do, focus on what I can accomplish.
Hence, Vygotsky’s theories brought awareness to my own life’s journey. For example, my first perception of the previously mentioned professional development task ended on a blast of self-doubt. Once I acknowledged Vygotsky’s theories at work within the situation, my viewpoint changed. Here’s how the episode proceeded with this new understanding.

As my peer’s initial ideas were verbalized, my negative thinking pattern continued and I chastised myself for not seeing the relationships they described. Their ideas were simple computations; why had it seemed so puzzling to me? Next, a second slide with the same numbers and three words (males, females, total) appeared on the screen and the task was expanded, “What do these numbers mean?” With my background knowledge having increased (the verbalization of my peers’ ideas), I re-engaged my thinking and joined in the activity. On my own I was unable to make a single move to solve the puzzle, but with the knowledge of co-workers my thoughts began to fire. The problem-solving task became challenging rather than daunting. My peers, representing the outside circle of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), had served two purposes – providing background knowledge and motivation. I came to realize that I was not an independent person operating on my own island, but rather an individual with countless connections to the world around me. By acknowledging the social context in which I grew up, at home and in school, I recognized how past experiences affected the meaning I attached to many concepts as they applied to me. These glimpses of my personal reactions to situations continued to prompt a probing
attitude of wondering why. However, at first these wonderings belonged only to me, as I remained independent on that island. I was scared to reach out. One of the first occasions I shared came after a peer’s words made me laugh. That laughter provided a feeling of warmth, allowing my defenses to diminish, and increasing the desire to give back. Thus, my first level of the ZPD occurred in the form of motivation. Next, I recognized that peers’ comments often prompted me to think of my own ideas, providing me with background knowledge to spur my brain to ignition. Once I realized how the social community supported me in accomplishing tasks (acting as the outside circle of ZPD), I became more comfortable in my skin and took more risks in sharing. This in turn increased my level of experiencing life, utilizing my confidence. After this development, any given moment my peers and I could switch roles between knowledgeable peer and learner. At each stage my persona gained more strength in developing a voice with which to express myself. Vygotsky’s theories have provided me with a social constructivist viewpoint rather than the independent thinker stance I began with. That stance did not perceive the inter-relational nature of constructing meaning of concepts.

Throughout most of my life I felt inferior about expressing myself verbally—my actions spoke for me. Therefore, it was scary to put all of myself forth in written form; I expected to be rejected. During the writing of this dissertation I realized I was the only one accepting or rejecting. I needed to take on a positive role—be my own cheerleader. When I put together an argument I was both the student and the teacher. As a student who tried to formulate a path I had always looked for the answers in the all-knowing
teacher. However, my teacher-self did not possess an all-knowing stance. This certainly created tension and anxiety. Eventually, I realized that my teacher persona was an excellent guide in coaxing me, the student, along. Although she could not tell me the answers, my teacher identity kept up a steady supply of strategies that encouraged my growth. It showed me how to look beyond myself, not for an all-knowing other, but rather for the support and strength needed to create knowledge that would sustain all my endeavors.

This personal growth taught me two things about myself. First, I bristle and stay quiet when a misunderstanding, conflict, or defect is brought to the limelight. Second, I thrive through accomplishment. In the past, this created a personal struggle; I didn’t know how to discern which accomplishments were worthy of my energy and attention. I wanted to do it all, but my disability caused many restrictions—or so I had been told.

This dissertation permitted me the opportunity to tell my story. These pages were certainly a struggle to write, but I am glad I was able to determine that this accomplishment was worthy of my energy and attention. I hope that each and every reader establishes some means of connection to my practice as an intervention specialist. These stories describe the depth of passion I experience when teaching. I am truly privileged to partake in this learning journey and that of each of my students.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Ohio Teacher’s Evaluation System (OTES) is rigorous. This evaluative system demands bountiful evidence in three domains (seven standards) to achieve the highest rating—“accomplished”—for a K-12 licensed/certified teacher. Having attained such a status, one would expect me to be a confident instructor. However, my personal experience provided evidence to the contrary. I shared these thoughts with a co-worker, voicing doubt in my abilities as a teacher. She expressed the same feelings, asking “How did I fool them? How did I earn an accomplished rating on the Ohio Teacher’s Evaluation System (OTES) appraisal, when colleagues better than myself are being placed on an improvement plan? I can only conclude that I jumped through the appropriate hoops at exactly the right time. We as teachers are so quick to take the blame when things do not go well, but will not take credit for our accomplishments.”

Another glimpse of this doubt occurred after a dream I experienced one night. The next morning, I was delighted to see the veteran teacher who had been featured. Although the dream depicted little action, sharing this connection with my colleague seemed special to me. I explained that in my dream she kept whispering in my ear, but I couldn’t make out any of the words. Her response was simple and poignant—I couldn’t hear anything because she had no words of wisdom to offer. That took me by surprise. I had worked closely with her on a year-long research project and felt nothing but admiration for her teaching style. I wondered how teachers could put forth such great effort in our practice and still feel as if we were doing something wrong. At a time when
evaluations were paramount within our nation’s school systems, I wondered if the battle to establish a teacher’s forte is really achieving the desired result. Why does my self-image not align with the concluding OTES evaluation verifying that I am an accomplished intervention specialist?

**Personal Appraisal**

I have always loved teaching. After I completed chemotherapy, developing daily habits to offset my disability permitted me to continue working. However, each year brought greater unrest and uncertainty in my own skills, as well as in the choices I made designing lessons for my students. The world of education held so many conflicting messages that I did not know which information to trust. I didn’t know how to be a wise consumer in regards to choosing “best practices” for students. Looking for answers, I pursued a doctoral degree. Nevertheless, the feeling that I didn’t know what I was doing only seemed to intensify. Why?

**Unmasking Personal Conflicts**

Prior to using the scooter I had “passed” quietly through life. Robert Rueda and Hugh Mehan utilized the term “passing” in their 1986 case study *Metacognition and Passing: Strategic Interactions in the Lives of Students with Learning Disabilities*. These researchers concluded that students with learning disabilities would go to great lengths to avoid difficult tasks while trying to appear competent, thus managing identity and intellectual tasks simultaneously.

The actor who is passing attempts a piece of social legerdemain: attempting to conceal the stigma while, at the same time, trying to get through social situations
without the stigma of being revealed. It is this dual character—concealing a
blemished identity while acting as if another identity were in place—that
characterizes passing in general (Rueda & Mehan, 1986, p.160).

What difficult task was I going to great lengths to avoid? Had the need to utilize
a motorized scooter caused me to become stigmatized later in life? Goffman (1963)
described the term “stigma” as concealing a double perspective—that of viewer and
viewed. I never took the time to explain that the scooter was a tool to conserve energy. I
thought that riding a scooter rather than walking caused my differentness to be evident on
the spot. This simply was not true. People assumed that my legs were the cause of my
disability and demonstrated amazement when they saw me get up and walk. My issue
was not managing the tension generated during social contacts, but rather managing
information about my situation. I was a quiet person and rarely shared personal
information. Now each moment of the day someone seemed curious about my scooter
and medical condition. I wondered if I should tell, let on, or lie, and “in each case, to
whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). If someone approached me with
a personal question, I shared a little, but was always quick to move off the topic.

Using the scooter prevented me from passing quietly through a school day; I
seemed to have a continuous light shining on me like a beacon, something my students
may experience as well. Passing became even more difficult when I experienced a
drastic change in my teaching routine. In 2005 my school adopted a scripted reading
program, in which teachers were given lines to read verbatim to say throughout the
instructional period. In spite of undertaking professional development to better utilize
this program, in my eyes I barely passed as a teacher as I struggled to implement the outlined lessons. I fumbled through scripted lines, and felt annoyed when urged to call attention to each and every mistake the students made. These experiences quickly drained my stamina, causing more difficulties in maintaining my health. I lost my spontaneity and ability to have fun with the children and create learning experiences that offered variety. In designing my own lessons I had focused on my strengths—organization, visual representations of the information, and movement. The scripted program operated in the auditory/verbal domain—one of my weakest capacities.

Eventually, self-reflection illuminated the fact that these conflicts occurred because my preferred mode of operating within the world had changed. Prior to using the scooter, I was a very physical, active person. Participating in walks, bike riding, and swimming allowed me to release unwanted tension and anxiety. Thus, although the scooter provided the ability to move on my own, my natural methods of dealing with stress were gone. Second, I was comfortable with my shy, quiet personality. Pushing me to talk, let alone to repeatedly call attention to another’s mistakes, was simply not my disposition. However, I was unaware that these changes were in direct conflict with my very nature as a person. As the tension grew, so did my subconscious personal criticism of myself.

Growing Awareness

Without this awareness my “action-oriented” nature continued to lead and the mind blindly followed. I felt I had good instincts. Schön (1983) described “knowing in action” as spontaneous, an intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life. He
explained that one often cannot say what is known. When asked to provide an explanation of their practice, people found themselves at a loss, and their descriptions were obviously inappropriate. Dewey (1933) stated that “thought can more easily traverse an unexplored region than it can undo what has been so thoroughly done as to be ingrained in unconscious habit” (p. 141). However, I wanted all of my identity as a teacher to work together to understand what was going on. So I needed to find my voice, which was either lagging behind or blocked. I felt disheartened and unworthy without a voice. In my mind I was “less than”; I didn’t know how to stand up and express my own thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

My exploration of the concept of metacognition helped me to develop beneficial self-reflective habits that began to give voice, and thus understanding, to my instincts and practice. Self-reflection guided me to explore unknown courses of behavior, rather than the well-worn paths that utilized my strongest modalities. Often, I felt my defenses rise and my resistance build when treading into the uncomfortable zones of these unknown courses. At one time a defensive stance would have caused me to scurry back to the safety of my well-worn path. Self-reflection allowed me to risk unknown courses while riding my new fire-engine-red scooter with confidence. Within my teaching practice these self-reflection skills permitted me to feel more alive in the moment. I became able to share personal information with co-workers and students, demonstrating courage in myself by expressing my discomfort but still venturing forward.

My disability enabled me to identify with the feelings and experiences of students with special needs. When you have been zapped by a defibrillator, use oxygen nightly to
sustain your health, and need a scooter to move down the halls you feel apart from society. You feel as if others cannot identify with your experiences. In the past that meant I stayed quiet, because what I had to share seemed so different. Self-reflection altered my path and taught me that my uniqueness does not separate me from society; it simply makes me who I am. I realized that none of my colleagues ever excluded me from the group; rather, it was my own thinking that caused personal feelings of exclusion. Thus, I learned that inclusion into society requires teaching people to respect their own distinctive style, honor their backgrounds, and celebrate themselves. I could recognize that my experiences with a disability provide me with unique knowledge that can be used in my roles as a self-study practitioner and researcher.

**Problem Statement**

Inclusive education was intended to deliver a value-based practice that endeavored to bring “all students, including those with disabilities, into full membership within their local school community” (Ross-Hill, 2009, p. 189). My job as an intervention specialist is to help my students navigate the journey from passing to self-reflection. As such, I am amazed that I was unaware of my own feelings of inadequacy within the school community for such a long period of my life. Experiencing a disability later in life forced me to travel uncomfortable paths. It forced me to problem solve and create solutions to achieve my daily goals. In turn, these encounters provided me with opportunities that allowed me to develop tools to move beyond these feelings of inadequacy and acknowledge my own self-worth within my community. My personal experiences gave me first-hand knowledge to assist others on this journey. Sapon-Shevin
(2007) expressed a hope of constructing a learning community in which everyone was invaluable: a community in which the exclusion of a single person would diminish the whole. However, turning that vision into reality is a substantial task and requires teachers to be able to respond to challenges and objections. “Telling teachers that inclusion won’t take any more work than they are already doing, or that they won’t have moments of frustration and distress set up false, unreasonable expectations. Promoting an overly simplistic positive picture also makes those who do experience difficulties feel as though they have failed personally or are inadequate to the task” (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 52).

Brantlinger, Morton, and Washburn (1999) added the importance of establishing an ethical framework for structuring caring treatment, “respectful social relations, and authentic learning for all students” (p. 491).

Simply teaching about the principles of inclusion and respect for diversity does not create a society in which all people are appreciated and embraced as important members of the community. Encouraging individuality, tolerance, and the inclusion of everyone demands the personal experience of these values by both teachers and students. Explorations of these experiences provide an understanding that the ideologies of inclusion are both desirable and possible. “Best practices for creating inclusive classrooms are ones that are personalized for the group of individuals on a given day and time and in any given context” (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 52). These specific situations often create unique moral dilemmas.

Ross-Hill (2009) noted that “regular education teachers recognized that they were ill prepared to teach students with severe academic and social skills problems” (p. 189).
McLeskey and Waldron (2011) further stated “many general education classroom teachers take the perspective that they do not have the time nor the skills to deliver this specialized instruction” (p. 50). Tallman and Levine (1960) stated that the dynamics influencing social distance in the classroom were not solely created by the children’s behavior, but also related to the trepidations, pressures, and apprehensions felt by the teacher. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the educational specialist (also referred to as an intervention specialist or special education teacher) to personalize best practices for individual students within an inclusive setting. Schirmer, Casbon, and Twiss (1995) provided the following list of duties for the intervention specialist: assist with curriculum development and modification, arrange classroom schedules, develop behavior management systems, monitor student progress, manage data-collection systems, order materials, and communicate with parents. With all of these responsibilities, when is there teaching time?

McLeskey and Waldron (2011) stated that high-quality instruction for students with learning disabilities is best delivered in small groups in part-time, separate special education settings. These intensive lessons should be in addition to high-quality general education instruction. Sufficient time, modeling, and guided practice must be provided to ensure student mastery. This explicit, direct instruction emphasizes targeted, high-priority skills and concepts. Additional instruction time is typically 40 to 60 minutes per day, 4 to 5 days per week. In summary, the characteristics of intensive high-quality instruction methods included grouping, instructional design, independent practice, progress monitoring, and delivery of instruction. But how do intervention specialists
cope with the vast amount of interactions and decisions that are required throughout the school day? How do they make so many choices in the moment, trusting that they are honoring best practices for individualized instruction? The literature seems silent on these questions.

This proposed study focused on self-study. As a student and a professional, I alternated back and forth between two paths, one as a learner, and the other as an intervention specialist. Both roles greatly influenced my approach in developing lessons for students with special needs. The goals of this study were three-fold. First, I aimed to use self-reflections to extensively describe the ordinary interactions that occurred during an intervention specialist’s school day. Second, I hoped to discern and characterize what information was taken from these interactions that led to decisions in developing and creating scaffolds for a student’s individual zone of proximal development. Third, I planned to determine how outside factors influenced the decisions I made.

**Professional Significance of Study**

Spelman and Rohlwing (2013) stated that “highly qualified, effective teachers are the most powerful factor in increasing student achievement” (p. 155). They reported that students with lower achievement levels were the first to benefit from this effectiveness. I wanted my students with special needs and those students who were at risk to profit from my endeavors. Again, I came to the conclusion that I first needed to know what I am “all about.” Stover, Kissel, Haag, and Shoniker (2011) stressed that “learning happens within teachers, not to them” (p. 499). Knowing what happens within teachers’ psyches requires capturing their thoughts as they experience the ordinary interactions that occur
throughout the school day. This research investigation divulged the intricacies of these moment-by-moment interactions. Thus, engagement in this self-study enabled me to explore the nature of my thinking as I worked to meet the unique educational needs of diverse learners within an inclusive setting. Present literature does encourage teachers to use reflection within their practice, but only a few studies describe an intervention specialist’s thinking as it affects change-making within teaching moments.

Presently, the OTES evaluation system tries to encapsulate an instructor’s teaching practice. Its rubric defines four levels of teacher proficiency—accomplished, skilled, developing, and ineffective. This rubric is divided into three domains—instructional planning, instruction and assessment, and professionalism. The first two domains are further separated into subcategories. Instructional planning includes knowledge of students, focus for learning, assessment data, and prior content, knowledge, sequence, and connections. Instruction and assessments entails assessment of student learning, lesson delivery, differentiation, classroom environment, and resources. All areas of assessment are aligned with Ohio’s seven teacher standards. In theory, this evaluative system is a comprehensive assessment of an instructor’s teaching practice. However, the implementation changes the focus of this evaluation. The evaluator is focused on the listed items. The system simply acknowledges that an action, seen or heard, is present to demonstrate a specific proficiency level. Hence, the teacher being evaluated prepares (or scrambles to collect) evidence of her teaching practice, rather than focusing on what is best for students. The assessor then determines if the evidence is sufficient. In this manner, an outside source defines an instructor’s teaching proficiency. The teacher’s
evaluation is not based upon personal learning, but rather a collection of artifacts that document the existence of items listed on the evaluation form.

**Purpose**

I studied in my undergraduate to be a special education teacher. As the years progressed my title morphed into intervention specialist: in other words professional, dedicated, high-quality, and an expert. I recognized my status as a professional who was very dedicated to exhibiting the behaviors of a high quality teacher. However, I struggled with the term expert—there were too many unknowns for me to claim that status. The only thing I could assert was that I was in the business of learning, including my own. Self-reflection permitted me to focus on my part in the teaching and learning cycle. Regardless of whether I was the teacher or the learner, I could only change my part of the equation, but that was enough to alter the outcome. Utilizing this personal power I focused my energy on making choices that impacted my role as an intervention specialist. Thus, I was interested in exploring my teaching/learning system, and its impact on my daily decisions in creating lessons for my students.

Bintz (2002, 2010) proclaimed, “do not change the nature of the learner but rather transform the environment.” Bintz’s emphasis on the environment influenced and reflected my own teaching practice, including the classroom atmosphere, activities, tools, and conversations that occurred under my direction. I needed to engage in reflective thinking to make decisions on how best to craft these modifications in developing and creating scaffolds for each student’s individual zone of proximal development. I also needed to question how often I was falling into the two teacher traps Bintz illuminated.
First, teachers feel that when a problem exists it lies with the learner. Second, teachers take credit for students’ success, but attribute failure to ascribed characteristics rather than their own instructional interventions. Hodge and Chantler (2010) explained that when such a credit/blame situation occurs educators have forgotten the relational nature of teaching and learning.

I have fallen into this credit/blame trap that Bintz described. On these occasions, my attention was often obsessed with a number. This number was generally a low test grade or reading fluency score. My first reaction was to blame the student: he/she did not study enough, the parents did not review vocabulary terms, the child rushed through the work, and of course, the student does not care. Once this litany was recited, then I began taking the blame for the “poor” student performance, i.e., “I should have…” However, I was not the only one in the equation from which this number arose. I needed to refocus on the interpersonal, social, and interactive characteristics of instruction and acquiring knowledge. Thus this self-study examined my portion of the teaching and learning cycle. In turn, the study provides valuable data/findings for teachers and intervention specialists regarding the use of self-reflection to change instruction and move beyond the credit/blame game.

**Research Questions**

In this research I asked one main question: *How do I use reflective thinking to inform my choices in designing instruction that helps students with special needs and those who are at-risk to learn strategies and use tools to become independent learners?* My subsidiary questions included:
• What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their zones of proximal development?

• What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that direct my questions and planning for future activities?

• How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making (e.g., content of classes, administrative decisions, and my disability)?

Definitions

Intervention Specialist: The job description of an intervention specialist states that this person is responsible for all aspects of special education services and compliance. Their responsibilities include 1) ensuring that all students who have been diagnosed with a disability are given the same learning opportunities as students without disabilities; 2) working closely with the classroom teacher to make sure that student needs are met, IEP goals are taught, and IEP provisions are followed; and 3) providing as-needed additional intervention for students not identified for special education services (Intergenerational School, 2015).

Reflective Thinking: Reflective thinking “is a part of the critical thinking process referring specifically to the processes of evaluating and drawing conclusions about what has happened” (University of Hawaii, 2015, para 3). Dewey (1933) proposes that “reflective thinking is an active, persistent and thorough consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge” (p. 9). Reflective thinking promotes awareness of learning as one “assesses what they know, what they need to know, and how they bridge that gap” during learning situations (University of Hawaii, 2015, para 3). This process is “… most
important in prompting learning during complex problem-solving situations” (University of Hawaii, 2015, para. 4). Reflective thinking urges learners “to step back and think about how they actually solve problems identifying specific strategies that are appropriate for achieving the targeted goal” (University of Hawaii, 2015, para. 4).

*Learning Disability:* A learning disability is a neurological condition that interferes with an individual’s ability to store, process, or produce information. It may affect one’s ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, and reason. This condition may also affect an individual’s attention, memory, coordination, social skills, and emotional maturity (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2015).

A child may have a specific learning disability in one or more of several areas—oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving—if the following conditions are met:

- The child has not obtained adequate achievement in accordance to the child’s age or state-approved grade-level standards, and appropriate instruction was adequately provided for the child’s age.
- The child’s lack of progress is not primarily the result of one of the following conditions: a visual, hearing, or motor disability, cognitive disorder, emotional disturbance, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency.

To ensure the proper identification of a specific learning disability, a process based on a child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention must be incorporated, and data
collected. Identification can also occur if the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both relative to age (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Summary**

The prologue presented an autobiographical sketch of many facets of the main participant and researcher of this self-study, myself. This background knowledge provided readers with insights to the conception of my research. Chapter 1 introduced the need for me, as an intervention specialist, to develop self-reflection/critical thinking skills that promote effective decision making to enhance student learning. I situated the concept of self-evaluation within the context of an inclusive classroom. In Chapter 2 I describe my framework of Vygotsky’s social constructivist viewpoint and the Zone of Proximal Development. I also review three other bodies of literature: 1) readings on reflective thought by Dewey, Schön, Brookfield, and other relevant contemporary researchers; 2) research studies that focused on the process of teaching/learning to read in terms of metacognition as a problem-solving task; and 3) professional wisdom and evidence-based special education practices. Chapter 3 outlines my methodology for this research study. This includes sections on self-study research, reflective thought, study design, and trustworthiness. In Chapter 4 I present my findings. These findings are divided into three sub-categories, each one correlating to a sub-question of my main research question. Chapter 5 connects my research findings with research literature as well as providing concluding thoughts in regard to this study. The epilogue offers the reader a glimpse of my present self as a result of this doctoral studies journey.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I utilized Vygotsky’s theories and research to frame this self-study. Specifically, his Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provided the lens through which I first conceptualized and then viewed my work. However, other bodies of literature were also important to the construction of my research. These included (a) readings on reflective thought by Dewey, Schön, Brookfield, and other relevant contemporary researchers; (b) research studies that focused on the process of teaching/learning to read in terms of metacognition as a problem-solving task; and (c) professional wisdom and evidence-based special education practices.

The first section of this review focuses on Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism. I examine how these ideas play a role in the context of teaching students with special education needs, specifically in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding. The second section presents the literature of reflective thought. Nine subsections are incorporated into this segment. Each of these subsections describes a particular aspect of reflective thought that impacted my understanding of the smallest unit of data within my research—my thoughts. In order to stand outside of myself as the researcher and observe myself as a participant, I needed to be well equipped with wisdom of the nature of thought. The third segment provides research from metacognitive studies that relate to the teaching/learning of reading. The final section describes the nature of a special education teacher’s professional wisdom as it interfaces with evidence-based practices to deliver high quality instruction to students with special needs and those at
The key theoretical framework that guided my research was that of Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In *Mind and Society* (1978), Vygotsky’s theory of higher mental processes described learning as a social process that plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. He viewed the human organism as “highly plastic,” (p. 121) operating in an environment comprised of culturally and historically shifting contexts. These ever-changing historical conditions greatly determine which opportunities a human will experience. Hence, no universal schema could “adequately represent the dynamic relation between internal and external aspects of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 121). Gredler (2009) stated that “individuals react or respond to stimuli in the environment or stimuli within themselves” (p. 4). Human development proceeds in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level. Thus, individual cognitive development is embedded within the social and cultural context where the person resides. This theory is the transformation of an interpersonal (social) process to an intrapersonal one. Vygotsky presents his theory in terms of three basic principles. The first principle stresses that comprehension of human thought is best recognized from a complex, chronological perspective. The next tenet identifies that the development of advanced thought processes are rooted in an individual’s own personal sociocultural history and experience. The final principle states that mediation or facilitation of signs, symbols, and languages impacts the psychological behavior of human beings at individual and
collective levels of experience (De Valenzuela, Connery & Musanti, 2000). Vygotsky’s approach differs from his contemporaries’ in that he focused on the historically shaped and culturally transmitted psychology of human beings. Overall, this theoretical approach emphasizes that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning for children.

Furthermore, Vygotsky emphasized that language operates in a crucial role during the social process of learning and development. Krager (2000) added that these two components, language and social environment, play a formative and transformative role in cognitive development. Vygotsky (1962) stated that the roots and developmental course of intellect differ from those of speech. “Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech . . . it does not merely find expression in speech; it finds its reality and form” (p. 126). Thought and language are separate systems at birth. They merge around three years of age, producing inner speech or verbal thought. The relationship linking thought to word is a process of persistent back and forth movement between the two elements. This process endures change that may be considered as development in the operating sense. Thought comes alive with words. Each thought creates a connection, fulfills a function, or solves a problem. Stimulated by motivation, thoughts include one’s desires, needs, interests, and emotions. Wertsch (1985) stated that thought organizes perception and action in a particular mode.

Sociocultural theory proposed that learning and development were motivated by cultural and societal influences. Therefore, the environment in which children grow influences how they think and what they think about. Krager (2000) stated that with this
postulate in mind, teachers should be responsible for fostering relationships that established distinctive contexts for learning and development. An instructor’s designs must “reflect sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic dynamics of students’ backgrounds” (Krager, 2000, p. 296). Implementing these designs, a teacher utilizes guided participation to model the interactive stance between the individual and the social environment. These joint interactive tasks move novices to gain control over routines and cultural responsibilities under the guidance and assistance of adults, or experts. In this manner, the social environment alters the course of cognitive development. Thus, Krager (2000) felt that Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory challenged teachers to reflect on the contextual influences present in classroom instruction that may both form and transform development.

Viewing my practice through this lens of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory urged me to focus on moments of shared encounters and group conflict between teacher/student, student/student, and teacher/teacher. The framework emphasized the interdependent association of these encounters in regards to classroom presentations, procedures, and skill practice periods. When students were struggling to stay focused and complete a task, I thought, “When I am in a difficult position I want help. Another’s help encourages me to keep trying; trying keeps the brain engaged and leads to learning.” Hence, in my role as an intervention specialist I hypothesized and tested to determine what assistance could be implemented to achieve this result. Wetsby and Torres-Velasques (2000) explained that according to Vygotsky, cultivating a child’s mind occurs through social experiences that are negotiated by means of psychological tools related to
language, mnemonic techniques, concepts, and symbols. Adults or more competent peers exhibit the use of these tools to children. Eventually, children internalize these tools, altering their mental functions. In this way, “children gradually move from informal learning through concrete experiences in the preschool years to formal learning through presentation of theoretical concepts in the school system” (Wetsby & Torres-Velasques, 2000, p. 101).

**Children with Special Education Needs**

Vygotsky’s unique approach to special education focused on a child’s disability presenting itself as a sociocultural developmental phenomenon, rather than as a biological impairment with psychological consequences. His trademark was to focus on the positive aptitudes and qualitative traits in the nurturing of children with disabilities. He actively pursued identifying a disability in a child from the point of strength rather than weakness. Vygotsky labeled this process positive differentiation (Gindis, 1999). Vygotsky asserted that the impairment of any physical organ was perceived as abnormal only if and when it was brought into a social context. In this manner, the disability led to a reformation of one’s social interactions and to a displacement of all systems of behavior.

Higher mental functions have their roots in social interactions and collaborative activities. Daniels and Hedegaard (2011) stated that children with physical or mental difficulties have “developed in unique ways, their repertoire of abilities is more complex than that of their unaffected age-mates, with weaknesses in some areas and compensatory strengths in others” (p. 13). Therefore, their disabilities affect the manner in which the
children join in the activities of their culture. Consequently, the most debilitating problem for the child’s growth is not the primary disability, but rather how the impairment, modifies the way the child participates in activities. The child’s path of development is altered because of compensatory behaviors that emerge due to the impairment and its impact on the child’s interactions with the environment.

Lack of full participation in social activities limits the development of higher mental functions such as self-regulation. Children whose disability interferes with their opportunities to experience positive interaction with adults and peers develop a secondary, more serious problem in cultural development. Children with limited parent-child communication and fewer opportunities to participate in scaffold task activities internalize language less effectively and display self-regulatory difficulties. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) characteristics affect the social experiences these children have with other members of their culture and the degree to which they actively participate in collaborative activities that promote the development of higher mental functions. During the time of this research study nine of the twelve students in the researcher’s small group were diagnosed with ADHD, and seven of the total received speech/language therapy in the school setting. An additional two children met with an occupational therapist weekly.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the gap between what a learner has already mastered (i.e., the actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support (i.e., potential development) (Vygotsky, 1978).
Ash and Levitt (2003) stated that the “zone of proximal development embodies an emphasis on readiness to learn, where upper boundaries are seen not as immutable but as constantly changing with the learner’s increasing independent competence at each successive level” (p. 26). The next level of potential development can be attained when children engage in social behavior. In this outer circle an adult’s collaborative support extends the child’s range of skill, and exceeds what can be attained independently. Verbal interaction with an adult influences the development of a child’s pseudo-concepts as they coincide in context with the adult’s concepts (Vygotsky, 1962). With each additional instance when a child takes advantage of assistance from a more knowledgeable peer or an adult, the Zone of Proximal Development becomes broader. However, a child needs to feel competent to benefit from give-and-take activities and conversations with others. Hall, Leat, Wall, Higgins, and Edwards (2006) stated that trust is a key component when considering scaffolding in relationships. One way to cultivate this feeling of competence would be to create an environment of play. In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age and above his daily behavior (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Vygotsky (1978), when children want to resolve the tension of unmet desires, participation in worlds of illusion and imagination allow them to attain their unrealizable longings. A child’s greatest self-control occurs during play periods. At these times, the youngster adopts the line of least resistance to engage with an activity, for play is connected with pleasure. Therefore, during play periods children learn to render themselves submissive to rules and reject their own wants. Maximum pleasure in
play occurs when a child subjects to rules denying his/her own impulsive actions. Play continually creates demands on the child to act against their immediate impulse. Hence, a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play. When an instructor creates a feeling of play in the outside zone of ZPD students are encouraged to maintain greater focus to difficult tasks.

Gindis (1999) used the term “terra incognito” when referring to ZPD in its application to special education. This term implies that each child’s individual differences vary in terms of the depth of the ZPD, often concealing the student’s cognitive and metacognitive learning potential. Thus, when a child is unable to perform a skill independently, rather than encouraging adults to judge, ridicule, or blame the student, the Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes that assistance continues to be necessary to reach the goal. If a student can execute a skill in a larger group, but not independently, the instructor needs to observe what supports were provided in the group situation that enabled the learner to perform the skill cooperatively. An intervention specialist needs to dissect the social situation and its given supports. This dissection involves in-the-moment observations of the student’s actions throughout the school day. These observations permit the teacher to draw conclusions about the student’s strengths and weaknesses during the learning period. Often, these conclusions lead to a hypothesis that may, or may not, pinpoint the blockage to achieving independence in performing a skill. Testing these hypotheses affirms or disaffirms the intervention specialist’s conclusions. With affirmation, the teacher continues instruction in the same direction; with rejection an instructor needs to return to observation mode and begin again. Hence,
this concept of ZPD was vital to enhancing my ability to make choices for instruction. This improvement transpired because I became able to continually narrow my focus of observation, noticing what is not working, and then offering distinctive strategies to improve that particular aspect of learning. Thus, ZPD assisted me in defining my specific purpose for making a change with instruction. It allowed me to name the positive actions that are moving a child’s learning forward, and identify the negative movements that halt the ability to gain independence.

Several studies identified activities that empower learning by utilizing ZPD and positive social interactions. Gredler (2009) stated that speaking aloud promotes thinking. When solving a problem aloud, a child learns to be conscious of his/her own operations, to follow a sequential plan accurately, and to control the track of his/her thoughts. Ceasar and Santos (2006) declared that students co-construct their knowledge and identities as they learn to negotiate meanings, roles, arguments, or strategies when solving tasks. This empowers them to become more autonomous and responsible for their learning, developing higher mental functions. Ash and Levitt (2003) viewed learning and teaching as a sociocultural process in which the interaction between participants was the focus. Allal and Ducrey (2000) offered that ZPD was a framework for studying relationships between development and educational intervention. Hence, a child’s current developmental level determines the type of interaction needed in terms of involvement and profitability. Vygotsky (1978) considered the teacher-student relationship to be transformative for both students and teachers, with a major focus on the activities of the learner in these joint interactions. “Every function in the child’s cultural development
appears twice, on two levels. First, on the social, and later on the psychological level; first between people as an inter-psychological category, and then inside the child, as an intra-psychological category” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 128). This applies to voluntary attention, logical memory, and formation of concepts. Thus, higher mental functions have their roots in social interactions and collaborative activities.

**Scaffolding**

In education, scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional practices used to move students toward greater understanding and independence in the development of their learning. Teachers present various techniques of temporary support to assist students in gaining higher levels of comprehension and skill acquisition that would not be attainable if no support were provided. Hall et al. (2006) defined the nature of scaffolding guidance by naming each practice with its given role. These roles included recruitment of the child’s interest, establishing and maintaining an orientation to task-relevant goals, highlighting critical features of the task that might be overlooked, demonstrating how to achieve goals, and helping to control frustration. Similar to physical scaffolding, the supportive framework is incrementally removed as the building process is complete, rendering the temporary structure no longer necessary. Ash and Levitt (2003) stated that scaffolding is a gradual process; the teacher modifies the interaction within the student’s zone until the child can accomplish the task independently. In this manner, teachers gradually shift more responsibility of the learning process over to the student.

Many times the purpose of educational scaffolds is to bridge learning gaps that can be identified by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. These gaps are
characterized by the difference between what students are expected to know and be able to do at a certain point in their education and the child’s current performance. Scaffolding is often implemented to reduce the negative emotions and self-perceptions students may experience when they become discouraged, overwhelmed, or frustrated as they attempt a difficult task. Thus, scaffolding provides the assistance a learner requires in terms of direction or understanding to achieve success. Adults, or more competent peers, are important sources of delivering scaffolds to increase cognitive development. This experience of adults modeling the use of cultural tools of intellectual adaptation aids children in internalizing the process. Through the interaction of scaffolding instructional practices, students develop more sophisticated and effective mental processes and strategies to gain higher mental functions.

Paxton-Buursma and Walker (2008) emphasized that language has a critical role in the development of “inner language” and higher forms of thinking. They conceived of the term “piggybacking,” which represents “a simple ‘word tool’ phrase that describes how to deepen learning dialogue by linking to another student’s contribution” (p. 30). This term describes the relationship that is built when one student clarifies, expands, elaborates, or extends an idea from a classmate’s previous remark. For these researchers, scaffolds served as tools for engaging student thinking and communication. Participating in activities that utilized these tools helped students to employ multiple-skill sets, working toward more complex communicative proficiency. Within the parameters of these researchers’ book discussions, scaffolds provided the following aids: crafting an activity or skill to be more visible, prompting a student, and encouraging student
involvement, practice, and risk-taking behavior in higher order tasks. Intended as provisional supports, over time these scaffolds were removed or altered in some manner as children’s skills developed. Thus, as students learned, scaffolds were adjusted or faded as the responsibility transferred to more independent activities.

A study conducted in 1996 by Bliss, Askew, and MacRae concluded that scaffolding in school was more difficult than the researchers had imagined. Several factors contributed to this conclusion. First, different relationships between school ideas and their real world use suggested that some concepts were more accessible to children than others. Second, the foundation established by parental skills or lay personal may not be enough. Within the classroom, teachers need to be aware of the more elaborate set of skills that assist student learning. Teachers also need to be cognizant of the application of these skills. Promoting learning requires a diagnosis of the dialogue between a learners’ level of development and their progress. Hence, scaffolds can build bridges from a pupil’s understanding of a domain to the specialist knowledge of that domain. Teachers need to believe that children can learn difficult and complex ideas by taking small steps. Negotiating a student’s path to learning requires that a practitioner remain sensitive to the instruction, which lies in the gap between comprehension and production. Scaffolding involves keeping the task constant, not simplifying it. The learner’s role is simplified through the graduated intervention of the teacher. Creating sensitive and accurate assistance requires the teacher to challenge a learner without upsetting the student.

Within current literature, two ideas are apparent about scaffolding. First, research names the purpose of scaffolding by referencing the role that the procedure serves when
assisting a child. Second, the previously mentioned studies describe the temporary nature of scaffolding. However, the literature does not explain the scaffolding process an intervention specialist needs to pursue in developing specific techniques and instructional strategies to utilize with individual students. The design of those distinctive characteristics emerge as a practitioner uncovers a student’s concealed ZPD in regards to cognitive and metacognitive instruction. That revelation occurs when the intervention specialist continually observes in-the-moment interactions between the instructor and student. Thus, this research is important to the field because these findings illuminate how reflective thinking leads to the uncovering of elements important to designing scaffolds within a child’s Zone of Proximal Development.

**Reflective Thought**

The next section describes the research literature on reflective thought. Nine subsections are incorporated into this segment. Each subdivision explains a particular aspect of reflective thought that impacted my understanding of the smallest unit of data within this research—my thoughts. The research of Dewey and Schön predominate this literature review, having contributed much to the knowledge of the process of a reflective practice. These theorists’ endeavors detail terms and information, allowing a reader to identify, understand, and recognize their own relationship with the process of reflective thinking. Dewey (1933) stated that “thought can more easily traverse an unexplored region than it can undo what has been so thoroughly done as to be ingrained in unconscious habit” (p. 141). This body of literature helped me define my self-study by encouraging me to unravel my own habitual thoughts and discover my own voice: the
underlying messages I give myself and others and my own personal patterns, routines and practices to self-critique. This in turn provided data with which I could problem solve for future in my life and that of my students. Teachers who utilize a reflective stance work toward a greater knowledge of themselves, their practice, and the ensuing context of all of these activities. Developing a practice that promotes reflective thinking permits the practitioner to co-construct knowledge with colleagues. Such a structure encourages communication, collaboration, and creativity. Critical thinking in this nature leads to self-confidence in the decision making process.

**The Temperament of Thought / Reflective Thought**

In *How We Think* (1933), John Dewey described the nature of thought and reflective thought. The following graphic organizer, Figure 1, offers a visual framework to reference with regards to the steps of this reflective thought process.

*Figure 1.* Dewey’s Steps of the Reflective Thought Process

Dewey’s language provides a succinct set of directives to review the critical thinking process. This allows the reader to recognize his/her own personal experiences, labeling actions and identifying practices—a method to develop a voice. Owning one’s voice to
describe past experiences shaped by one’s surrounding culture, context, environment, and actions is an important step in recognizing those experiences’ influence on current decisions and habits. This self-study explored my in-the-moment experiences utilizing a reflective practice stance, which determined how these events influenced future planning and decision-making.

Dewey (1933) made the following comparison of thought and reflective thought. Thought consists of everything that flows through our minds, while reflective thought presents itself as a chain of ideas. In this chain, each sequence of notions defines the next as its proper outcome, while each outcome leans back on its predecessor. Units in the chain of ideas are linked together to form a continuous progression to a common end. Thoughts include prejudices or prejudgments. They are accepted with little or no support, often resting upon some kind of testimony. Tradition, instruction, and imitation cause thoughts to grow unconsciously without reference to the attainment of correct beliefs. Thus, thought depends “upon authority in some form, appeal(s) to our own advantage, or fall(s) in with a strong passion” (p. 7). On the other hand, reflective thinking urges inquiry and engaging intellectual and practical commitment. Reflective thinking investigates what grounds one’s beliefs rest upon through careful and extensive study. This type of thought purposefully widens the area of observation, reasoning out the conclusions of alternative conceptions. Through personal examination, scrutiny, and inquiry, one produces evidence for confidence in or disbelief of an idea.

Thought can masquerade as reflective thought, impacting decisions made in teaching. Limited beliefs, acceptance of ideas without supporting evidence, acceptance
of ideas because of authority, or prejudices and prejudgments can present themselves in the thought process. Dewey (1933) stated that when this occurs, reflection is not achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions in which reflection is not achieved</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not amply critical about suggested ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jumps to conclusions without assessing the position on which it rests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Foregoes or shortens the act of pursuing and inquiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Takes the first “answer” that arises or impatience to get something settled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Finds suspense of judgment and intellectual search disagreeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultivates a rigid state of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feels that doubt demonstrates mental inferiority (p. 16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Conditions in Which Reflective Thinking is Not Achieved*

He continues,

> To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found.

(Dewey, 1933, p. 16)

Remaining in that state of doubt is difficult. Society desires answers yesterday. Justification implies a defensive stance. This stance pulls in emotions that move away from reflection into reactionary behavior. Therefore, reflective thinking often seems as if it is a luxury out of reach. As society pushes for a decision to be made, time limits become the focus, rather than obtaining information and data for an appropriate conclusion. Thus, the critical thinking process is not only impacted by personal experiences, but also by the world around us. Johnston (1994) agreed that individuals
differ in their approaches to reflective thinking because their purposes are influenced by both their personal backgrounds and their social contexts.

**Five Phases of Reflective Thought**

Dewey (1933) identified five phases that a person may employ to reach an appropriate conclusion, which are presented in Figure 3. When designing this chart, I recognized that in the past I struggled to move from one phase to the next, for although I was disciplined, I was also impulsive. My disciplinarian character helped me to curb my impulsive nature. However, many of my conclusions were still faulty because I had not thought them through appropriately.

| **1st Phase** | **Suggestions** | *More than one suggestion arises*  
• competing with one another  
• maintaining the state of suspense  
• proclaiming further inquiry  
Each new suggestion  
• inhibits direct action  
• hesitates to perceive conditions, examine purpose, check resources, aids, difficulties and obstacles (p. 108)* |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **2nd Phase** | **Difficulty is located and defined** | *Movement from emotional quality to the process of intellectualizing*  
• Conversion produced by making definite observation of the conditions that created the trouble and caused the stoppage of action (p. 109)* |
| **3rd Phase** | **Hypothesis** | *Observation using methods, techniques and experience*  
• Possible solutions controlled by diagnosis  
• Collection of factual material  
• Possibilities tested and probabilities measured (p. 111)* |
| **4th Phase** | **Reasoning** | *Chain of connections brought to light by reasoning depends on:*  
• Store of knowledge that the mind is already in possession of  
• Prior experience* |
The emphasis in these five steps needs to be on experiencing and feeling the process rather than impulsively flitting from one thought to another. During my reflections, I needed to be cognizant of those times when my disciplinarian character pushed me forward rather than permitting me to feel the discomfort of experiencing each phase of the process. Ryan (2011) contended that academic reflection, as opposed to personal reflection, involves a mindful and identified purpose. The practitioner is an active participant in improving professional practice. Such reflection is supported by knowledge transformation rather than knowledge transmission.

**Attitudes and Curiosity**

Dewey (1933) described three attitudes people should adopt to obtain favorable results when employing methods of inquiry and testing. In later studies, Mezirow and Kegan added their findings to these qualities. These characteristics, outlined in Figure 4, were significant to me. This list of attributes provided a reminder of virtues I wanted to exhibit as the researcher peering in on my own practice. This was important in demanding high quality work from myself, particularly on days of great tension and
stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Open-mindedness  | • Freedom from prejudice and partisanship  
|                  | • Willingness to consider new problems and entertain new ideas  
|                  | • “Willingness to construe knowledge and values from multiple perspectives without loss of commitment to one’s own values” as defined by Brunner (Mezirow et al., 2000, p. 13)  
|                  | • Continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective, relying on past forms of action or previously established distinctions and categories (Mezirow et al., 2000)  
|                  | • Temporary delay of judgment about ideas—truth or falsity of, the belief or disbelief in—until a better determination can be made (Mezirow et al., 2000)  |
| Whole-heartedness| • “Enthusiasm for and capacity for absorption in subject matter” (Dewey, 1933, p. 32)  |
| Responsibility   | • Willingness to adopt consequences of a projected step  
|                  | • Integrity to sustain consistency and harmony in belief  
|                  | • Mental confusion of the mind results when a person accepts beliefs but rejects the logical consequences of those beliefs; this person is unwilling to commit to the consequences that flow from the belief so the mind has blurred its insight and weakened its firmness because the person is using two inconsistent mental standards (Dewey, 1933)  
|                  | • Behaviors of an individual are shaped through token rewards into increasingly “responsible” activity (Kegan, 1994, p. 45)  |

Figure 4. Attitudes for Achieving Effective Reflective Thinking

Lehrer, Mihwa, and Jeong (1999) concurred that one of the benefits of reflection was in the development of good habits of the mind.

Dewey also discussed the natural tendency of curiosity. He expressed that inquisitiveness was as an essential factor to broadening one’s experience, not an attitude.
Thus, curiosity becomes a major ingredient in one’s personal foundations, which must be advanced in reflective thinking. With these attitudes, and the natural tendency of curiosity in hand, one can strive for construction of knowledge.

**Habits**

Day and Harbour (2013) discussed Dewey’s cautions about habits. Habits are formed early and mostly under the influence of the traditions of a group. They affect the substance, depth, and openness of thought. The properties of habits include binding the user to orderly and established ways of action by generating ease in skill and interest, instigating fear of operating in another manner, and determining the channels within which thought operates—although habit does not prevent the use of thought. Thus, self-reflection needs the opportunity to confront habitual ways of thinking. Since habits are natural to human beings, the decision to change requires effort and an expenditure of energy. In making a commitment to change, reflective thinkers focus their efforts and energy on six actions: allow doubt and postpone judgment, view the intellect as a tool for understanding, recognize how the social environment affects thinking, form one’s own judgments, struggle and wrestle with ideas, and employ a method of discernment.

Brookfield (1995) concurred that learning to know ourselves requires effort and energy. He called attention to five categories of personal knowledge: first, the complex web of formative memories and experiences within each individual; second, those values that concern one’s obligation to others and to wider society, which were learned early in life; third, the deeply embedded influences that operate on a person’s model of learning and teaching – those images, models, and conceptions of teaching derived from one’s
own experiences as learners; fourth, that reflection on a difficult learning experience in
terms of teaching is an intuitive, rather than an intellectual path, into critical reflection;
and fifth, enduring emotions through deliberation on what behaviors alleviate,
exacerbate, or sharpen those emotions.

**Mindset**

Locating personal space demands critical thinking regarding the mindset
individuals position themselves within. Dewey (1933) identified two schools of thought—discipline versus freedom. Both positions portray positive and negative aspects. The positive nature of a disciplined person is rooted in a constructivist viewpoint. This person acquires power through the development of practice and exercise, but not in the form of meaningless drill. The reason a disciplinarian exhibits controlling power is to achieve an outcome or product. This achievement has personal value. However, if discipline is permitted free reign then the resulting habits become external modes of action, not the result of thinking. Such a stance creates an aversion to study, forcing the mind into channels of constraint and a belief that using the mind is disagreeable. Freedom’s positive nature enables a person to achieve mastery of a skill because the individual can act and accomplish a task independent of external coaching. When a difficulty presents itself, freedom allows an individual to overcome complications through the use of personal reflection. These experiences are cherished. When boundaries for free self-expression are limitless, then the multitude of stimuli for spontaneous activity becomes insatiable. Furthermore, errors arise as imposed arbitrary tasks increase the factor of perplexity and difficulty in keeping up uninterrupted and
unimpeded external activity. Regardless of whether a person operates from a position of discipline or freedom, a “direct immediate discharge or expression of an impulsive tendency is fatal to thinking—only when impulse is to some extent checked and thrown back upon itself does reflection ensue” (Dewey, 1933, p. 87).

I have located myself within the disciplinarian mindset. Many of my rigid behaviors stem from habits formed during my childhood. Prior to conducting the self-study for this dissertation, I knew I was extremely disciplined in living my life. However, I never stopped to think how these personal choices affected those around me. I did not take note of how these personal choices impacted decisions I made for my students.

Construction of Knowledge

Reflection impacts the construction of knowledge. Moseley and Ramsey (2008) recognized that reflective thinking influences the formation of knowing and understanding.

In the construction of knowledge teachers as learners are presented with experiences (problems, challenges, and questions) that they incorporate into their existing schema. In other words, they consider other perspectives and may reconstruct or reorganize their existing knowledge framework to incorporate the new experience. This reconstruction and reorganization of experience add to the meaning and understanding of the experience. Knowledge is constructed, in part, through reflection. (p. 50)

Hofer (2004) concurred that knowledge is actively formed by the knower, thus providing
an understanding of the objective and subjective qualities of knowing. Knowing corresponds with justification. Individuals are often confronted with contradictory claims or exposed to multiple interpretations of a topic, forcing them to make choices about authority and evidence. Sometimes an individual’s choice may be an outright rejection. At other times, the decision involves active monitoring, assessment, a search for alternatives, and a contemplated reconciliation of viewpoints. Thus, reflective thinking is tugged in various directions as the learner experiences opposing personal and contextual viewpoints.

Furthermore, Wang and Lin (2007) explained that teachers must recognize both internal and external influences that may impact their conception of teaching. These influences include language, experience, and cultural beliefs. When cultural norms of teachers and students contradict, ethical dilemmas in the classroom may arise. The findings of this study support the idea that reflections are context-situated, containing judgments and choices among competing versions of good learning and teaching.

Day and Harbour (2013) listed five challenges people confront when striving to be their best: changing social conditions, technological changes, changes in work, changes in amusements, and increased sophistication of opinion-makers and their ability to manipulate public opinions. Continually adjusting to these changes wears on a person. Ross-Hill (2009) stated that tension, stress, and strain have caused traditional education teachers to realize they were ill-prepared to teach students with severe academic and social problems in an inclusive setting. Sapon-Shevin (2007) confirmed that confronting explicit and implicit values is necessary to visualize a truly inclusive society and
classroom. She urged teachers to reflect on any potentially deficit-oriented beliefs about children.

Thinking as an Art

According to Day and Harbour (2013), learning was hard work for Dewey. He appreciated when people made the effort to use methodical care to protect the processes of thinking so that it became truly reflective. Reflection needed to present a logical path, demonstrating an investigative, systematic progression with clear, consistent, comprehensible, and articulate moves. This in turn signified the achievement of “thinking as an art” (Dewey, 1933, p. 113).

Dewey argued that the term “logical” has at least three different meanings. In the following diagram (Figure 5), the outer circle represents the meaning of logical in its widest sense, the sensible and obvious deductions that adapt to exterior topics and themes. The inner circle represents its meaning in its narrowest sense: rational thinking evidenced by an unyielding, obstinate disposition. To develop thinking as an art one needs to remain conscious of the illogical nature of the external structure and cognizant of the inner circle’s rigidity. Achieving a reflective stance requires the hard work of looking both inside and out.
Figure 5. Using Balanced Logic to Achieve Thinking as an Art

Within this self-study the outside circle had many examples of situations in which outside forces affect teachers’ practices. These included—but were not limited to—
Common Core curriculum, administrative scope and sequence charts, teacher’s guides, teacher-based team agendas, statewide assessments, district-wide assessments, Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), technology, professional development, email directives, and The Ohio teacher evaluation system. All of these elements tried to impose their structure upon a teacher making instructional decisions. This study’s inside circle is comprised of my specific nature. At times I unknowingly embraced a rigid stance as I struggled to let go of 37 years of teaching experience, my personal beliefs, and childhood school memories. My feeling was that effective decision-making occurred when I was mindful of the school’s position, and also conscious of my personal stance of the situation. In this way I honored the values of all stakeholders by making decisions that best met the needs of the child in the moment.

The Role of Reflection on Practice

Schön (1983) discussed thinking about teaching practices in two manners. First, when reflections take place after the fact, this is called knowing-in-practice. Certain actions demonstrate a spontaneous, intuitive performance, knowledgeable in a special way that often cannot be described. At one point one may have been aware of the understanding of the action, but it is then internalized. No thinking is necessary prior to or during the performance of these actions. Second, reflection-in-action occurs when one reflects on their own practice while in the midst of action. By turning thought back on action and questioning, a practitioner deals with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. As understandings surface they are criticized, restructured, and embodied in further action. Hence, reflecting on knowing-in-action
goes together with reflection on the matter at hand as the practitioner tries to make sense of puzzling, troubling, or interesting phenomenon.

Schön argued that wisdom can be increased by reflecting on dilemmas that are encountered in one’s practice. Through the use of reflection-in-action, practitioners can continue to develop their conceptions related to practice. Thus, reflective practice can be promoted as a tool to improve teacher education and classroom instruction. This tool utilizes a four-step process. First, the practitioner conducts an experiment reframing the puzzling situation. In this manner, the effectiveness of the problem-solving process is critiqued objectively. Second, prior knowledge, including theory and technique, are applied to reveal and acknowledge the uniqueness of the present circumstance. Third, reflection-in-action acts as an experiment. Because these situations are particularly resistant to structured experiment, making it difficult to duplicate the action, the practitioner reflects on what rigor can be brought to the on-the-spot experiment. Fourth, in the final step, the practitioner explains the distinguishing stance towards the reflection-in-action inquiry in terms of objectivity, control, and distance.

Within this study I kept field notes documenting instructional changes made to my lessons. I also videotaped teaching periods. Hence, I had specific data describing the occasions where the lesson diverted from the original plan. These diversions illustrated this practitioner’s reflection-in-action. In my role as a researcher I was able to use these four steps to describe the nature of these alterations.

Identifying and labeling steps of the reflection-in-action process demands that the practitioner take an unbiased, fact-based purpose and impose rigorous attention to as
many moments as possible. Moments detailed student situations. Reflection allowed a mirror image of the wonder or chaos of that moment to be described. The challenge was two-fold: capturing those moments and presenting the details in an unbiased manner or locating the biased position.

Teaching moments are charged with energy from both the teacher and the students. Defining boundaries and separating out each other’s actions was also a challenge. Schön (1983) explained that the evaluation of the frame experiment is grounded in the practitioner’s own appreciative system. Within a circumstance, unintended effects of an action occur or the situation “talks back.” This back-talk is reflected upon and new meaning is found within the situation that leads to new reframing. Next, the practitioner scrutinizes this reflective conversation noting, the quality and direction of this new problem setting. Further judgment rests on insights on the possibility for coherence and congruence, which can be realized through additional inquiry. Successful reframing leads to an extension of the reflective conversation. Schön (1983) also stated that the practitioner engages in three types of testing/experimenting at the same time during the reflection-in-action process. Specifically, exploratory experimentation involves probing with a playful activity to get a feel of things. This type of experimentation succeeds when it leads to the discovery that something exists that requires further investigation. Move-testing experiments intend for an undertaken action to produce a specific endpoint. Thus, the outcome either affirms the inquiry by achieving the production of what was intended, or negates it when a different result appears.
Finally, hypothesis testing searches for discrimination between competing assumptions. This plan leads to confirmation or disconfirmation of the hypotheses.

Moseley and Ramsey (2008) described the process of reflection as being connected to change. A reflection itself is reflected upon, communicated, and discussed multiple times. “Intellectual attribution of learning lies as much in reflection, in explanation and socialization as it does in the experience itself” (p. 55). Researchers who are reflective inquirers need to acknowledge that probing is likely to raise issues of change. This in turn will involve a confrontation of inconsistencies within and between existing core values.

**Developing a Voice**

Routines and externally dictated activities promote skill in outward actions, but fail to develop one’s ability to understand. The power to think effectively depends upon one’s possession of a capital fund of meanings, which may be applied when desired. Thus, a reflective practitioner needs to provide students with repeated practice in describing their own actions using appropriate vocabulary.

Stover et al. (2011) stated that in current top-down divisions of administration, staff developers are positioned as experts and dispensers of knowledge. In such a configuration, the teacher has little interest or ownership and may present resistance. To change this state of affairs, teachers must develop a voice in the process of their own learning. A reflexive educator cultivates an inner voice, which requires an awareness of one’s own contribution to the construction of meanings (Ryan et al., 2006).

Brookfield (1995) emphasized that teachers need to learn to speak about their
practice in a manner that is authentic and consistent. They need to be alert to voices that are not their own. These voices have been deliberately implanted by outside interests and have not emerged from their own experiences. Teachers need to find the boundaries of what they allow themselves to think. “The discovery of one’s authentic voice is at the heart of the critically reflective process” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 47). This voice instills within the teacher a sense of controlled rightness that is both moral and artistic, e.g., “What I’m doing is imaginative and spontaneous; it is grounded in my examined experiences; it’s good for me and for my students. I know and can explain why it’s good.” This sense of pedagogic integrity signifies that teachers grant new value and dignity to their practice because they are aware of its worth.

Mezirow et al. (2000) explained that “finding one’s voice” is an essential component for free full participation in discourse. This dialogue “always reflects of wider patterns of relationship and power” (p. 11). These researchers emphasized that this discourse reflects on the two great yearnings of human experience—to be included and to have a sense of agency. A teacher’s learning needs to emphasize contextual understanding, include critical reflection on assumptions, and validate meaning by assessing one’s reasons. Justification for this reasoning is based on what one knows and believes. It depends on the biographical, historical, and cultural context in which it is embedded. “In the absence of fixed truths and confronted with often rapid change in circumstances, we cannot fully trust what we know or believe” (Mezirow & Assoc., 2000, p. 4).

Throughout his book The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in
Action (1983), Schön describes a professional in two terms: as an expert or a reflective practitioner. An expert is believed to know and must claim to do so, regardless of their own uncertainty. A reflective practitioner is acknowledged to know, but is not the only person in the situation to have relevant and important knowledge. Uncertainties become a basis of learning for one’s self and for others within the group. A reflective practitioner finds a sense of freedom and real connection with others rather than maintaining a professional facade. Thus I have chosen to engage in a reflective practitioner practice.

Information provided in the previous nine subdivisions allowed me to implement reflective thinking into my daily teaching practice. Dewey stated that thought was any notion that entered one’s head. Within my practice, various cultures—the school environment, my family, my church, the medical field, and my post-graduate university—impacted my ideas. Initially, I was searching for the “right answer” to every question I possessed. This pursuit simply led to a feeling of information overload. Dewey’s readings helped me to understand that this feeling of excess and strain was caused by the contrary meanings each group’s messages brought to my life. All of these groups were respectable, but I was unaware that each association presented its own unique variation on the messages my thoughts entertained. When I made contact with a group of people my thoughts easily followed their patterns of chatter. Sometimes I disagreed with a discussion point, but chose to remain quiet. My action of silence was disturbing to me and I often chastised myself for not speaking my own mind. However, remaining quiet was the practice in my home, so I did not know what words to use during conflict. Hence, there was a lot of internal tension that caused personal anxiety. A
change began when I started to journal my private thoughts in an attempt to embrace
certain contemplations while detaching from and avoiding others.

Dewey’s five phases of reflective thought clarified that my personal patterns of
reflection often demonstrated impulsiveness. An impulsive act was likely to occur when
I was confronted with an objectionable thought in my head. In these moments, the
impulsive action was necessary to fix my uncomfortable feeling. Eventually, these
offensive notions started me on a path of self-reflection. I needed patience with myself as
I pondered these uncomfortable thoughts, reflected on why I did not want those particular
notions in my head, and why the ideas repeatedly presented themselves. I learned to stare
back at these uncomfortable feelings, knowing that their existence in my head did not
define my character. This cycle of reflection and action took many years of practice.

Dewey’s concepts of attitudes, habits, and mindset alerted me to be attentive to
my in-the-moment thoughts and actions. When I operated with natural curiosity and an
open mind, I allowed the flow of information to construct emerging designs. However,
closing my mind obstructed budding viewpoints from evolving. Habits aided my
efficiency, but also hindered further insight. My disciplinarian stance pushed me to
continually employ the motions of a habit, but also created resentments that I was
restricted from engaging in acts of freedom. Hence, Dewey’s concepts helped me to
develop self-confidence in using reflection to understand that issues, both personal and
professional, were often a jumble of contrary meanings. Unraveling these meanings
required the focused attention of simultaneously occurring thoughts and actions.

**Reflective Practice in Teaching**
In hunting for the voices of other special education teachers, my search began with the terms “reflective thinking” and “intervention specialist.” A single article appeared—*The view from the edge: Rethinking a few ideas* written by P. V. Paul, a scholar with a hearing impairment, in 2013. The first words to greet my eyes were written by John Dewey (1933). “Thinking is inquiry, investigation, turning over, probing or delving into, so as to find something new or to see what is already known in a different light. In short, it is questioning” [(1933, p. 265) as cited by Paul, 2013, p. 287]. The editorial appeared in the *American Annals of the Deaf*, addressing the flaws of the Third Grade Guarantee, Common Core Standards, P-12 Licensure, and the one-size-fits-all construct. For me the most powerful statement in the article centered on a single phrase: “reading is not fun or rewarding” (Paul, 2013, p. 288) for a student who is struggling with reading. (Of course, this is not a new concept, but rather a message that the pattern of how we teach children to read needs to change.) Paul utilized Keith Stanovich’s construct of the “Matthew Effect” to describe the influencing causes of Third Grade Guarantee outcomes. He explained that this concept was based on Matthew’s gospel, passage 25:29, in which Jesus proclaims that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Essentially, students who have difficulties in reading avoid reading and continue to lose ground, while students who are strong in reading grow in their skills due to their habit of reading widely and voraciously. Paul invited readers to improve the development of their critical-creative thinking skills and progress beyond habitual patterns. This editorial aligned with my own struggles with school mandates and students who struggle to read. Paul’s invitation to utilize Dewey’s reflective thought process ignited my own passion to find the gap in the
current literature regarding a reflective practice in teaching.

I then conducted three additional searches. Each mixture of key terms presented different facets of reflective thinking within a teacher’s practice. Figure 6 below charts these explorations. The first column identifies the keywords of the search. The second column lists studies with significant relevance to the topic of reflective thinking. The final column establishes the resulting theme of each of these analysis. These themes are further elaborated upon in the following sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords for Search</th>
<th>Resulting Studies</th>
<th>Theme of Studies</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • reflective thinking  
• decision making  
• teachers | • Udvare-Solner (1996)  
• Bartelheim and Evans (1993)  
• Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) | Reflective Thinking Process |
| • reflective thinking  
• teachers of children with special needs | • Hodge and Chantler (2010)  
• Jeweler, Barnes-Robinson, Shevitz, and Weinfeld (2006) | Purpose of Reflective Thinking |
| • special education teachers  
• self-reflection | • Milner (2003)  
• Quezada and Alfaro (2007)  
• Vogt and Au (1994) | Utilizing Reflective Thinking to Promote Change |

Figure 6. Searching for Themes of a Reflective Practice in Teaching

Overall, a reflective practice within teaching is defined as a conversation between self and setting (Udvari-Solner, 1996). This practice utilizes a constructivist decision-making perspective to develop expertise through a process of problem-solving, testing, and evaluating (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998). From an intervention specialist’s view the purpose of a reflective practice is to design instruction that meets the specific needs of children with special needs. Identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses to form well-defined pictures of the “total child” helps an intervention specialist to differentiate instruction in content, process, and product without compromising the objective of the
assignment (Jeweler, Barnes-Robinson, Shevitz, & Weinfeld, 2006). Hence, teachers help students to visualize themselves as a successful learner. Finally, a reflective practice promotes change. Sometimes, self-reflection illuminates personal experiences that affect decisions made about instruction (Milner, 2003; Quezada and Alfaro, 2007). Other times, the reflective thinking process encourages the practitioner to be more open, responding objectively rather than subjectively to students and instructional practices. A reflective practice in teaching encourages teachers to cultivate a sense of ownership in the change process, as well as a sense of joint responsibility for the success of instruction (Vogt and Au, 1994). This overview explains the process, purpose, and change elements of a reflective practice in teaching. However, the element I find to be lacking in the literature occurs in the application of this knowledge—utilizing this process within the parameters of an intervention specialist’s professional practice.

**Reflective Thinking Process**

Udvari-Solner (1996) conducted research by observing teachers in a Midwestern urban school district. Her findings brought her to urge teachers in inclusive settings to be mindful of the nature of their practice, and their novel responses, when faced with specific challenges within their day-to-day reality. This researcher felt that attention to teachers’ “conversations with self and setting” (p. 246) was critical. She argued that teachers appear to have a sequence of self-questions that guide reflection on their practice. These questions focus on the following elements of instruction: (a) instructional arrangement and lesson format, (b) student-specific learning outcomes, (c) teaching style and delivery of instruction, (d) environment considerations, (e) instructional materials,
and (f) support and supervision structure. Thus, by capturing “a portrait of teacher thinking” (Udvari-Solner, 1996, p. 252) one could document their internal personal dialogue. Schön (1983) described this phenomenon as “a reflective conversation with the situation” (p. 76). In this manner, teachers design curricular adaptations through creative thought, constructing their own knowledge utilizing individual and interactive problem solving.

The results of a study conducted by Bartelheim and Evans (1993) suggested that special education resource teachers used reflective practice to some degree when managing instructional problems. Through observation of four high-school special education resource teachers, the researchers determined that three components of reflective practice were evident in their on-the-spot decisions. These components were problem setting, testing, and personal responsibility. Problem setting occurred 29 percent of the time. This is the process of determining the integral parts of the problem and how each will be addressed. In defining this new frame, the practitioner is influenced by past professional experience and professional knowledge of theory. Testing, that is, experimenting with a variety of solutions for the newly framed problem, was evident in 32 percent of the participants’ responses. Personal responsibility was documented in 39 percent of the participants’ responses. It refers to the practitioner’s own feelings of accountability in regards to their chosen solution’s outcome. Therefore, these researchers demonstrated that when the participants of their study utilized reflective thinking, the teachers engaged in a process of problem setting, testing, or personal responsibility.

Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) investigated educators’ unobservable thinking
processes through the use of think-aloud problem situations for the data collection method. They cited Ericsson and Simon (1984) by stating that think-aloud reports provided “the closest possible reflection of cognitive processes in inference making, strategy selection, and identification of salient features” (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 102). The following five categories were used to reveal whether the participating practitioners exhibited reflection-in-action within their professional practice: 1) mode of problem identification, 2) solution generation, 3) testing-in-action of solutions, 4) response to inconsistencies, and 5) reflection-on-action. Their findings demonstrated that reflecting practitioners use a constructivist decision-making perspective to develop expertise. Specifically, a reflective practitioner clearly defines the unique parameters and interactive context of a problematic situation. Solutions are generated by involving others in the situation, reaching beyond the defined parameters to meet the expressed needs of those involved. Mental rehearsal describes the testing-in-action process, supporting the generation of new alternatives not previously identified. Feedback characterizes the impact these test-in-action experiments exhibit, while inconsistencies cause the practitioner to redefine or rethink the details of the situation. Finally, a practitioner engages in reflection-on-action when developing a reconstructive mental review. The results of this research also indicated the existence of experienced educators who exhibited minimal reflection. Thus, an experienced teacher is not synonymous with an expert educator.

These research studies presented the reflective thinking process through the identification of specific elements. The first article, by Udvari-Solner (1996), presented a
conceptual nature of this process. The second study, conducted by Bartelheim and Evans (1993), named three components of the reflective thinking process and detected the number of occurrences for each component. In the third study, Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) identified participants’ responses to think-aloud situations that demonstrated cognitive processes in action. Thus, the findings of these studies spotlight specific elements for me to identify when collecting data and analyzing my reflective thinking practice. These findings present a beginning point for my research, from which I labored to illuminate an elaborate path of the reflective thinking process both in-action and on-action. Furthermore, my self-study provides a case example that demonstrates the application of this process for a student with special education needs.

**Purpose of Reflective Thinking**

Hodge and Chantler (2010) argued that it is through the course of reflective thinking that teachers find the most suitable solutions to the matters that concern them. Knowing a student’s frame of reference, and their way of being in the learning world, will assist a teacher in personalizing the child’s “learning experience and [making] it more meaningful” (p. 13). Jeweler, Barnes-Robinson, Shevitz, and Weinfeld (2006) stated that a teacher needs to form clear pictures of the “total child” and differentiate instruction in content, process, and product without compromising the objective of the assignment. In this manner, teachers help students to visualize themselves as successful learners through knowing themselves, their own needs, which tools to work with, and how to succeed.

These researchers describe the purpose of reflective thinking at a conceptual level.
My self-study provides empirical evidence of rich, thick descriptions that explain the complex nature of students’ learning. As I observed and analyzed my self-reflective process through field notes, journaling, conversations with my critical friend, and videotaping, my students’ natures and their needs were revealed. Thus, my research portrays an intervention specialist in action utilizing reflective thinking that informs my choices in designing future instruction.

**Utilizing Reflective Thinking to Promote Change**

The next two studies showcase the impact that a teacher’s reflection on personal experiences has on instructional design. This first investigation, conducted by Milner (2003), was a case study of a female African-American English teacher. Milner argued that a teacher’s experiences with race, culture, and gender influence the development of their curricula plans and decisions for student learning. These experiences were referred to as the participant’s cultural comprehensive knowledge. The researcher’s findings illustrated that this teacher’s self-reflections on her commitment to certain issues due to her cultural comprehensive knowledge prompted the enactment of effective lessons.

The next study, Quezada and Alfaro (2007), focused on bi-literacy teachers’ self-reflections on their accounts of student teaching abroad. Through case study methodology, the researchers examined reflective journals. These journals were written in response to the dissonance participants experienced when faced with ideological differences between their value orientation and teaching ideology. The personal narratives expressed the teachers’ reflections as they struggled to develop ideological and pedagogical clarity in a foreign setting. Thus, the researchers uncovered these
participants’ experiential knowledge as it influenced decisions within their practice.

The final study, entitled “The Role of Teachers’ Guided Reflection in Effecting Positive Program Change,” was conducted in Hawaii by Vogt and Au (1994). The article described the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP), which began in 1971 with the purpose of “strengthening the school success of students that had not thrived in traditional mainstream school settings” (p. 1). These researchers stated that teachers were the critical factor needed to effect positive school change. Teacher thinking and reflection were encouraged. KEEP provided teachers with the tools and resources needed to facilitate this reflection. These tools included a half-day teaching assignment, time to write in a daily reflective journal that was read by the director, and instruction in communication skills, specifically reflective listening and providing feedback. In this manner students were viewed as partners in the classroom rather than adversaries. Provided with time to think and reflect, teachers began responding objectively rather than subjectively. KEEP encouraged teachers to develop a sense of humor, take risks, forgive themselves, and cultivate a sense of ownership in the change process, as well as a sense of joint responsibility for the success of the program.

As a collective group these three studies reminded me to pay attention to how my personal experiences impact my teaching practice and the tools needed to effectively implement the reflective thinking process and affect change. The case studies conducted by Milner (2003) and Quezada and Alfaro (2007) define the participants’ personal experiences that influenced decision making within their practices. These experiences caused strong feelings that shaped the participant’s values. In turn, these values impacted
individual choices in designing lessons. My personal experiences characterize a different type of experience: my disability. My research defines how these personal experiences informed my decision-making process within my practice. The final study, by Vogt and Au (1994), described a broader research project that desired to change the instructional decisions of a school community. These researchers stated that teachers were the critical factor needed to implement and sustain positive change by encouraging teacher thinking and reflection. For me, the message of this research project was that my decisions strengthen the larger school community when I implement a reflective thinking process into my daily practice. My research demonstrates how I use reflective thinking to expand my verbal abilities in naming, identifying, describing, explaining, and clarifying to myself the instructional design of the lessons I create.

**Reading as a Problem-Solving Task**

Utilizing metacognition presented a way to acquire problem-solving skills rather than expecting an immediate answer from myself. For me an immediate answer implied urgency, while problem-solving signifies time to investigate and come to a decision. When learning, people need time to experience and thus, urgency is not conducive to learning. Overall, problem solving seems more effective than allowing ritual habits to take over.

While reading Pina Tarricone’s (2011) taxonomy of metacognition I created charts to diagram information. These diagrams helped me to recognize a correlation between the breakdown of metacognitive competences and my own deconstruction of skills when creating lessons for my students. For me, in terms of teaching and learning, the process
went as follows. Prior to delivering a lesson I recalled where students struggled in the previous day’s instruction. I focused on the element that seemed confusing to them. I viewed this element from as many aspects as I could and imagined possible ways to demonstrate certain features. Then I would think “keep it simple” and reject those complex ideas. I proceeded forward, encapsulating the concepts within time and space constraints. Finally, I gathered the materials needed to present the lesson.

This process was my habit when designing lessons and team teaching reading with co-workers. When scripted reading instruction became a part of my daily routine I questioned my fidelity to the program. However, the staff would not acknowledge these doubts because they felt allegiance to the research behind the program’s curriculum. My feeling was that this one-size-fits-all strategy simply lacked the individual nature needed to move students with special needs and those who were at-risk forward in their learning. Hence, when my research revealed studies defining reading as a problem-solving task I was intrigued. Since by that time the scripted reading program had been dropped from our curriculum, I now had more wiggle room to design instruction that met the students’ needs. The studies discussed in the next paragraph provided a wealth of information to enlighten my decision-making processes.

Fourteen metacognitive studies spanning back to 1978 correlated metacognition and the reading process. The main idea of these findings was that reading requires engaging the learner in meaningful action (Babbs & Moe, 1983; Book, Duffy & Roehler, 1985; Curwen, Miller, White-Smith & Calfee, 2011; Ganz & Ganz, 1990; Martin & Kragler, 2011; Stewart & Tei, 1983). Martin and Kragler (2011) defined reading as a
problem-solving task. This problem-solving process applies a strategy of relating the reader’s prior knowledge to the text (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill & Joshi, 2007; Knight, 1992). Book, Duffy, and Roehler (1985), and Jacobs and Paris (1987), emphasized that when a student encounters a reading problem then thinking needs to occur—thinking about how to solve the reading problem, e.g., draw upon word identification, a comprehension strategy, or study skill. “Success of problem-solving tasks depends on how specifically information was encoded during the time of acquisition and the quality of the retrieval schemes in the mind of the learner” (Ganz & Ganz, 1990, p. 182). Furthermore, Underwood (1997) stated that in order to recognize and gain fluency with words, beginning readers need self-awareness and self-assessment capacities. Turner and Paris (1995) believed that students would be motivated for literacy learning if teachers provided engaging meaningful tasks on a daily basis. These researchers concluded that engaging in meaningful tasks was “a more reliable indicator [of reading success] than the type of reading program followed by the district” (p. 662). When students did not engage and utilize problem solving techniques while learning to read, avoidance behaviors were observed. These students exhibited a desire to “be done with a reading” [(Mackey, 1997, p. 431) as cited by Block, Parris & Whitely, 2008, p. 461].

Hence, problem solving has become the focus of my reading lessons, rather than the acquisition of skills. In this manner, the student becomes actively involved with the written word/page rather than mastering lessons of the one-size-fits-all scripted curriculum. Rather than taking the perspective that a child possesses the knowledge to
sound out or remember words, the stance becomes one of inquiry about how a child can interact with the page to make real-life connections. The learning occurs in the child’s explanations of his/her thinking process to make these connections. Practice periods permit repeated performance of these problem-solving strategies.

Researchers Calfee and Drum posed their question—“What happens in the mind of the student during the acquisition of reading?”—the year I became a teacher: 1978. Finally, after 37 years of experience I am aware of my, and my students’ unobservable, internal thought processes. For me, problem solving has demonstrated that the reading process requires developing a positive relationship between the reader and the written word. Reading includes the intake of reading the written page and the outtake of expressing one’s thoughts and feelings about the information. Hence, an effective reader needs to have a voice to describe his/her thoughts about what is read. An effective reader needs to feel safe in voicing his/her opinion and not be worried about how others are going to receive the message. An effective reader needs to be respectful of others’ messages, even if those thoughts do not match their own. An effective reader, including those with disabilities, helps to construct a school community in which everyone is invaluable.

In my current school community I teach many students who are poor readers and lack literacy experiences. The “push” to develop skills of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension often overshadow the student’s thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the information being presented. Their misconceptions and questions are overlooked in the time crunch of staying in line with the scope and sequence imposed by the
administration. Developing a classroom atmosphere in which the child is valued becomes the most important task for me as an intervention specialist. However, the student’s standing on an arbitrary list of numbers that defines their skills pays my salary and is an issue that needs to be reconciled. Thus, the purpose of this self-study was to explain how I utilize ZPD, reflective thinking, and problem solving skills to address the needs of the “total child.”

Self-study of a reflective practice is featured in very few research studies in regards to the inclusive classroom and intervention specialists. I wanted to research how an intervention specialist’s reflective thinking process informs the choices made in designing instruction that helps students with special needs and those who are at-risk learn strategies and use tools to become independent learners. This rich, thick description of critical thinking in general provides an example for the larger population of inclusion, pre-service, and new teachers (Creswell, 2007, p. 119). Present literature urges intervention specialists to use reflective thinking to develop a clear picture of the “total child.” Hence, achieving this final goal is not a matter of repeatedly traveling a well-worn path to the same destination, but rather interpreting reflections as one trudges through his/her own thought processes. Each individual child presents a different path.

**Professional Wisdom and Evidence-Based Special Education Practices**

Self-reflection nurtures my professional wisdom. Cook, Tankersley, and Harjusola-Webb (2008) described professional wisdom as non-research knowledge acquired through practice. This wisdom is either implicit or accumulated, evolving into “the judgment that individuals acquire through experience” (p. 105). Citing Kavale and
Forness (1999), these researchers explained that scientific generalizations were not likely to apply in regards to a student with special needs. Rather, a special education practitioner needs to mediate on which evidence-based practices (EBP) will maximize the learning outcomes of students with disabilities. A teacher’s practical knowledge of students’ individualized learning needs and goals provide balance when adapting an EBP to a local situation, safeguarding that the fundamental elements of the practice are not compromised. Furthermore, when selecting EBPs, special educators should also reflect upon their own strengths. A significant, positive correlation exists between knowledge of a practice and the intervention specialist’s use of the practice as prescribed. Overall, special education teachers need to utilize their professional expertise and wisdom to interface with evidence-based practices. The practitioner selects an EBP, chooses when to use it, designs adaptations, implements it, and evaluates the impact of the evidence-based practice for students with disabilities (Cook, Landrum, Cook, & Tankersley, 2008).

When students with special needs are not responding to instruction, teachers can choose to incorporate EBPs into their classrooms. A ten-step framework guides the practitioner through this process (Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2014). First, the intervention specialist needs to determine the characteristics of the student, environment, and instruction. Next, the special education instructor searches for sources of evidence-based practices (step two) and selects those EBPs that apply to the characteristics of the student, environment, and instruction (step three). Then, the teacher identifies the essential components of the practice (step four). In step five, the practitioner implements the EBP, embedding the practice within effective instruction. After that, the teacher utilizes a
checklist to self-assess fidelity of implementation (step six). In step seven, the educator progress-monitors student outcomes, analyzing the data and evaluating the EBPs effectiveness. If EBPs are increasing student outcomes, no adaptations are required. However, if desired outcomes are not reached, then adaptations need to be planned while maintaining the integrity of the fundamental components of the EBP (step eight). Instructional decisions are made based upon progress monitoring data (step nine). Finally, the practitioner needs to become a leader and an advocate in using EBPs within teaching practices. Cook, Tankersley, Cook, and Landrum (2015) reported that “evidence-based practices can form the highest level of a hierarchy of teaching practices” (p. 313).

The following practices present evidence-based strategies that are effective in increasing time on task and decreasing levels of disruptive behavior for students: (a) teacher praise, (b) scaffold independent seatwork, (c) increase opportunities for correct responses, (d) establish peer tutoring opportunities, (e) student choice, and (f) direct instruction (Niesyn, 2009). The emphasis for implementation is on intervention integrity, also called treatment fidelity. When interventions are implemented as designed, then the degree of a student’s behavior change increases. Implementing EBPs with fidelity is more likely to occur when the EBP is “(a) easy to implement, (b) not time-intensive, (c) positive, (d) perceived to be effective by the teacher, and (e) compatible with the context in which the intervention would be employed” (Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2003, p. 152).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The current research study was designed to focus on an intervention specialist’s reflective thinking as it impacted instructional moments and the planning that created them. I developed one main research question with three sub-questions: *How do I use reflective thinking to inform my choices in designing instruction that helps students with special needs and those at-risk to learn strategies and use tools to become independent learners?* My subsidiary questions were as follows:

- **What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their zones of proximal development?**
- **What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that directs my questions and planning for future activities?**
- **How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making (e.g. content of classes, administrative decisions, and my disability)?**

To best answer these questions, I engaged in a self-study of my teaching practice as an intervention specialist. Self-study allowed me to inspect, probe, and scrutinize my actions through a variety of research techniques. The investigation illuminated patterns and themes of my reflective thinking process as it influenced student learning.

**Self-Study Teacher Research**

Samaras (2011) defined self-study “to be a personal systematic inquiry situate
within one’s own teaching context that requires critical and collaborative reflection in order to generate knowledge as well as inform the broader educational field” (p. 10). She included five criterion necessary to create a study that maintained the integrity of self-study research. First, the study is a personally situated inquiry focusing on the space between self and the field of practice. Tensions and living contradictions are examined within this space. In this study I captured my in-the-moment thoughts, particularly those documenting changes that occurred as I taught students with special needs to read. Often these changes signified the presence of strain within a situation. Second, in terms of a critical collaborative inquiry, the researcher utilizes others’ questioning and divergent views to help verify the quality and legitimacy of one’s own understandings. Feedback from a critical friend and ongoing dialogue scrutinized the work, and hence, served as a validation team for the study. In my research I engaged in bi-weekly conversations with Mia, my critical friend. Her honest sharing of feelings and descriptive explanations of the words or phrases utilized during discussions supported the on-going analysis of the data. Third, the study impacts students’ knowledge through the consequences of enacted changes to improve learning. This study’s field notes, personal reflections, and critical friend conversations initiated many adaptations and changes that improved daily instruction. Fourth, the research process is transparent and systematic. Exposed to outside critique, this method requires an open, honest, and clear description of the spiraling progression of questions, framing, revisiting data, and reframing the researcher’s interpretations. In this investigation, dated document files and a binder document the study’s development. Fifth, the knowledge generated from the study is
presented and made public. I verbally shared the results of my research with colleagues and also used it to build my dissertation.

Reflective Thought

Brookfield (1995) emphasized the importance of self-reflection/critical thinking by outlining the following six aspects. First, self-reflection/critical thinking facilitates teacher choices that represent informed actions. Utilizing this type of thinking promotes a better chance of achieving the intended consequences. By developing a set of behaviors that consistently display a certain set of meanings, the likelihood of understanding between all parties involved increases. In turn, this process enhances the probability that one’s actions result in the desired effect. Second, self-reflection aids teachers to develop a rationale for practice. This rationale serves as a methodological and ethical touchstone, providing a foundational reference point and allowing the instructor to work from a position of informed commitment. Third, critical thinking helps teachers to avoid self-laceration; particularly refraining from blaming themselves if students are not learning. This student resistance is often socially and politically sculpted. Fourth, self-reflection grounds the instructor emotionally. The teacher is able to control the ebbs and flow of his/her emotions during periods of turmoil. This control results from a process of clarifying and questioning assumptions, investigating students, and not believing that the world is governed by chaos. Fifth, a teacher’s critical thinking enlivens the classroom through the process of publicly modeling the instructor’s own thinking. Thus, an active model of passionate skepticism is provided. In this manner, an emotional climate is created in which accepting change, and risking failure, is valued. Brookfield (1995)
stated that an instructor who models critical inquiry within the classroom is one of the most powerful catalysts for developing critical thinking within students. The final important factor of self-reflection is that it increases democratic trust. Students observe whether independence of thought is really valued, or whether everything depends on pleasing the teacher.

Therefore, self-reflection was one of the most powerful tools a teacher could use. As teachers talk about their work and “name” their experiences, they learn about what they know and what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than imposed from without…teachers who know in this way can act with intent; they are empowered to draw from the center of their own knowing and act as critics and creators of their world rather than solely respondents to it, or worse, victims of it. Agency, as it is described in this model, casts voice as the connection between reflection and action. Power is thus linked with agency or intentionality. People who are empowered—teachers in this case—are those who are able to act in accordance with what they know and believe. [Richert, 1992, p. 197] as cited in Brookfield, 1995, p. 47]

In this manner, a teacher learns to speak about his/her practice in a way that is authentic and consistent. It is authentic in that one becomes “alert to the voices inside us that are not our own, the voices that have been deliberately implanted by outside interests rather than springing from our own experience” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 45).

Hodge and Chantler (2010) considered that reflective action involves a
willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development. It implies flexibility, rigorous analysis, and social awareness. Reflective action thus moved away from answers of “what works” and “how to teach” toward developing individual solutions. “Individuality is the challenge and the beauty of this area of practice” (Hodge & Chantler, 2010, p. 12). Teachers need to take calculated risks, moving in a spiraling motion to develop understanding and knowledge of how to work most effectively. Semmar and Fakhro (2009) emphasized that teachers need to know how to effectively evaluate their critical thinking.

Study Design

Investigating my reflective thoughts as they occurred during moments of decision-making required capturing those contemplations throughout the school day. This self-study was designed to grasp the nature of these instructional changes, and provide a vibrant portrait of the intervention specialist in action. Mia, my critical friend, was vital in painting this picture as she listened and then spoke her mind about our shared responsibility in teaching our students. Within our working relationship we encouraged each other’s efforts, shared and taught our personal strengths to one another, and sent unspoken messages during instructional periods that alluded to “Do something, I need help!” Mia was wonderful at providing sustenance, which included hugs, snacks and witty comments.

This self-study included three phases. The first phase, entitled pre-study preparation, involved actions performed prior to data collection. This section included 1) a narrative of the research participant (myself), 2) an autobiography, 3) a description of
the role of my critical friend, 4) a depiction of the research site, and 5) an explanation of the process I followed to gain access to the site. The second phase encompassed the data collection process. The final phase was data analysis (although analysis was intertwined with data collection). Figure 6 below provides an overview of the design for this self-study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Study Preparation</th>
<th>Data Collection &amp; Generation</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Research participant – myself</td>
<td>• Multiple data sources</td>
<td>• Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Autobiography</td>
<td>o Lesson plans</td>
<td>• Memos</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Critical friend</td>
<td>o Field notes</td>
<td>• Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research site</td>
<td>o Journaling</td>
<td>• Building connections / relationships</td>
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<td>• Gaining access</td>
<td>o Videotaping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Audio files of critical friend conversations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Data organization</td>
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*Figure 7. Three Phases of Self-Study Design*

Samaras (2011) stated that a researcher must “maintain the integrity of self-study research through explicit adherence to methodological standards” (p. 11). Preserving the honor of this methodology required that I be ever mindful of my in-the-moment actions as they occurred within my practice. This necessitated viewing these actions from various perspectives—personal journaling, recording field notes, videotaping, and conversations with a critical friend. Self-reflections during data collection, and my on-going analysis, continually illuminated my thoughts within these moments of practice. Once this knowledge was gained, the role of self-reflection seemed to transform the workings of my personal practice as new data supported decisions of change. Pinnegar
and Hamilton (2009) emphasized that at the heart of self-study research is the desire to change “practice in the moment of practice” (p. 23). In this manner, I was able to purposely respond to the call of the situation, and initiate changes in the moment of teaching.

**Phase 1: Pre-Study Preparation**

During the pre-study preparation phase I focused on defining the components that would provide the framework for this self-study. First, I wrote about myself from both a personal and professional standpoint. When the words dried up and no other ideas surfaced, I interviewed colleagues to assist me in collecting thoughts about actions I performed that evidenced my nature as a teacher. Creating an autobiography acknowledged past experiences that impacted my current decisions. This written account presented this practitioner’s authentic voice at the onset of the research study, and provided a baseline or reference point from which decisions were made, or changes occurred. Next, I considered co-workers who could act in the role of critical friend. I had three options, however, my first choice consented and the process was complete. The site was obvious—the environment where I taught. Gaining assess required that I meet with the principal several times, providing short written reports stating my research questions and explaining the purpose of the study.

**Research participant—myself.** In this self-study I held the dual role of examiner and examinee. I wondered, “Why do I want to poke at myself?” The answer was found within the layers of my experiences, my attitudes, my beliefs, and my life changes. I have been an intervention specialist since 1989 and a teacher since 1978. Of course, an
abundance of changes have occurred during this time period. These changes included the blending of families, technological advances, increased testing, progress monitoring, and data collection. What surprised me was that this vast amount of experience had not created a sense of “I know what I’m doing,” but rather a questioning attitude: “Do I know what I’m doing?” After thirty-seven years in my profession I expected to be an expert. However, self-doubt abounded and thoughts such as “Ha, I haven’t even figured out the game yet!” popped into my head. For this self-study, my dual role as teacher and researcher provided with me the opportunity to examine teaching and learning inside out—from both aged eyes (an abundance of teacher experiences) and new ones (the researcher peering in), from a single-minded persona to the collective voice of my colleagues and students, from the substance of the data to the essence of the study.

I asked my critical friend to use a few adjectives to describe my nature when I teach. The first term she threw out was “retrospective.” I laughed, surprising myself, when I verbalized to Mia that I couldn’t include the term because I didn’t know what it meant in this context. In the past, I would have felt great anxiety that I did not understand what she was saying about me. In turn, this would have caused feelings of shame and stupidity. To expel that negativity, I would have simply worked harder to convince myself that I was better than that. Fortunately, my co-worker took time to explain the thought behind the term. She said, “You think about what you’ve done and adjust the lesson accordingly.” I agreed. My lessons demonstrate attentiveness to the students’ strengths and weaknesses. My expectations are reasonable, challenging the children but not overwhelming them. Utilizing a multi-sensory approach to teach, I am
dynamic in that every move within the lesson has a purpose. I’m very focused, often to the point that I can be hyper-focused on trying to get the details of an upcoming lesson finalized. I do my best to present a positive, respectful, fair, and cooperative nature to coworkers and students alike. My patience is on-going, except with myself. I strive to be the best intervention specialist I can for my students, by making choices that enhance their learning opportunities.

During the 2014-2015 school year, my role as an intervention specialist for the third grade included many duties. First and foremost, I was the case manager for nine students with special needs. This responsibility required that I teach to the third grade core curriculum and the objectives written on the students’ Individualized Educational Plans (IEP). I wrote a yearly IEP for each identified student, collected data for IEP objectives, and each quarter presented statistics to document student growth. I also provided tier two interventions for several students whose oral reading fluency scores were below grade-level benchmark. A disability was suspected in three additional third graders. This identification process was lengthy, requiring data collection and intervention. I attended problem-solving team meetings for each of these students and helped design the short cycle (six to eight week) interventions necessary to ascertain if a disability existed. Mia and I team-taught the third grade math class, consisting of 30 students, including all nine of the children with identified special education needs. Nearly half of the students in the class demonstrated as much difficulty as their identified peers in problem solving and calculating an answer to math equations.
**Autobiography.** Both Brookfield (1995) and Berry (2007) recognized that an autobiography documents a practitioner’s experiences as a learner and teacher. Through this exercise the practitioner establishes a beginning point and pedagogical framework for self-study. Berry stated that bringing learning experiences to the surface helps one understand one’s actions as a teacher/educator. Construction of these life stories identifies those circumstances or choices that led to a particular outcome, providing information that may be available for subsequent analysis of one’s practice (Berry, 2007). Brookfield explained that parts of practice contain an element of strong commitment. This occurs when individual crises were collectively experienced. The same tension reappears in various situations, even though the dilemmas, details, or characters differ. The experiences of the learner are often felt at an emotional gut level, which is much deeper than that of reason. These deep experiences may have an intense and long-lasting influence on insights and meaning for teaching. Thus, when teachers face crises or uncertainties they instinctively fell back “on memories from times as learners to guide them in their responses” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 31).

My autobiography influenced my research study design. Within my autobiography and early writings were descriptions of my personal experiences with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and metacognition, in terms of self-reflection and as a problem-solving tool. By studying these concepts I gained knowledge of how learning occurred for me. These tools were of vital importance for my understanding and therefore I wanted to study how they impacted my teaching. As an intervention specialist my goal was to keep the children engaged with a given task. I felt
that learning halted when a student was not participating in an activity. However, feelings are not facts, so the previous statement could simply be a personal belief that is setting unrealistic expectations for the students and causing frustration for myself. So I asked, “Am I setting a realistic goal?” I also felt that if a child experienced enjoyment while engrossed in the task, this learner was more likely to sustain the activity and enhance their learning. However, my students often gravitated towards drama, confusion, and disorganization. These frustrating occasions are unsettling to me, so I change what I can: my part in the teaching and learning cycle. Valuing engagement and enjoyment in an activity, along with an attitude of respect, I designed ZPD scaffolds for students. I considered many variables that impacted each child’s learning. Learning about these variables occurred during observations of student behavior, trial and error, and the input of colleagues. I also tried to enhance learning through student-led conversations or class discussions, but this was a much more difficult task for me. I wondered, “Am I understanding the information the student is sharing in the manner it is intended? Do I lead a conversation? Do I allow a single student to lead the conversation? Do my comments encourage the students to keep sharing?” As I’ve stated before, I’m not as comfortable in the auditory/verbal domain, so I question my ability to observe clues of students’ strengths and weaknesses in this manner. Finally, I wanted to empower students to problem solve. I hoped that when I modeled making choices that promoted kindness, respect, and an excitement to learn, my students would follow my example. On many days I achieved these goals, but it seemed a mystery to me as to how
and why it happened. I knew there was a tremendous amount of hard work going on and I wanted to be able to describe the nature of this work.

**Critical friend.** Samaras (2011) identified “two principle roles of a critical friend: to offer critique and to provide support” (p. 7). Four general actions were needed to set up guidelines for this critical friend team. First, create a working structure through the practice of professional ethics. This included establishing, revisiting, and re-clarifying ground rules, developing and agreeing on a structure for feedback, honoring confidentiality, and sharing what was working or not working. Next, use active listening to take a critical approach. Be clear and open about responsibilities and commitments to the mutual task. Then, embrace alternative perspectives by examining progress reports and evidence. In providing feedback, the team confirmed or disconfirmed data that justified assertions for action. Finally, the team acknowledged the complexity of collaboration by valuing one another’s contributions through the provision of both cognitive and emotional support. As problems surfaced, an honest, open, and transparent stance was employed. For this study, my co-worker Mia, a third-grade classroom teacher, agreed to serve in this role. Prior to the onset of the study, we discussed our mutual responsibilities to one another to develop ourselves as a team of critical friends. Our roles included being a present and an active listener; honestly sharing feelings, thoughts, and ideas; providing our perspective of a situation; and offering emotional support.

**Research site.** During the 2014-2015 school year, I was the intervention specialist in two third grade classrooms at a suburban elementary (K-4) building in
northeast Ohio. The school was nestled in a residential community with a student population of 334 students—173 boys and 161 girls. Sixty percent of the children received free and reduced breakfast and/or lunch. The school principal, now retired, had over thirty years of experience in the educational field. Our teaching staff began with sixteen general education classroom teachers—four kindergarten classrooms, three first grade classrooms, three second grade classrooms, three third grade classrooms, and three fourth grade classrooms. Classes ranged in size from 17 to 29 students. Each third grade class consisted of 29 students. There were students with special needs in two of these three rooms. There were also three encore teachers—art, music, and physical education. All of the previously listed staff members had a single classroom within which to instruct. The remaining teaching staff shared space throughout the building—three intervention specialists, three Title 1 teachers, and a literacy specialist/coach. Our support staff included a school psychologist, a speech/language therapist, two occupational therapists, a vision consultant, a home liaison, an on-site counselor, a testing coordinator, a librarian and librarian’s aide, a nurse and nurse’s aide, a secretary, an office aide, four special education assistants, two third grade classroom aides, a janitor, a cleaner, two cafeteria personnel, and playground/cafeteria aides. Many of these support staff were only in the building part-time. Only two of these positions were held by men—the music teacher and the janitor.

I was assigned to this school building due to its wheelchair accessibility through two of the five entrances. These entrances were positioned by the school office and kindergarten classrooms. A ramp located within the school led from the classrooms to
the cafeteria and permitted me access to all areas inside of the building. My classroom was shared with all three intervention specialists. I used the scooter mainly in the school halls for conservation of energy to preserve my health. When teaching a class, the scooter was parked in the hall or its “parking space” within my classroom. I moved between three spaces—the special education resource room and two of three third grade classrooms. These third grade classrooms were separated from the special education space by a single classroom.

**Gaining access.** The gatekeeper for this suburban elementary school was its principal. Creswell (2014) suggested that a short proposal might need to be written and submitted for review in order to receive the gatekeeper’s approval. Thus, I conversed with the principal and gave her a written description of my research questions, the purpose and significance of the study, and the proposed data collection chart. She granted permission and provided me with written consent.

I gained institutional review board (IRB) approval from Kent State University. The application included procedures and information about the nature of the study, the site, and its participants. The committee’s purpose was to decide to what extent I placed participants at risk within my study. This was a Level 1 risk factor as I was the main participant of the study. Co-workers and students contributed data that assisted me in focusing on the actions of my practice.

Next I secured informed consent/assent from participants. Mia, my critical friend, read the informed consent form and agreed to participate by providing her signature on the consent statement. On April 14, 2015, I began the process of personally contacting
parents of the students in my three reading groups by phone. This conversation focused on the purpose of the study, and requested permission to videotape students during instructional periods. After the parent granted verbal consent by phone, permission slips were sent home with the child. A second phone call was made on April 15, 2015, for those parents whom I did not speak to, or for whom I left a message on the first evening. The final round of calls took place on April 21, 2015. Two of those calls involved speaking to the families of students learning the English language. At one home, the phone was passed from person to person (totaling five different people) as I tried to convey the purpose of my call. Finally, the phone was handed back to the son. He had been the first person to answer, but had given the phone to his mother when I asked to speak to the student’s parent. The son listened and translated the information to his mom. Next I spoke to a different student’s mother. This parent had not received the packet sent home; she stated that her boys tended to think that anything directed home from school was bad. Another permission slip and an explanation of its purpose was given to that student for his parents to sign. A homework pass was earned when each student returned the permission slip to school with a parent signature. Prior to videotaping, I individually reviewed the procedure for obtaining consent with each child. All names within this study, except my own, were pseudonyms.

**Phase 2: Data Collection**

Data collection began March 23, 2015, and continued until June 5, 2015, a ten-week period. There was no school at this site during the first week of April (April 6 through April 10) due to spring break. The chart below, Figure 7, illustrates how often
data was collected for each source. Lesson plans were created weekly for each of my three reading groups. Writing of personal reflection entries and field notes occurred four to five times per week. Critical friend conversations totaled 15 during the ten-week period, and one additional phone discussion occurred after school ended. Twenty-five videotapes documented small group class instruction during the ten-week period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lesson Plans</th>
<th>Personal Reflections</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
<th>Critical Friend Conversations</th>
<th>Videos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8. Weekly Schedule of Data Collection*

**Multiple data sources.** To enhance critical reflection on my practice I needed to stand in and outside of myself (Brookfield, 1995). I needed a rich and diverse set of artifacts that reflected the complex, diverse, and full nature of my professional practice. These artifacts captured decisions made in the moment, and provided evidence of spontaneous back talk of reflection-in-action situations.

Our voice, our understandings, and our assumptions pervade our self-study. We need to ponder ways to collect data as evidence that allows us to make claims, the voice of the researcher and the researched (the self-conducting the study/the self...
being studied) about the question . . . being explored to ensure more authentic claims about our own thinking and understanding … capture learning in the process of that learning. (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 112)

The following chart, Figure 9, outlines six data sources that were utilized to portray my practice as an intervention specialist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Purpose of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Plans</td>
<td>Written record of instructional strategies and activities</td>
<td>Recorded instruction in terms of time limits (number of days and minutes), strategies, activities, grouping and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Written record of on-the-spot happenings</td>
<td>Detailed changes to instruction, the catalyst for these changes, and the outcome of these changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>Written record of practitioner’s feelings, thoughts, ideas of planning prior, during and after lessons, possible ideas for reframing situations, etc.</td>
<td>Documented feelings, thoughts, and ideas of the practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videotaping</td>
<td>Visual records of in-the-moment decision making and the resulting back-talk</td>
<td>Authenticated in-the-moment practitioner/student behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical friend team meetings</td>
<td>Audio files of conversations between critical friend and practitioner</td>
<td>Documented discussions with critical friend representing interpretations/observations outside of the practitioner’s viewpoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9. Data Sources*

*Lesson plans.* Lesson plans provided a blueprint of my daily schedule, and the scope and sequence of the reading skills taught each day. They also provided information about the strategies and activities utilized for instruction, student groupings, organization of activities, and materials needed for lessons. Plans for each of the three
groups of students were made on a weekly basis. For six months prior to the ten-week data collection period I worked to develop a format that incorporated the previously listed essential information. Figure 10 is an example of the daily lesson plans included in my data collection. The figure also contains information pertaining to the instructional purpose of each group, the time allotted for instruction, and a composite of the students in the three groups who were focused upon for this self-study. Aspects of all of this information were reflected upon in conversations with my critical friend and in my journal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention Specialist’s Daily Lesson Plans</th>
<th>Language Arts Lessons – 3 Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each weekly lesson plan included the following items:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Established framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organization of time, space, activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Graphic organizers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Key words to focus upon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decomposing a skill into smaller chunks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Outline thought process to describe projected outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key to student learning groups:
IEP – Individual Education Plan written for students with identified special education needs
SLD – Specific Learning Disabled
OHI – Other Health Impaired
ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
504 – Educational document listing accommodations for a student with a diagnosed medical condition that impacts learning in the school environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevention, Intervention Enrichment Group “PIE”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guided Reading Group</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guided Reading Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 minute instructional period</td>
<td>55 minute instructional period</td>
<td>40 minute instructional period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal of Instruction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal of Instruction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goal of Instruction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accuracy/fluency in reading</td>
<td>vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, written language</td>
<td>vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 students</td>
<td>6 students</td>
<td>6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 boys, 2 girls</td>
<td>5 boys, 1 girl</td>
<td>3 boys, 3 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 students with IEPs</td>
<td>4 students with IEPs</td>
<td>4 students with IEPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students identified as SLD</td>
<td>2 students identified as SLD</td>
<td>2 students identified as SLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 students diagnosed as OHI</td>
<td>2 students diagnosed as OHI</td>
<td>2 students diagnosed as OHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 student considered at-risk</td>
<td>1 student considered at-risk</td>
<td>1 student with a 504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 students with ADHD</td>
<td>1 student learning the English language</td>
<td>1 student learning the English language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students diagnosed with bi-polar disorder</td>
<td>4 students diagnosed with ADHD</td>
<td>5 students diagnosed with ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 student diagnosed with bi-polar disorder</td>
<td>1 student diagnosed with bi-polar disorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Connor                    | Connor                                              | Alex                                                 |
| Emily                     | Dylan                                               | Henry                                                |
| Jack                      | Emily                                               | Lily                                                 |
| Lily                      | Jack                                                | Lucy                                                 |
| Nicholas                  | Mason                                               | Madeylyn                                             |
| Noah                      | Nicholas                                            | Noah                                                 |

*Figure 10. Intervention Specialist’s Daily Lesson Plan Format*

**Field notes.** Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) explained that field notes provide a record of experiences, ideas, successes, mistakes, and problems that arise during fieldwork. These notes were divided into two parts, a descriptive section and a reflective one. These served as reference points concerning time and place. Interpretive and analytical comments were recorded, but remained distinct from the practitioner’s notes. Berry (2007) added that field notes provide a written record of observations, interactions, conversations, situational details, and thoughts during a period of study.

In this self-study, the purpose of my field notes was to document in-the-moment
instructional changes. These notes included a description of the new sequence of events. They also identified if students, the school environment, scheduling, or other circumstances were catalysts when adjustments were made from the original lesson plans. Lastly, the field notes detailed student accomplishments and difficulties so that I could reflect on this for future teacher practice.

Field notes were kept daily. Sometimes they were outlined in quick detail during the morning planning period or at lunch. However, my responsibilities as an intervention specialist generally did not allow time to record data in this fashion during the school day. Most often the complete version of changed events was written after school or in the evening, four to five times a week. I do not believe that these actions impacted the integrity of this research because I consistently demonstrated that the students’ needs came first. Thus, putting my responsibilities of work prior to my dedication to this research simply illustrates my dedication to my practice.

**Journaling.** Journaling gave a more free-flowing release for my thoughts, feelings, physical and emotional reactions, interpretations, judgments, and experiences of teaching. Berry (2007) stated that with this tool one can develop observation skills, document personal change, evaluate aspects of practice, and promote critical thinking. Journaling provided necessary distance and abstraction from the immediacy of teaching. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) suggested using journaling as a tool to forward think and document action occurring during the study. Brookfield (1995) recommended keeping a weekly record of the events that impressed themselves most vividly on the practitioner’s consciousness for approximately 15 to 20 minutes per week. Those events that excited
and enraged serve as confirmation or contradiction to one’s assumptions. Those events that engaged emotions often reveal one’s true values. Brookfield encouraged the practitioner to think about events that caused pleasure, stress, or puzzlement.

Journaling documented my thoughts, feelings, and ideas before, during, and after instructional periods. A few times it documented an old memory that surfaced due to the day’s happenings. These words portrayed the various roles I engaged in—as a learner, as an intervention specialist, and as a researcher. The journal differed from my field notes because my reflection log described the person behind the actions, rather than the actions themselves. The format of this reflection log placed the newest dates at the opening/beginning of the journal in the Word document. Journaling occurred four to five times a week.

**Videotaping.** Videotaping captures the moment and allows the researcher contact to multiple layers of experience (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Brookfield (1995) focused on visual and audio information that can be observed. This data includes gestural and verbal tics, facial expressions, tonal qualities, and movement in our teaching. He also noted that videotaping documents the amount of teacher and student talk that occur during a lesson. Berry (2007) described videotaping as obtaining a “slowed down look” of the events. Thus, actions and decisions that were taken “in the moment” are scrutinized and pondered as the recording is replayed. With multiple viewings I recognized dissonance between what I saw and how I felt, creating stimulus for reflection leading to alternative possibilities for action and recreation of practice.

Videotaping was very important for my ability in this self-study to capture
happenings within instructional moments. Utilizing this tool, I had the ability to watch instructional moments multiple times and thus observe happenings that occurred so quickly that I could not keep track of them without a visual record. Videotaping began the week of April 20. The following chart, Figure 11, outlines these occurrences, indicating the number of times each group was videotaped during each weekly period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>School Activities Interfering with Instruction</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/20/15 – 4/24/15</td>
<td>OAA Testing in Language Arts – 1 day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27/15 – 5/2/15</td>
<td>PARCC Testing for Math – 2 days</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/4/15 – 5/8/15</td>
<td>DIBELS Benchmark School-Wide Assessment – 3 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/11/15 – 5/15/15</td>
<td>Grade Level Fieldtrip – 1 day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/18/15 – 5/22/15</td>
<td>Grade Level Fieldtrip – 1 day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/26/15 – 5/29/15</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/15 – 6/5/15</td>
<td>Field Day – 1 day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11. Videotaping Schedule*

During the first five weeks of videotaping, I was quite successful in viewing the lesson either on the night the data was collected or during the following weekend. Viewing of the final two weeks of taping was held off until the school year was complete, because my job’s responsibilities took priority and needed to be finished by the last day of school.

*Audio recorded conversations with critical friend.* Brookfield (1995) listed many reasons to engage in conversations with a critical friend. First, these conversations help break down a sense of isolation as both participants recognize the commonalities of their individual experiences and confirm privately felt instincts. This critical friend acted as a mirror as we listened to each other’s reflections of our actions, which often took us by surprise. A critical friend helps to check one’s interpretations of problems, responses,
assumptions, and justification to gain a clearer perspective on the parts of one’s practice that need closer critical scrutiny. Conversations with this friend increased my awareness of how much was taken for granted in my teaching, and how much of my practice was judgmental. Lastly, as listening and conversing continued, suggestions for new possibilities for practice arose, as well as new ways to analyze and respond to problems.

Audio recordings of the critical friend discussions provided a voice outside of the practitioner’s viewpoint. These audio files documented topics for discussion, the feelings of the critical friend, and solutions to dilemmas. They also recorded the nature of these discussions, including think time and the opportunities given to present one’s position. The critical friend shared her interpretations of this researcher’s perplexities concerning data collection and analysis. Critical friend conversations occurred once or twice a week, ranging in length from seven to sixty minutes long. The following chart, Figure 12, outlines these events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Conversations with Critical Friend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/30/15 – 4/5/15</td>
<td>2 conversations - 3/30, 3/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/6/15 – 4/12/15</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13/15 – 4/19/15</td>
<td>3 conversations – 4/13, 4/13, 4/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/15 – 4/26/15</td>
<td>2 conversations - 4/20, 4/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/18/15 – 5/24/15</td>
<td>1 conversation – 5/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/25/15 – 5/31/15</td>
<td>1 conversation – 5/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/15 – 6/7/15</td>
<td>1 conversation – 6/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/8/15 – 6/14/15</td>
<td>1 phone conversation – 6/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(after school year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16 conversations</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12. Schedule of Critical Friend Conversations*
Data organization. The first challenge of such an extensive collection of data was organization and storage. A personal laptop, purchased specifically for this research study, was used for this purpose. A folder entitled “Dissertation data collection” included files of my daily lesson plans for all three groups, field notes, personal reflections, critical friend conversations, codes, and pseudonyms. Lesson plan folders were designed and organized to add each new week’s information to the beginning of the existing document. Every entry written in field notes and personal reflections was dated, and also placed at the beginning of that document. The laptop had videotaping capabilities and thus all video files were stored on its hard drive. Critical friend conversations were documented and stored on my own personal audio recorder. An external hard-drive was secured and back-up files were created for word processing documents, videotapes, and audio files.

Samaras (2011) suggested creating a research log as an audit trail. In this manner, the validity of my study was increased as I considered and verified the theories and findings I concluded from the data; knowing where I was assisted me in remembering where I was headed. Samaras stated that documentation is a “method of improving the immediate analysis task being carried out, advancing the sophistication of later analyses and deepening the confidence” that I will present in my conclusions (p. 165). Carefully documenting my analysis and then sharing these thoughts with my critical friend allowed opportunities for her input and perspective. This “collaborative inquiry of critical friends is a distinguishing methodological component of self-study research” (p. 165).

For this purpose, in addition to the computer files, a binder was created documenting the chronological sequence of this analysis. This binder had five sections.
The first tab included dated notes of drawings, hand-written memos, charts, and sketched diagrams verifying this researcher’s thinking process as data was analyzed and collapsed into themes. The second tab contained a calendar with references to the collection of videotapes. The third tab housed signed informed consent forms. The fourth tab incorporated a written analysis of each video. Videos were viewed repeatedly and most were analyzed in three distinctive manners. The first video investigation recorded this researcher’s gut reactions to teaching moments and the corresponding video time code. The second analysis utilized a tally system as evidence for turn taking and documentation of the integration of multi-modalities. The final examination charted events and cue numbers to support four themes—discovery, reactions, power, and interactions. The fifth tab in my binder consisted of a written analysis of each critical friend conversation. Audio files were listened to on multiple occasions—driving in the car, working in the house, and taking walks. Dates, times, thoughts, and feelings were noted. Written transcriptions were made of those sections of the file pertinent to specific themes of analysis. Thus, the binder served as a research log.

**Phase 3: Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process and continued after data generation concluded. To begin the process, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) suggest a data exploration phase in which the researcher thinks about the data during an initial reading or viewing. At this time, notes are jotted down in the form of a memo or highlighted text, signifying possible importance to the study. Additional memos are written that note elements that seem to be coming together or data that seem to be
problematic. The researcher sketches visual aids and designs charts to assist in thinking about the data. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) explain that this “first run through the data techniques . . . [can] potentially draw out some findings” (p. 347).

Prompted by these researchers’ suggestions I kept an electronic journal entitled “Today’s Reflections” that spanned from 11/23/2014 to 3/31/2015. These entries detailed my thoughts as I prepared the dissertation proposal and examined possible avenues of execution for my self-study. Thus, my initial viewing and exploration phase occurred when I reread these preliminary accounts of my personal reflections. Five key words surfaced that identified possible categories or topics to focus on when analyzing the self-study field notes and personal reflections. These terms were discovery, power, reactions, limitations of time and energy, and interactions.

Coding. As soon as data collection began, I color-coded documents using these categories. Each weekend, information collected from the previous week was coded according to the following colors: teal – discovery, green – power, yellow – reactions, purple – limitations of time and energy, and light gray – interactions. Creswell (2014) described the following steps to form codes. First, read the entire document carefully, getting an essence of the whole, then write down ideas that come to mind. Next, think about the underlying meaning, not the substance of the information; again jot notes in the margin. After completing these first two steps for several documents, make a list of all topics and cluster similar ones together. Then, create a visual displaying these ideas in terms of major topics, unique topics, and leftover topics. Using this list of topics, generate abbreviated codes and write them next to appropriate segments of data.
Assigning a statement to a specific category came at an intuitive gut level. Sometimes I surprised myself by coding a particular statement to a category. When such a situation happened, I recorded in written form the many thoughts that presented themselves. In this manner a myriad of possible connections began to display themselves, although at that time the process simply seemed like a chaotic mess.

Since my questioning thoughts were relentless I shared them with Mia to gather another perspective. On April 20, we began an on-going conversation about power as it relates to students. To both of us one student in particular exhibited power—Mason. Many of our dialogues highlighted our constant struggle to problem solve and create solutions that displayed fairness to Mason, as well as to the other students involved in any given situation. Interactions and reactions, especially those regarding lesson plan changes, were also discussed on multiple occasions (4/27, 5/6, 5/14, 6/1, and 6/10). Limitations in the areas of time and energy tested us each and every day. I believe that our persevering actions to endure these limits spoke louder than any verbal discussions we had on the topic. When reviewing the theme of discovery I noticed that I often exhibited the actions of a “giddy girl.” Many audio files portrayed my undeniable excitement when sharing a happening with Mia (3/31, 4/21, 5/4, 5/20, and 6/10).

Memos. Samaras (2011) stated that the brain is always taking in data and creating patterns of its own. These mental observations may include repeated behaviors, patterns, contrasts, chunking and linking similar information, and sequencing or associating related factors. She encouraged the researcher to keep written notes of this meaning, as mental notes can be easily forgotten. In this way I provided myself with
multiple opportunities to revisit my thinking, reflect honestly, and study my role as a researcher. This “process of noting regularities and patterns, topics, chunks, or classifications assists in condensing data and also helps guard against facing a data overload” (Samaras, 2011, p. 200).

Given this advice, I created a file labeled “Dissertation Journal” on 6/12/2015. These pages documented my brain chatter as I grappled with data and wrote my ideas. The writings recorded various topics, a mixture of strategies for working, my feelings, and the physical reactions I experienced on any given day. At the conclusion of a work period I often included my list of successes for the day, as well as encouraging words to myself.

Samaras (2011) described codes as labels or tags that assign units of meaning to the information collected throughout a study. She stressed that generating a master file of one’s coding system is imperative. This file served as a reminder of the meaning I appointed to each color, letter, or abbreviation code. She noted that coding categories could include codes about the setting, definitions of the situation, perspectives, processes or changes over time, strategies, events, relationships, narratives, activity or behavior codes, and reflections about researcher methods. She encouraged researchers to examine the elements and properties of these codes, conceptually focusing on the study’s research questions. As the study progressed, and data proved to be insufficient in supporting initial ideas, these original codes changed or were discarded. Samaras stated that discarding codes indicated the researcher was coming to a closer understanding of the research.
Memos were particularly helpful as I observed videotapes. I wrote the following paragraph after the initial viewing of the first video.

I was fascinated watching myself on the video. It was past time to get ready for bed and I kept watching to the very end. The movement of the lesson from one activity to another was seamless. As I watched I did not feel the anxiety that I often feel when I am teaching. That anxiety focuses on the idea that I’m not doing something correctly. I would say it did not occur because as I watched I saw a very confident teacher keeping a lesson moving, the students not only engaged but constructed knowledge through explanations, discussions, and problem solving using past history of lessons learned. (4/22/2015)

After the second viewing of videotapes, my memos displayed a very different perspective of myself as I engaged my organizational nature into the analytical process. These pages included charts documenting teacher/student turn taking, the nature of teacher talk, and moment-by-moment dissection of multi-sensory tasks within the larger scope of an activity. It was interesting to note that memos written after conversations with Mia were often very critical of myself. At one point I wrote, “I feel needy, I’m doing all the talking.”

**Classification.** The next initiative was to combine these codes into broader categories or themes. This began the process of moving from raw data to larger categories. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) stated that just a small amount of data collection and analysis can unveil important patterns. Thus, data collection worked interactively with data analysis in an ongoing process. Creswell (2007) explained that
progressing beyond coding into classification refers to taking the text or qualitative information apart, and then searching for categories, themes, or dimensions of information. My goal in classification was to recognize five to seven broad themes that could be subdivided. With the technique of “winnowing the data – a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it” (Creswell, 2014, p. 195), this objective was obtained. Samaras (2011) urged researchers to keep documentation of what was discarded and why. She also suggested reviewing these thoughts with a critical friend.

Thus, for my next step of analysis I created 10 more files: five files (discovery, power, reactions, limitations of time and energy, and interactions) in which all the same color-coded statements were grouped together for field notes and five additional files arranging these same classifications in a similar fashion for personal reflections. For example, all green-coded power statements for field notes were placed in one file, while all green-coded power statements for personal reflections were assigned to a separate document. The purpose in keeping these statements detached was to determine if a significant difference occurred between them. I numbered each entry and wrote a single word or phrase to identify the main idea of the statement. Once all entries were numbered and labeled, charts were created depicting how the codes of the filed statements correlated. Some charts were simple—I chose to group the statements with the same code together and then calculate a percentage of occurrences. Some charts were extensive, such as the one created for analyzing interactions. This chart encompassed five pages—three columns for each entry. In the first column I identified the roles
enacted by the student and teacher, the second pinpointed which actions were associated with the five learning modalities (visual, verbal, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic), and finally the last column generated a phrase to describe the overall action of the sequence.

**Building connections/relationships.** Samaras (2011) offered the following technique as another way to manage the data analysis process. Using sticky notes and large pieces of poster paper I shifted different sized and color notes from one category to another as I decided on the best categorical fit for a code. The physical movement and graphic organization attracted me to this method. This step offered an opportunity to relax and play with the data. I enjoyed being creative by using various colored markers and notepads. Designing several different graphic organizers to illustrate my thought process permitted a break from operating in the auditory/verbal domain of reading and rereading files upon files of written data.

Hence, upon completion of these ten files and analytical charts, I transferred each code to a single post-it note. The color-coding system was retained; for example, the word “Mason” was written in green magic marker on a green sticky note, signifying power. Next, the main research question and three sub-questions were each written on a single piece of twelve-by-eighteen inch off-white construction paper. Post-it notes were placed on one of the four construction papers reflecting my thoughts on the best correlation between a question and the code written on the note. At this point I recognized that the coded notes of the category “limitations of time and energy” were not specifically correlating to any sub-question; rather the category seemed to encompass the entire study. Several different diagrams were drawn trying to depict how this category
created a framework for all of the data. As a final step, I wrote a memo for each question highlighting the main ideas that seemed to be emerging. Then I reread my dissertation proposal. At the conclusion of this task I sensed that I had accomplished my goal and could answer my research questions. I shared these diagrams with my advisors. After a ninety-minute discussion a format for the three sub-questions had surfaced.

Creswell (2007) defined a category as “a unit of information composed of events, happening, and instances” (p. 64). These units, or categories, were created as I saw relationships and connections among and between the separate codes. Creswell also stated that these categories or themes are built from the bottom up as the researcher organizes data into progressively more conceptual units of information. First utilizing an inductive process, the researcher alternates between these themes and the database until a comprehensive set of themes has been established. Then he/she engages in a deductive process that looks back at the data to verify if more evidence can support each theme or if additional information needs to be gathered.

Samaras (2011) indicated that showing my work allows others to see my “thinking and interpretations as well as my misinterpretations” (p. 165). In providing adequate detail and description of how I proceeded with my analysis, including the steps I took to sort and organize the vast amount of data, I tell others what I learned. This work displays the transparent path I followed to reframe my understandings of my research and increase my expertise. Ultimately, I tried to decipher what the data said about my research question and my interpretation of this data within the context of my teaching
practice. Samaras also suggested stating the limitations of one’s work, and explaining the role of one’s critical friend in the study’s analysis and interpretations.

Beginning with a clean slate, I typed each research sub-question into a separate document. Discussion points defining units of classification derived from the dialogue with my advisors were noted under the appropriate question. Figure 13 below outlines and names those groupings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-question # 1</th>
<th>What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their zones of proximal development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>An invitation to learn and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>List of scaffolds – pacing, degree of intensity – reflective thinking – recreate situations in my head – what works or not, better opportunity to meet student’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Creating space and context to allow the students opportunities to demonstrate power in regards to the skills – empowering students – shifting power from teacher to students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-question # 2</th>
<th>What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that directs my questions and planning for future activities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>In-action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>On - action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Whole class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-question # 3</th>
<th>How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making (e.g. content of classes, administrative decisions, and my disability)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Institutional influences - powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Limitation of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Interruptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Research Question Groupings

Next, a three-column chart was designed to organize specific data points for all ten groupings. The first column identified the audio or video file associated with the data.
point. The second column recognized which class (A, B, or C) was featured. The third column summarized the activity. Assigning information to the chart was a three-step process. First, I reread the field notes and personal reflection documents, noting significant data points. Then, I utilized the fourth tab of my binder to peruse through the analysis of the videotapes. If I questioned my notes I watched the video again. Lastly, I walked and listened to the audio files once more. On 6/27/2015 my dissertation journal entry was a single word – saturation. I felt I had included enough data points for each of the ten groupings to support my findings. However, I still was not ready to write.

I then returned to the first sub-question’s document and began the process of keeping examples that best illustrated my point while weeding out those that were redundant. I moved the redundant information to a document entitled “Leftovers.” This was to ensure that if I changed my mind I would have an easy path to retrieve the information in the future. I repeated this process for the second and third sub-questions.

Finally I began to write. It was a long arduous process that involved moving back and forth among all three types of data. The data contained rich, thick descriptions, but getting to a complete portrayal of the scene required watching videos and listening to audio files again and again. I often stopped the writing process to clarify information by rereading my field notes or journal entries, which corresponded with the dates of these video and audio files. In this manner, I provided the reader with vignettes of my practice, as well as my personal experiences with each of these situations. At times, the given example was a “feel-good event,” but other instances depicted the tension occurring in the moment. As stories came together, I realized there was an overabundance of data.
This additional information would not need to be transformed into written form for my findings. Thus, research questions two and three were trimmed down from the original outline provided in the previous figure.

Roadmaps (i.e., charts) outlining the divisions and subdivisions for each subsidiary question were created. These roadmaps provided my reader with a navigational tool that enabled them to sift through this intervention specialist’s actions within a school day. Additionally, I constructed three diagrams illustrating the framework of my findings as it applied to each of the three sub-questions. Although I used a circular target for both the first and third subsidiary research questions, the premise of each is very different. The first sub-question’s diagram portrays the three phases of learning and instructional design. The third sub-question’s schema specifically relates to the four layers of institutional influences that affect interpretation of government mandates. Constructing the graphic for the second sub-question helped me to expose my thinking process to myself. The presentation of these findings for sub-question two continually evolved as I used pictures and labels to name the path my thinking followed. On several occasions I cut and pasted to reorganize information as knowledge of my unique thinking patterns emerged. The final product materialized after an extended period of rest and then a re-examination of my work.

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2007) stated that researchers need to be sensitive to ethical considerations. These ethical factors include reciprocity, confidentiality, protecting anonymity, and most important to me, “Did I get the story right?” (p. 44). This question
returned me to my purpose in doing the study—to provide a vibrant portrait of an intervention specialist in action, and to grasp the nature of instructional changes. I wanted the quality of my work to represent the unique position an intervention specialist embraces within an inclusion classroom. Creswell (2014) further explained that the researcher of a qualitative study seeks believability based on consistency, awareness, and active efficiency. Attaining this level of believability leads to trustworthiness through a process of verification of the data.

To achieve this goal I first presented myself as the person within this self-study. I described my personal and professional personalities, allowing the reader to build connections with the individual behind the research. I exposed my vulnerabilities as well as my strengths. The journey of coming to understand my unique learning system was depicted within the pages of this self-study. Then I portrayed the environment within which I worked. This background knowledge provided the reader with an awareness of who I am as a person, a teacher, and a researcher.

My next step employed rigorous data collection procedures. Viewing the research question through various perspectives facilitated a collection of rich, thick data. This included observing my practice through others, specifically co-workers and students who experienced my actions. These observations were felt through multiple senses: visual (video recordings and visual representation of my thoughts in Word files), verbal/auditory (conversations with my critical friend, audio files, and talking or reading to myself), kinesthetic (process of writing or typing lesson plans, field notes, and journaling), and tactile (manipulation of papers, books, and various items during
Experiencing my practice through all my senses permitted me to shed layers of anxiety, staying open to how I felt in the moment. Even when it didn’t make sense, and it often did not, I kept recording what was occurring in the moment.

Dated computer files and my research binder provided proof of the identifiable steps I engaged in to analyze the data. These steps offered the reader a transparent path of the journey I traveled to develop my findings. Member checking with my critical friend occurred throughout the analysis. I often questioned whether my account resonated with my critical friend. Thus, I shared data, analysis, feelings, and writings with Mia through each step of the process. In turn, she shared her thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Through our cooperative teamwork we agreed that the given accounts of these findings were accurate.

During the writing process I utilized triangulation to “get the story right.” I took time to re-experience the data through multiple senses. For example, when writing about the props in my findings I placed the object on my computer desk. I picked the item up, examined it from different views, and wrote lists to describe the various parts and functions of the object. Next, I reread the data from my field notes and personal journal that pertained to the object. Then I took a walk, listening to conversations Mia and I engaged in that referenced the object. Finally, I repeatedly viewed video files that incorporated this object. As I teased out the story, I often stopped to repeat a step of this process to clarify the details. When I encountered writer’s block and was unable to shape the story, I documented the feelings that seemed to obstruct my progress. Some vignettes required hours and hours of moving among the data sources to “get the story right.”
Ensuring confidentiality and protecting anonymity required that I carefully examine my presentation of the students in each of the three small groups of instruction. It was important to provide my reader with a full description of the student’s nature without disclosing the child’s identity. Thus, pseudonyms were used from the onset so that even my data sets did not reveal the child’s real name. This same confidentiality procedure was utilized with co-workers. If I paired the co-worker’s position with their pseudonym in the data, this information was removed from the formal writing to prevent potential identification.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to utilize a reflective thinking practice to examine my part of the teaching/learning cycle, discerning what information led to decisions in creating scaffolds for students’ Zone of Proximal Development. Quite honestly, this process was a mystery to me. I took comfort in Schön’s (1983) words that described knowing in action as spontaneous, an intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life. He explained that one often cannot say what is known. When the effort is given to provide an explanation of one’s practice, a person finds himself or herself at a loss, and the descriptions are obviously inappropriate. My initial investigations delved into the context within which the thoughts of my practice occurred—my life. This demanded that I first consider unresolved issues with my disability, and then my insecurities concerning my auditory and verbal skills. In regards to both, there existed an unknown internal conflict. My actions told one story, but my thoughts followed another path. In exposing these insecurities and incongruities to myself, and then sharing them with my critical friend, I initiated a difficult conversation with myself. Now I was exposing these dialogues to a researcher’s perspective. When data collection began, the dialogues widened to accommodate the thousands of thoughts that occurred during my teaching day.

How do I use reflective thinking to inform my choices in designing instruction to support my teaching? I use reflective thinking to build faith in myself and the decisions I
make for students learning how to read. For me faith demands a belief in goodness. Hence, I am trusting that at any particular moment in time I make choices that offer kindness and integrity. Taking time to reflect permits an opportunity to pull significant moments together, developing a cohesive picture of a situation. These moments of enlightenment may happen in many different places and occasions, so I need a period to gather my thoughts and sort through the myriad of experiences that occurred in the school day.

Three subsidiary questions guided my research. In the following paragraph, I will follow a format of presenting the sub-question first then the correlating findings. Sub-question 1: What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their Zones of Proximal Development? The principles that directed my decisions on how to support learning and facilitate students’ abilities to work within their personal Zones of Proximal Development exhibited values and standards that ignited an invitation to learn and be motivated and created environments to encourage student empowerment. Sub-question 2: What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that directs my questions and planning for future activities? My personal attention was directed to those tensions in my practice that required change by igniting a problem solving sequence that offered possible strategies and solutions. Sub-question 3: How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making? I felt that outside factors, including institutional influences, limitations, and interruptions, distracted me from my primary purpose—teaching. Overall, my purpose as an intervention specialist is to create experiences for the learner that provide a sense of
faith in one’s ability to keep trying and to work through limitations and frustration. For each person building that sense of faith takes something different. In the following sections I will expand on these findings.

Sub-question 1: What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their zones of proximal development?

The elements I uncovered during the data collection process, and contemplated throughout analysis, fell into one of three categories. Each category emphasized a specific purpose and phase of learning/instructional design. The purpose of the first phase was to incorporate a sense of play and fun within the instructional period, inviting students to participate in the learning process. This invitation encouraged and motivated children to partake in the lesson. The purpose of the second phase was to provide supports, enabling students to put forth their best efforts particularly when I, the intervention specialist, could not be directly by their side. These supports, also referred to as scaffolds, supplied various experiences and practice periods enhancing academic and behavioral skills. The purpose of the final phase was to create both a space and a context that challenged students to guide their own learning. Within this environment learners began to identify a problem (i.e., How do I decode this unknown vocabulary term?), offer a solution, initiate the action, and adopt a “can do” attitude. These three phases of learning/instructional design are illustrated in Figure 14 below.
A tier system was used to illustrate these three phases of learning/instructional design because each phase works best when students have experienced the previous one. The circular framework enables me to visualize pulling the students towards an engaging environment, rather than conceding to their outward gaze. Furthermore, as each level collapses into the next, students are acquiring skills that will enable them to take ownership of their learning. Thus, at the nucleus of the diagram students become their own facilitators of knowledge, rather than relying on a teacher.

The following chart (Figure 15) acts as an outline or a roadmap to reading the findings of these three phases. Each phase is divided into subcategories. The first segment, an invitation to learn and be motivated, has four sub-categories. The second stage, designing scaffolds, is separated into eight supports. The final level, creating
environments to encourage student empowerment, encompasses four different perspectives to fostering a child’s independence. Each phase of learning concludes with a paragraph entitled “Applications.” This paragraph explains the relevance of my findings to current school policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation to Learn and be Motivated</th>
<th>Designing Scaffolds</th>
<th>Creating Environments to Encourage Student Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting the Table</td>
<td>Peer Tutors</td>
<td>Teacher’s Blunders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Props</td>
<td>Oral Reading / Multi-Modalities</td>
<td>Student Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Personal Experiences Based Upon Information from the Reading Selection</td>
<td>Extended Time</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coins, Bingo (games) and Prizes</td>
<td>Directions – Visual/Verbal</td>
<td>target performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>Clarifying Directions</td>
<td>Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Routines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Praise, Feedback,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 15. Three Phases of Learning/Instructional Design*

**Invitation to Learn and Be Motivated**

“I’m invited!” Those words may create a rush of excitement for the person receiving an invitation to an event. For me, school needs to be an event. Each child needs an invitation to be part of a learning community that encourages that sense of belonging. Obviously, just because children show up at school does not mean they are willing to learn. Teachers need to entice those feelings of enthusiasm, fostering a desire to put forth one’s best effort. However, lighting a fire within a child to engage in learning does not mean it will continue to burn. Thus, teachers need to fan the flames
and build connections that help ensure students’ further commitment to their own learning, particularly when the going gets tough.

**Setting the table.** One morning I had just completed “setting the table” (i.e., organizing materials in class) for my first period of instruction with group A. The table was dark blue and shaped like an amoeba. At the center was a single eight-by-ten white board with directions written in large black letters. Placed at each of the six seats was a copy of the poem “Um” and a yellow highlighter. Nancy, our special education assistant, remarked that the table was very inviting for the students to come in and learn. I watched the following scene play out, wondering if her statement was true. The written directions instructing students to highlight words that rhymed with “new” also implied a challenge. Nicholas was the first to begin working and he quickly highlighted “grew.” Others sat down, saw his effort, and began to try too. Students read and reread while highlighting. They maintained attention on task while locating four, then five, and finally six rhyming words. Soon the children were focusing on the final rhyming word, *gruesome*. Using their iPads and Google Images to figure out the term’s meaning, they quickly saw pictures of grisly things. Then I spoke for the first time during the lesson, describing the meaning of the word gruesome, using the pictures to assist me in explaining the term.

“Wow, Nancy was right,” I thought, “the students had been invited to learn; they chose to take the plunge and read.” My reflection that day included these personal ambitions, “I want my students to be invited to the party . . . enticing them to be a part of the community of learners.” I also posed this question to myself, “What’s the selling point
(gimmick, device or strategy) that pulls the students into the interaction?” and the answer—inviting environment, inviting activities.

Why is the word “inviting” so important to me? This term reflects an appealing, fascinating, encouraging, and welcoming nature. Why does it matter? I want to create occurrences that the body experiences, even if the mind does not remember, that draw the students again and again to work past the difficulty of learning. I want to focus on the enjoyable and fun, rather than the difficult and scary.

**Props.** When I introduced the story “Thinking Like Fred” for group B I brought in a prop—a stuffed dog that could be held in the palm of one’s hand. This grade-level reading selection was the fictional story of a dog’s first and last experience riding an elevator. The hand-held pup seemed to add comfort and excitement from the moment the students’ gaze fell upon it, a small gray hound dog with dark brown spots, long floppy ears, a red collar, and droopy eyes. At first, “Fred” simply listened to the group chorally read the story together. Then, he began to partner with one child and then the next. The draw and incentive for the student was that they had to read the paragraph independently in order to earn the privilege of holding “Fred.” As “Fred” hung out with each new friend, he was expected to listen and then restate in his own words what action had occurred in the previous paragraph. On “Fred’s” first few attempts he struggled to explain the main ideas and actions of the words he had listened to. However, once he hung out with his pal Dylan he was a pro. “Fred’s” voice was as strong as Dylan’s animated expressions, including the huge round saucers of the boy’s eyes, as he provided an explanation that was right on target with what was happening in the story. Now the
others laughed while Dylan’s voice modulated through a variety of registers as he told the events in proper sequence. “Fred’s” performance had the others begging for a chance to try. When another student, Connor, got his opportunity, “Fred” reread the paragraph word for word in a squeaky voice rather than restating the action in his own words. Not the account I was hoping for, but a demonstration of Connor’s understanding of the task. This demonstration gave me insight to future activities that could be employed. For example, Connor could use a hand puppet to practice restating the main idea of a paragraph. I am hopeful that positive memories were made and will stay with these students who engaged in a difficult task using another character rather than risking using their own.

Creating personal experiences based upon information from the reading selection. Duck was the next prop to make an appearance in my classroom, with groups B and C. However, he didn’t physically arrive until two days after the idea was conceived. Nearly eight inches long and six inches wide, Duck could sprawl on his belly spread-eagle fashion or sit hunched over on his bottom. His sunshine yellow spiky fur accented the bright orange webbed feet and rounded bill. Duck’s two black-beady eyes seemed to be looking forward to the upcoming events of the game the students would create. He hung out with us for nearly ten days, presenting cohesiveness to an extended period of interrupted instruction. The Ohio Academic Achievement (OAA) reading test had been held over the previous week (4-20-15), and the next ten days held the promise of still more assessments. The schedule (Figure 16) was presented as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Small Group Guided Instruction</th>
<th>Reason Instruction Cancelled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>4-27-15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>4-28-15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>PARCC Math Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4-29-15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>PARCC Math Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>4-30-15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>5-1-15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>5-4-15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>5-5-15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School-wide DIBELS Benchmark Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>5-6-15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School-wide DIBELS Benchmark Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>5-7-15</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School-wide DIBELS Benchmark Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>5-8-15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 16. Schedule of Cancellations for Small Group Guided Reading Instruction*

Thus, Duck was a visual of the promised fun the students would have as they entered class on and off again during that ten-day period.

In the regular classroom, students were reading the biography of James Naismith, the man who invented basketball. The assignment I was given to teach consisted of an abbreviated reading selection of this classroom biography, twelve multiple choice questions, and a written response constructing a paragraph of the important events in the main character’s life. The selection provided lots of dates and specific events from which to create a timeline. Making this type of graphic organizer provided a framework from which students would later write the paragraph about James Naismith. The timeline’s physical structure consisted of a manila piece of paper eighteen inches long and six inches wide, and Post-it notes on which to write the specific events. Instruction adhered
to the following pattern: chorally read a paragraph, identify the date, discuss the events, as a group create a statement that included important facts, and copy this sentence onto a sticky note. Observing this routine seven times over to complete the graphic organizer was a very lofty goal on my part. The manila paper and Post-it notes were different and a bit enticing, but not enough to hold the students’ attention for the entire length of time. Fortunately, the second paragraph of the reading selection offered an idea for encouraging prolonged attention. In this section of the story, the author described a game that James Naismith loved to play with his friends when they were young boys. The game was entitled “Duck on a Rock.” (It is to be noted that the “duck” in the original game in 1870 was simply a large rock.)

On Monday, once the preliminaries of making a line and writing a title were settled, I said, “There’s a really cool game James played when he was little.” Emily’s hand shot up in the air, and bursting with excitement she supplied this description: “I know, I know it, it’s called Duck on a Rock. They put duck on the rock and they get stones, and they throw it. And if when they throw it they have to get their stone, and if they get tagged then they get out.” Enthusiastically I stated, “I would like to play that game. However, I am not allowed to use rocks.” Nicholas suggested bean bags, and I concurred that I had brought them to school with the same thought. Jack was a bit confused and requested another explanation. His classmate Mason, in a very quiet voice, provided the information a second time. However, Jack could not hear him, and asked for one more clarification. With my encouragement, Mason repeated his explanation. Thus, having discussed the particulars of the game, the students agreed to my bargain of
earning seven stickers when constructing their time lines in order to play “Duck on a Rock.” After working for nearly an hour, time ran out. The students had each earned six stickers; they left class eager to return and earn the seventh.

Of course, the proposed schedule changed once again. In the original plan the next instructional period was slated for Thursday, but it was actually bumped up to Wednesday. I wrote the following entry on Tuesday.

So I guess I need to start with the game on Wednesday for both groups. This has given me time to let the guidelines brew around in my head. First I need a guard – I’ll choose that person randomly – picking their name block from a bag. Review the role of the guard – not let another player’s bean bag knock the blue bag – duck – off the basket. As I’m writing I think I have a stuffed duck downstairs that can be used. That will help solidify the purpose of each item in the game. The players need to throw their bean bag to try to knock the duck off the basket. If they get it they become the new guard, if they miss they have to grab their bean bag without being tagged by the guard. In my mind I keep picturing Mason, possibly Connor getting rough – that’s their nature and if the game was outside it would be OK, but I need to address this concern. My words are not together yet – I have some more time to think about it.

On Wednesday, Duck was perched on a rectangular prism basket on the floor greeting students as they entered class; six bean bags were piled nearby. Having taken the time to individually evaluate each timeline on Tuesday, I determined that three of the six students had included enough information to earn the last sticker. Thus, I strategically
grouped a student who had a completed timeline with one that was unfinished. By pairing the two children together, both were encouraged to reread and discover the missing information that needed to be added to the unfinished timeline. Next, the students were charged with the task of proposing three rules they would all agree upon to follow when playing the game. After a group discussion of each proposed idea, the students typed the rules. This was my solution to address the concern of possible excessive roughness, knowing the students would adhere to the rules they had designed themselves. Finally it was game time. I was shocked that the students were able to get the duck knocked off the rock in under ten seconds. The event took less than four minutes (video #134, time stamp 12:00 to 15:52). Mia assured me, though, that they returned to class very excited to share their experience.

Duck’s presence enticed students through two more assignments—partner work to answer twelve multiple-choice questions and writing a paragraph. The same guidelines were used—earn seven stickers to play the game. These tasks were difficult, but the students persevered, working together for a common cause—to play Duck again. As I reread my personal reflections of that ten-day period I discovered a very philosophical twist to my thinking.

Background and experience are a large part of the equation. As a teacher I’m trying to enrich the students’ lives with both of these elements, but I cannot make-up for a childhood of choices the students’ parents have made for them. Nor should I, it is not my life or my choice. I believe this disparity of the have and have-nots in turn affects the students’ perceptions about their skills, which affects
their receptors in the challenge of learning to read. There is a [mental] block, not a flow of information. The more the child feels it is hard, the harder everyone has to work to break down this perception. (5-6-2015)

…Teaching reading is individual and requires lots of fun. When a group of students that struggle are put together comparing thoughts enter, and maintaining that message – slow and steady, keep practicing, stay the race, a little bit every day, someone will always be better, others have it worse than you – all come into play. Reading is social because of the need to make meaning from the world around one’s self. How does the way I teach reading encourage students to engage in a process that is difficult for them? I walk the line between providing the feelings and experiences that students need to engage in and the rules of the [teaching] game. (5-6-2015)

**Coins, bingo, prizes.** I believe my best tactic to entice student motivation occurred when I pulled out the coins. It amazed me how student performance improved with the appearance of these simple round discs.

By the third trial I realized I needed the coins to keep them tracking as they read, three coins – if they lost them all, [the student] would be on the wall outside at recess – that seemed very negative so [I] also put a positive twist – teddy graham if they kept all three. Both students did a great job of tracking [on] the third trial. The other two [previous] times [the children experienced] many more lost positions. [I] also [noted that they were] more careful in listening to words [on the third trial]. (4/16/2015)
I didn’t want to use these tokens too often and risk their effectiveness. Although I had never shared the history of my first pile of coins, it seemed that the students intuitively knew they were special. My first stash had been given to me by my parents. Mom and Dad collected them during the Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans. I treasured those gold coins—in fact, now that my memory is stirred, I also recall the small metal pirate’s treasure box that I used to store them in.

Coins were a great visual to demonstrate student performance. The simple concept of earning and losing tokens was employed. Generally at the onset of the activity each student would receive the same amount of coins. That number was typically low, 2 or 3, and depended upon time limits, difficulty of the task, and the objective of the assignment. Additional coins were earned for reading (either independently or with peers), contributing to the group discussion, and assisting a peer in decoding an unknown word. On one occasion, Mason felt I should award Dylan two coins for reading because the paragraph had been extra-long and difficult. When a student did not track with his finger as a selection was read, he would lose a coin. Verbal reminders to track rarely achieved the same effectiveness as removing a coin from the student’s collection. The final reward and amount of coins needed differed from one experience to the next. One day I awarded a teddy graham for every six coins earned. It was great fun for me to watch the students savor their treat, first nibbling on the ears, arms and legs before gobbling up the body.

One of my most common rewards was “ten coins equals a bingo pick.” This game used a bingo grid with the words “I Read” printed across the top on the horizontal
axis. The numbers one through five were placed on the left of the vertical axis. A “bingo pick” meant the child would choose a card from a group of twenty-five. A letter and number were written on each card. For example, R – 3 meant the student went to the “R” column and counted down three spaces. A sticker was placed at this intersecting point. If a sticker was already positioned at this spot the child chose another card. When the student earned a row of stickers horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, they received a prize from my prize box.

This phase of learning/instructional design incorporated a sense of play and fun within the lesson, inviting students to participate in the learning process. My own personal reflections recalled times when I felt alone and on the outside, because no invitation to join in had been issued. At other times, even when I had an invitation, isolation still occurred because I perceived difficulties that could arise during an event and thus was too afraid to contribute. During the data collection process of this self-study, I realized that presenting appealing and fascinating activities to the students welcomed them to move past their fears and work beyond their performance issues. Through the participation of these enjoyable encounters, students were encouraged to focus on the pleasurable and fun rather than the difficult and scary. Fun and play permitted the freedom to move, feel, and interact. Fun and play tolerated messiness and disorganization. Fun and play allowed us to bond, to build a history together, and make connections. Fun and play brought teachers and students into the moment, focusing on the process while letting go of worry about the product. Fun and play produced energy, the power needed to ignite learning, including my own.
**Applications.** Charged with the responsibility of facilitating learning in all students, teachers and intervention specialists are often overwhelmed with this undertaking. The nature of many of our students is that they struggle to follow classroom rules and learn. These children display behaviors that often distract all members of the learning environment. Such situations cause teachers to make associations that these students are a problem, and one they need to fix. Given this path of thinking, solutions may revolve around giving the child medication or improving the home situation—changes that may never come to fruition. Moving beyond this perspective of a problem to be fixed, the intervention specialist imagines how fun could be used to draw attention away from the difficult and towards positive learning. When a teacher can model placing her focus on a prop, activity, or token that entices learning, then attention is not being targeted on children as a problem. Using these strategies to pull students’ attention to the center of learning motivates them to remain focused and engaged. Thus, a teacher or intervention specialist seeks a common goal that can be hooked to learning and serve as an invitation. This draws students towards one another, looking for commonalities to build connections, overcome distractions, and avoid adverse situations. When members of the group feel isolated, then misconceptions may arise. When misconceptions surface, then problems once again are at the forefront. Thus, instructors need to model encouraging deeds that demonstrate a sense of belonging to members of the learning environment. The group becomes inclusive, not exclusive and elite.
Designing Scaffolds

That invitation to learn, or motivating prop, held power, and I was not going to abuse it. So once the students became invested in a task, I needed to keep them working to its completion. My individual help could only be stretched so far. Thus, the design of my alternatives, or scaffolds, to maintain engagement continually tried to push for the students’ best efforts at all times. For me, effort does not indicate that the task was completed accurately, just that the child was focused and performed at their level of understanding of what should be done. Examples of eight scaffolds are listed below.

Scaffold #1 - peer tutors. I loved using peer tutoring during small group instruction as a scaffold for learning. So often a student’s classmate would provide undivided attention and support. Such an occurrence happened during the final stage of making the timelines with group B. In the video, (134) Dylan never left Emily’s side until she had completed the assignment. From the moment she counted her stickers, realized the need for one more, and verbalized her desire for help, Dylan was literally her right hand man. Bent over Emily’s right shoulder, with his right elbow on the table and left hand fisted on his cheek, Dylan noted the mistake right away. “You didn’t put James’ father.” Emily listened, and then pointed to the blue Post-it note on Dylan’s timeline, asking to rewrite the entire event. I indicated that it was her choice. Both students searched the room for new sticky notes to use. Dylan noticed them first, grabbed a paper and handed it to Emily. He reread the entire sentence to her. He then remained quiet as she put pencil to paper, but his eyes never left the note on which she wrote. At one point, Dylan noticed an error and quickly stated, “No you have to put the dot here.” Again he
was quiet as Emily wrote and repeated the words out loud to herself. When Emily
struggled to write a long word, Dylan assisted her by breaking the word into syllables and
repeating each part several times. Some words he spelled letter by letter. Even during
the final teacher’s evaluation of Emily’s work, Dylan stood ready to help if further
assistance was needed. Amazingly, even in my role as teacher I could not have attended
to Emily’s needs with such dedication.

**Scaffold #2 - oral reading / multi-modalities.** The next scaffold supports oral
reading, which requires more than speaking the words on the written page out loud.
Incidents from my own past acknowledged that simply hearing a word would not
guarantee being able to remember how to pronounce the term on future trials. Layering
scaffolds, by incorporating experiences of multiple modalities (visual, auditory, verbal,
tactile, and kinesthetic) was necessary to sustain student engagement. The following
grade level passage, entitled “Geography Bee – Hottest, Coldest, Highest, Deepest”
illustrates using these multi-modalities scaffolds to encourage students in group C to
think during the reading process.

For this lesson, I did not read the title of the selection to the students. I wanted
them to problem-solve as a group and determine the unknown word—geography. That
was a daunting task, so we begin slow and easy. Lily offered that we could figure out the
word by typing the term (tactile) into Google Images (visual). With this strategy in mind,
the students pointed to the first word on the page, geography (visual), and spelled it out
loud (verbal and auditory). Then they opened their iPads (kinesthetic), and touched the
screen (tactile), to locate the appropriate icon and tool. After typing the term, pictures
appeared (visual), and students called out random words like world, earth, and geometry (verbal and auditory) that came to mind. My excitement began to bubble and I commented, “Oh, you are getting close, that ‘geo’ is there like geometry” (auditory). Lucy pronounced the term using two separate words, “Geo (soft g, long e, long o), graphy” (verbal and auditory). These two words were repeated three more times (verbal and auditory) by other students in the group. Alex scrolled down his iPad (tactile), and read a definition that popped up on his screen. “It’s a field of science” (visual, verbal, and auditory). At this point, I invited the students to come over and have a seat on the floor (auditory). As the students moved to the more intimate grouping (kinesthetic), Lily once again said the word “geometry” (verbal and auditory). I saluted the children’s efforts thus far (auditory). On a small whiteboard I wrote the word “graph” (visual). Then I asked Lucy to explain what information in the word told her how to pronounce it correctly (auditory). She responded, “The ‘h’ and ‘p’” (verbal and auditory). I requested clarification, “The ‘p’ and ‘h’?” and pointed to the letters on the whiteboard (visual and auditory). Lucy explained that these letters make the “f” sound and the word says “graph” (verbal and auditory). However, when I added the prefix, geo, and the suffix, y, to the whiteboard (visual), the students again separated the term into two parts, “Geo, graphy” (verbal and auditory). So I covered up the first two letters, g and e, (visual) and requested, “Let’s try it this way” (audio). The students accurately pronounced the remaining letters—ography (verbal and audio). Demonstrating with a finger tap (visual), I said the complete word slowly (audio) tapping each syllable on the palm of my left hand. Several times the students imitated my motions and voice (tactile, kinesthetic,
verbal, and auditory) to feel and hear the four syllables of the word—ge-o-graph-y. Twice more, the entire word was quickly pronounced without motions (verbal and auditory). Back at their seats (kinesthetic) I inquired, “What do you see when you look at those pictures of geography?” (visual and auditory). Their answers included “the world, earth, land, water, and rocks,” (visual, verbal, and auditory). That entire sequence began on the video tape at 18:41 and finished at 21:55. A total of 3 minutes and 41 seconds was devoted to problem-solving the pronunciation, and understanding the meaning of a single unknown vocabulary term. That’s a lot of time to invest in a word I could have simply demonstrated with a finger tap and pronunciation; how do I justify my choice to scaffold oral reading through using many different experiences of multi-modalities? I believe the answer lies within the students’ oral reading performance later in the lesson. As the children reread without the teacher’s voice they stumbled each time they encountered the word “geography.” However, they were able to regroup and correctly state the word after a slight pause to gather their thoughts. The path to retrace those thoughts was undoubtedly different for each child, but all had the variety of multi-modal experiences to draw from.

**Scaffold #3 - extended time.** Extending the time of any given task was an extremely common procedure in my classroom. The scaffold of extended time generally utilized a systematic breakdown of given information to build background knowledge for the children. If this type of scaffold was not embraced, the students’ responses were often random guesses. Teaching a child how to use additional time to finish an assignment dispelled nervousness and anxiety. Students needed to learn how to move
past that feeling that I want this done now, and engage in tasks that meaningfully attacked the present undertaking.

The following example of extending time unfolded when random responses appeared on group B student worksheets relating to a graph of snowfall in five states. I chose to use a map of the United States for the breakdown of information. Giving each student a placemat-sized US map and dry erase marker, my first inquiry was “What does TX stand for?” The group unanimously responded, “Texas.” My next instruction directed the students to trace the outline of that state. Nicholas struggled to find Texas so Dylan reached over and pointed to its location. Then I directed the children to find the capital city of San Antonio and circle it. Again Nicholas grappled with the task, needing to look twice at the model I was making before circling the capital city on his own. However, I knew he was studying the map because he commented that the state of Texas had a city named “Austin,” just like the name of two classmates. We moved onto the initials MT for Montana and its capital city of Helena. When checking each student’s work, I noticed that Nicholas had outlined Wyoming rather than Montana. I drew attention to his error and Nicholas corrected the mistake. Next I questioned the students about the weather in these states. Connor’s response indicated that he was making personal connections to the information: “At night [in Texas] it’s a little cool because my aunt lives there.” He also surmised that it was very cold in Montana because it was located in the north. As the lesson continued, students identified the initials for the states of Idaho, Washington, and Illinois, outlined their borders, and circled their capital cities. Once the location of the five states was solidified, we used the worksheet’s graph to
reference the amount of snowfall for each locality. This corresponding number was
written inside the state boundaries on the map. Then the black dry erase markers were
exchanged for blue ones. The students studied these five numbers to detect which state
had the most snowfall. When this question was posed Mason raised his hand. When
called upon, Mason spelled “Montana” because he could not recall how to pronounce the
word. Immediately, Nicholas correctly called out the state’s name. A number one,
written in blue, was placed by the state of Montana, indicating that it received the greatest
amount of snowfall. Next, the students identified that Illinois had the second-highest
amount, so a number two was placed by Chicago. Then I jumped to the state with the
least amount of snowfall, Texas—a number five was written within its boundaries.
Finally, the students compared the snowfall totals of the last two states, ranking Idaho
third and Washington fourth. The reflective thinking that I recorded on that day revealed
the following:

They [the students] felt so much more in control of knowledge when the maps
were being used. The prop of…a state map really helped to stimulate their
thinking. …When it is just words – maybe they are nervous because they are not
sure of themselves. Writing on the maps releases some of that anxiety – I know
that works for me. (5/15/2015)

Hence, providing extended time is a profitable scaffold when the students know how to
engage in a strategy that will accomplish the task at hand.

**Scaffold #4 - directions – visual / verbal.** I certainly need extended time,
specifically in terms of repeated practice, to improve my effectiveness when presenting
directions and supplying clarification. My field notes describe many occasions when I felt my instructions fell short of the expected results. The following excerpts illustrate those experiences.

I felt very unprepared in giving directions for the writing activity – web for friendship – choose a characteristic and write sentences with linking verbs. I didn’t want everyone to use a white board because some students write better sentences on the iPad but the iPad did not offer the best visual of the process. It was difficult timing this activity with all six students because each needed time to think about their answer, some needed individual coaching to come up with an idea. Thus, I was still practicing writing one type of sentence with several students but others – Emily and Jack – were ready to move on. I needed to give directions for the next step. This felt very clumsy. (3/28/2015)

…The task seemed simple enough to me – use the book and google images on the iPad to find the names of six tools used to measure weather. I wanted them to work individually because I feel that Mason and Connor rely on their partners to do the work and then they copy. The first tool listed was a thermometer – pictures were in the book, except for Mason the students could read the pages, (Mason and I read the pages together) and typing the word on the iPad and seeing pictures allowed [the students] to get a visual of different types of thermometers. Then students were asked to draw a picture of the tool and write what the tool was used for. Nicholas enjoyed listing the tool’s names. He had several [written] before others even really caught onto what was going on. However by the end of
the period he had not drawn pictures or written the purpose. Emily had gotten through the entire activity with help, she needed reminders to copy words accurately onto her paper. She gets overwhelmed, wanting to stop, but she accomplishes the activity. By the end when the obvious tools were found Connor struggled with words – he typed in the word skyline and wrote that down. I guess I needed to start the lesson off with a discussion of a tool – define it. So much one takes for granted. At the same time I can’t support the students in every aspect possible. (5/8/2015)

Thus, I concluded that scaffolding instructions need to be presented both visually and verbally.

This combination of directives proved to be very effective during a dismissal period of Mia’s classroom on May 1, 2015. That day, prior to leaving early for a doctor’s appointment, Mia and I reiterated her expectations: get every student’s planner checked and initialed by the teacher, pass out permission slips for the upcoming field trip, pass out homework, retrieve coats and book bags from lockers, retrieve lunch containers from large basket, and inspect that students’ desks were organized. I had observed this process on numerous occasions and experienced total pandemonium with the 29 children. Thus, in an effort to maintain calmness, I chose to write all six of these directives on the whiteboard. When Mia left I read each direction to the class and then said, “Go.” The checklist provided structure to the large group of talkative children. Many independently followed the list without any assistance from me. I knew those that would struggle, and my focus remained on their actions rather than the entire group. The list anchored me,
because I didn’t have to recall the six actions, simply reference the list and attend to
specified children. The independent students enjoyed completing the sequence of tasks
on their own, and then turned their attention to a friend in need. Before the final
dismissal bell, all students had finished the six directives and were ready to leave. This
experience solidified my conclusion—verbal and visual instructions serve me best by
providing a visual anchor when my attention is likely to be pulled in many directions
throughout the instructional period. Thus, the visual list functions as a reference,
allowing students and myself to locate their place on the checklist, and then follow the
sequence of directives independently.

**Scaffold #5 - clarifying directions.** Clarifying directions became this
intervention specialist’s natural concern when students were stumped and simply sat with
no response, hence halting an opportunity for further assistance to be offered. At these
times my standard scaffolding question was, “Do you need think time or do you need
help?” Noah in group C quickly learned to turn to a classmate and express his need,
“What do we have to do?” Lily showed him. Later in the lesson Noah was stumped once
more. “Can you help me again?” Lily explained the purpose of a spelling bee. Noah
repeated most of his peer’s definition, but faltered at the end because he could not recall
the final phrase. He imploringly looked towards Lily to restate the last few words a
second time. She complied and Noah completed the explanation. I applauded his effort,
“Very good, you did a great job of getting yourself help.”

**Scaffold #6 – routines.** With repeated use, directives often turned into routines.
This came to pass when using one inch red or orange rubber letters, textured on one side
and flat on the other, to practice spelling words in group A. Positioned on a white placemat-sized pad in arch formation, these letters were arranged in a rainbow shape when completed. “A” was placed in the lower left corner and named the initial letter of the sequence. “M” and “n” resided at the top of the arch, and were referred to as the medial letters. “Z,” the final letter, was situated at the lower right-hand corner of the mat. I adopted this formation after it was presented at a school in-service program. Students used one of two methods to sequence the letters—look at the alphabet on the wall, or repeatedly recite the ABC sequence in their heads as they positioned the letters. Once arranged in such a fashion, the students practiced spelling words by taking needed letters from the arch and then replacing them when finished.

Clap and spell was another common routine. When the letter was a consonant the hands were clapped together; for vowels the hands were tapped on the lap. I often used clap and spell to provide a kinesthetic movement during practice with rainbow letters. For the first trial, the class worked together to clap and spell; on the second trial individual students performed the sequence independently. When Connor performed this task on his own, he often needed additional time to think before beginning the sequence—observations of his hand movements exhibited that he was stopping to recall if the first letter was a consonant or a vowel. Students’ brains were further taxed when the visual input of the rubber letters was removed from the routine. Now, the children needed to visualize the word and perform the kinesthetic movement simultaneously. I had to remember to give additional think time to visualize prior to the clap and spell motions.
An additional routine utilized a four-square graphic organizer, recorded either on a whiteboard or the iPad, for word study. In the top left square, students placed an “x” for each sound heard within a word. Prior to marking any x the word was pronounced, as each sound was enunciated a finger on the right hand was tapped into the palm of the left. For example, the word “show” had two taps (“sh” and “ow”), while “time” had three taps (“t,” “i,” “m,”) and “help” had four taps (“h,” “e,” “l,” “p”). In the top right box, the children spelled the word. If the group displayed a variety of spellings I requested they stand and walk around to view their peers’ responses. Many times the majority of the students quickly recognized the correct spelling. Next, we compared the number of sounds heard to the number of letters written when spelling the word. If a discrepancy existed between the two numbers, then students provided an explanation. For example, the silent “e” at the end of the word helps the vowel “i” says its name, or the letters “sh” go together to make one sound. In turn, these letter combinations were grouped together with a circle, demonstrating their association to create a single sound. In the bottom left box, the students illustrated the word. When several different types of pictures appeared, the students again took a stroll to view their peers’ illustrations. I enjoyed listening to the verbalization of positive comments as children inspected each other’s drawings. Once again, differences were discussed. Thus, through this process of drawing first and then discussing the nature of the pictures, students realized that when a word was said people often thought of different meanings. Finally, in the bottom right box the students wrote whether the word was a noun, a verb, or neither. This was a difficult task and needed further clarification. I did this by asking questions such as, “Did you draw a person? Did
you draw a place? Did you draw a thing? Is your picture showing action?” Given the variety of pictures drawn, students began to grasp the concept that some words could be categorized as both a noun and a verb. When suffixes were incorporated into the curriculum, students were asked to return to the top right box and spell the word with a given suffix.

Some routines encompassed a week-long period. The following example of group A’s weekly routine utilized first grade fresh read stories. Fresh reads were fiction or non-fiction selections written by the publishing company, less than two hundred words in length. On the child’s first reading he/she was given no advanced opportunity to preview the selection. Annie, the classroom assistant, timed this initial reading and counted the student’s mistakes. After recording the time, she then calculated the total correct words per minute (CWPM) read by the child, noting this number on their paper.

Day two of the routine paired two students together with a timer. One child timed while the other reread the selection. The student timing was also charged with the task of following along to acknowledge when mistakes were made. After noting this information on the paper, the roles were switched. Then the entire process was repeated for a second trial with this goal, “Beat your previous time.” At the end of the activity papers were collected and again, the assistant computed the total correct words per minute read. On the third day, students often made a graphic organizer, picture, or some other visual to illustrate the selection. On the fourth day, students received a second paper on which multiple choice and extended response questions were written. As they answered each question, students highlighted the phrase or sentence in the selection that
supported their answer choice. On the final day of the routine, the children graded their own papers. Three timers were used during this period. Prior to grading each question one child reread the selection, three timed, and the remaining two watched for errors. The purpose of rereading the selection was twofold—first to reacquaint the children with the information in the passage, and second to demonstrate that the rereading could be done quickly. Next, all students chorally read the first multiple choice question and its responses. Then each child told which answer they chose, and the group discussed which choice was best. Students were required to support their choice with evidence from the selection. When an answer on their paper was correct, the child made a smiley face or star in magic marker; if incorrect he/she marked the appropriate answer. This process was repeated for all multiple choice questions. For the extended response questions, each child read their answer and the group gave a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” movement. A discussion followed if the students had mixed thoughts about the correct and incorrect responses. Then students referenced the writing rubric posted in the room to check the mechanics of their sentences: appropriate capitalization and punctuation, rereading to hear if the sentence makes sense, and correct spelling. This five day routine prepared students for taking tests. The repeated experiences of reading, rereading and providing evidence from the passage to support an answer equipped students with familiarity of this process for future testing encounters.

In describing this final routine I want to share the influences that affected its ever-changing mold. At the onset of this procedure, the literacy specialist requested that all teachers use a stack of phoneme cards during the PIE instructional period (group A.)
Phoneme cards illustrated a picture and corresponding letter(s) that depicted a phoneme (sound) of the English language. Prior to the initial trial, I separated the cards into two piles, those letter-sound combinations we had studied during the current school year and those not yet reviewed. All cards studied, except for the picture of the thimble, depicted a common noun that students would easily recognize. On that first trial, I instructed the students to first say the picture word and then the sound.

Phoneme cards – students were very sloppy in saying sounds but this was our first trial, I need to think about how I want to do this – first focus on what the students are doing that bothers me. Seemed to like the thimble [I brought one in for each student to accompany the “th” sound]. (4/13/2015)

What bothered me? When students were saying the words and sounds their responses were not uniform. Thus, I chose to make the group setting more intimate and hopefully controlled.

Phoneme cards – sat on the floor in the nook by the calendar, hands in lap, half circle formation, much more control of the words and sounds, not recited together but huge improvement from Monday. (4/14/2015)

…Phoneme cards – need to get a routine going for this task. I’m surprised how students mispronounce sounds. This gets me thinking that I did a bad job teaching phonics to students – step back and rethink. When these students were in first grade I included all modalities of learning. I wanted to slow down so they could have more time to focus on sound patterns but was pushed by principal to keep up with the pace. Now the phonics – Keystone – with the literacy specialist
is one-on-one and exclusive teaching, others cannot be part of the group. Work to
mastery – oh this business is maddening. (4/17/2015)

Thus, by the fourth day of utilizing the phoneme cards, past and present school policies
were interfering with my decision-making process. My thoughts from the past moved me
to impose judgmental reviews upon myself, thinking I did a bad job. I also justified my
actions, reiterating to myself that I wanted to slow down when the students were in first
grade but was not given permission to do so. My thoughts muddled through the
incredulity that policy seemed to have taken a 360 degree turn. How did I reconcile my
practices with these changes? First, I let my maddening thoughts go. Then, I
came back to the present moment and viewed the video—although in real time, it did not happen that
quickly or with that amount of clarity. In the video I observed students bouncing up and
down, swaying side to side, and moving their arms and hands. I noted with frustration
that so much uncontrollable energy was being released. My personal reflections read,
“When the activity switched to the floor, I was amazed at the amount of movement
students needed to engage in to keep their focus on the phoneme cards to say the picture
cards and sounds” (4/22/2015). Surprisingly, I believed that additional movement was
necessary to assist students in remaining focused. This belief, and experiences from a
past scripted reading program, spurred my next design movement for the routine. In the
scripted program, letter sounds were categorized as continuous (ongoing) or quick (fast)
sounds. Hence, I separated the cards into these two categories. For the on-going sounds
students said the name of the picture, produced the sound and held it until we clicked our
fingers to indicate the stopping point. For the quick sounds, the picture word was said
and then the sound was produced while we clapped our hands. Quick sounds stopped when the clap ended. After a few days of practice the routine had to be changed once again. The collective clap of the group was very loud, making it difficult for students working with the other two intervention specialists in the same classroom to hear instruction.

Phoneme cards – [Utilize a] two finger tap because the routine needs to be quieter. (Video 138 - 33:15)

Implementation of this routine for the phoneme cards developed through a series of movements, reflections, evaluations, trial-and-error periods, and finally the resulting change.

**Scaffold #7 - praise, feedback, guided questions.** This scaffold revolved around presenting feedback to a student. One natural occurrence for this feedback took place when returning graded papers. These graded assignments included reading assessments and written responses. I loved bearing the good news of a student’s commendable deed. I began with verbal praise. This was followed by a reward that ranged from a bingo pick or a package of fruit snacks to an opportunity to be first in the next classroom activity. Weaknesses were focused upon if the student’s overall score for the assignment was below 70%. These corrections were reviewed at recess, until teacher contract negotiations spurred the union to request that no child remain in the classroom during the lunch and recess period.
I would love to work on corrections but that needs to happen outside of new teaching time and I no longer can go over work at recess. As Mia says “It’s all good!” (4/22/2015)

…In the past I would have done that at recess – not taking up class time, but honoring working to contract does not allow that practice. (4/23/2015)

…I use[d] to think that if the kids screwed up it was my part to fix it – yes and no. I need to take my responsibility and they need to take theirs. In order to remain sane and calm and relatively happy I need to also enjoy the job, when my head is planning revenge for their poor performance that’s not going to happen. Taking away recess time to review mistakes causes me to rethink what’s this all about. What are my choices and why do I want to make these choices? I’ve been at this job a long time and there are still no clear answers. . . My first instinct is to keep working and fix the problem – that is not effective. (5/5/2015)

So positive feedback was an enjoyable experience for both the student and myself. However, when the child’s performance was “less than” and recess was denied, I began to question why I needed to review the mistakes and if it was really necessary. I came to the conclusion that for me, ignoring a poor performance was like running away from a problem. Thus, I felt I needed to teach the child how to face the difficulties by working through the mistakes together.

Sometimes verbal feedback was simply the acknowledgment of a single amazing response. Mason shared such a reaction with his classmates during the reading of *Tyronne the Horrible* to group B. This picture book described the experiences of Boland,
a small dinosaur, who tried to overcome being bullied by Tyronne, a tyrannosaurus rex. The last sentence of the story’s climax read, “Suddenly he heard a terrible scream.” Immediately Mason verbalized his understanding of what was happening in the story to his peers. Mason explained that the unidentified scream was uttered by Tyronne, because the sandwich Tyronne had taken from Boland was a double-thick-red-hot-pepper-sandwich and it had burned the large dinosaur’s mouth. My verbal praise consisted of a short phrase to recognize Mason’s accurate comprehension skills. Further confirmation of this student’s correct interpretation occurred when I read the sentences, and showed the illustrations of the next page in the book. I shared this experience with Mia during our critical friend conversation later that day. “Mason, he just beamed like ohhh – I did something that the other kids [couldn’t]. I can count on him to catch those things because the others do not.” (Audio file #3, 3/30/15, 6:51)

At other times feedback was a two-step process. First, the child was directed to review known information, then guiding questions were asked to elicit further knowledge. This type of feedback provided additional practice, demonstrating how to slow down and think about one’s responses. Such suggestions were particularly useful for Emily in group A, a child who had the tendency to be very impulsive. On one occasion Emily had orally read a fresh read selection to the group (video 148, 5:55.) At the conclusion of the task, her classmates indicated that she had incorrectly pronounced two words. I used a whiteboard to assist her in decoding each word. First I wrote the letter “a” and requested that she give the sound. Next, I placed an “s” after the “a,” and she read “as.” Then an “e” was written in the final position. Emily accurately changed
the short “a” sound to long ”a,” and explained why this happened. The next letter I added to the sequence was “c,” which was placed in the first position. Once again Emily said the word correctly. I finished the sequence by writing an “s” at the end and Emily said the word appropriately: “cases.” The second word was “snail.” I began with “a,” which Emily pronounced accurately. When I added an “i” she seemed confused, so Connor verbalized that this letter combination “ai” made the long “a” sound. The next three sequences were “ail,” “nail,” and finally, “snail.” At each step, Emily pronounced the word segments appropriately. On another occasion Emily was rereading a poem. Once again, she misread one word, saying “concerned” rather than “curious.” The following interchange of feedback transpired in video 138, beginning at 7:46 and finishing at 9:15.

Emily: But if you are concerned [this word has been mispronounced, the word should be curious] I’d say I’m furious [Reading a phrase from the poem.]
Me: Why are these two circled? [I am questioning an action the students made during the initial reading of the poem when two words – furious and curious – were circled.]
Emily: Because they rhyme.
Me: OK, you said concerned, furious. Take off the “f,” how do you say the word?
Emily: Curious.
Me: There you go. OK read the poem again.

Emily reread the poem, once again stating “concerned” rather than “curious.”

Me: You need to get it in your head.
Emily repeated concerned again.

I pointed to the circled words.

Emily: Curious.

After viewing this video interchange multiple times, I now recognize that my feedback lacked the concentration needed to significantly improve Emily’s performance. She mispronounced the word “curious” more often than she had said it accurately. Thus, in future trials of reading this poem Emily was as likely to say the word “concerned” as she was “curious.” These repeated opportunities to view what transpired on the video stimulated my awareness that when working with Emily the intensity of feedback needed to be increased.

**Scaffold #8 - testing accommodations.** These scaffolds embraced those accommodations made during testing periods. Adjustments were designed to be utilized consistently, but with the ability to fluctuate the nuances of their implementation from one student to the next. These testing assessments included three sections—vocabulary terms, word study, and a below-level reading selection with multiple-choice questions and an extended response. To improve the odds of focusing the child’s attention to the appropriate site on the testing page, I first directed students to draw a symbol by the given number before reading a question. For example I might say, “Draw a square around number one or put a zig-zag line under number two.” These directives gave me visual feedback, immediately indicating whether a child was attentive. If a student did not follow a directive, he/she received two additional scaffolds. The first consisted of
this intervention specialist’s close proximity to the child, and in the second I utilized my finger to point to the correct place on their paper.

Before reading a passage, students first previewed the questions to know what information would be asked. This preview had many different appearances depending on the difficulty of the words within the question. One tactic I used began with the instruction, “Read this question in your head and then stand if you can read all the words.” My next step requested that one of the children standing read to the group. Finally, the entire group reread the question together. Moving on to the passage, students chorally read the selection while seated in a small group setting. This intimate circle permitted me sight lines to ensure that students tracked from one line of the text to another. This was important to me because I had observed that when a child only listens to the story, he/she is less likely to locate evidence within the selection that supports his/her choice of answer. Reading the passage began with the whole group reading the title, and then a single student rereading the title alone. Next the children read the first paragraph, followed by a single student rereading the exact same paragraph. The child rereading was permitted to ask for help from a classmate if he/she could not recall how to pronounce an unknown word. This process of the whole group reading, followed by an individual rereading, was repeated for each paragraph of the selection, as well as any charts or diagrams that were a part of the passage. Then students had a choice to make as I stated these instructions: “If you want me to read it to you, raise your hand and I will come read the question and responses to you. If you feel confident reading it yourself
you may do so.” Mason and Nicholas both requested my assistance. (Video 147, 5/22/2015)

I often considered classroom writing prompts to be an overload of words for my students. The following excerpt taken from a critical friend conversation on 4/21/2015 demonstrates this point:

The prompts are very poorly written. . . [the writer] tells about people that have special needs, then moves on to talking about dogs, then they go into talking about people, then they tell you to think about all of these different kind of people and then finally they tell you write the two ways they are alike and different. . . I should have written compare and contrast two people, because it does not say that in here. It gets lost on the words.

Here the writing prompts needed to be restated, directing the students’ focus to the specific task and leaving out extraneous information.

These testing scaffolds were crucial elements in helping students to improve their performance on routine reading and writing assessments. The following personal reflection illustrates my thinking on the subject:

I graded room 120’s [group B’s] benchmark reading tests last night and Nicholas did better. I wondered why he had missed so many on the OAA test. Additional scaffolds [had been] incorporated into the benchmark test – Google images of the main characters - [the] service and rescue dogs, stuffed puppy for the first story “Thinking Like Fred.” Do these visuals add a comfort level to understanding the story? For each of these stories the students shared comments showing

For although I tried not to get caught up in “teaching to the test,” the “Third Grade Guarantee” was a very real message of the consequences for students who did not pass the OAA or its equivalent. One day, my trepidation for the children provoked a subsequent critical friend conversation with Mia:

Me: I’m not comfortable operating in the verbal/auditory domain. I really struggle with words, especially when I get into a freeze mode. The other day when the kids and I were doing the below-grade level [story] that goes with the basketball . . . it talks about her freezing so we were sharing. I was very surprised that I shared something very personal, I did talk about freezing in front of my professors. That the words would not come to me. And then I was sharing about not being able to move as well, because of the heart. And for the life of me Mia, I have had it for fifteen years, I couldn’t think of the word “cardiomyopathy.” Not that they care.

Mia: I know, I know.

Me: But I know it like that and my head froze. So my point is, especially when I’m scared, I’m freezing. When I feel I perceive I’m being put on the spot. And so much of what we do in school is in the verbal/auditory.

Mia: I agree.
Me: I need another route in. I guess that’s why this is important to me, because I did it automatically for myself and I never knew that’s why I was doing it. [This past sentence was stated in a very slow halting manner.] The visual and the kinesthetic, all of my charts, that back and forth movement, that’s to help my memory. Having done it enough times, it is that movement that will have made the difference for me, not remembering the words. Because if you gave me the test, my head would then stop and think, I did this first, I did this next, then I went here, then I went here, and I would visually be able to track it. That’s how I memorize it. If you give me just the verbal . . .

Mia: Yeah.

Me: I’m not going to be able to tell you [recall] the words and I know it. Now auditory if you said them to me, maybe, [This word was pronounced in a very drawn out manner.] but to bring it up by myself, no way, Jose. (Audio #10, 6:45, 4/26/2015)

Yes, I too look for comfort during difficult situations. At these times, I fall back on my ability to problem solve using those modalities of personal habits that are efficient and bring relief.

The purpose of this second phase was to provide supports, also referred to as scaffolds. These scaffolds enabled students to put forth their best effort regardless of whether I, the intervention specialist, could directly assist. Hence, this phase embraced the mission of nurturing students’ work skills. Scaffolds enabled students to encounter a variety of experiences and practice periods that enhanced academic and behavioral skills.
In this manner, each experience and practice period fostered a child’s growing sense of responsibility in regards to taking ownership of their learning. Scaffolds were implemented individually and collectively; the nature of the lesson determined whether working alone or with a partner was more appropriate. Overall, each scaffold provided opportunities to engage in several tasks simultaneously. These tasks included (a) interacting with adults and peers to verbalize one’s understanding of a task, (b) sustaining attention/concentration, (c) asking for help, (d) organizing, (e) utilizing specific strategies to complete a task, (f) presenting a variety of ways to remember skills, (g) increasing mindfulness about trying other alternatives, (h) demonstrating how to process, (i) following instructions by referencing a list, (j) guiding behaviors for better performance, (k) showcasing accomplishments, and (l) tackling difficulties together rather than ignoring a mistake or problem. The invitation of the first phase of learning/instructional design created power and energy. In the second phase, this energy was channeled to develop work skills that promoted learning.

**Applications.** A teacher or intervention specialist’s concerns might sound like this: “How do I move the whole band of students from point A to point B while keeping my group intact? I’ve got the children’s attention, but they demand so much more. I turn to help this student, and the others sit and wait. When a new concept is presented my brain goes crazy; it feels as if I have ADHD myself.” Yes, a teacher’s attention can be pulled in each learner’s direction, causing a sense that nothing has been accomplished. Thus, designing scaffolds permits the instructor to create organization and forward movement in the midst of chaos. These scaffolds demonstrate strategies to students that
enable them to continue thinking and working through difficult learning tasks. Furthermore, because learning for children with special needs requires an abundance of practice, these scaffolds allow students to drill skills in a multitude of ways, helping them to endure the doldrums of repetition. Engaging a student’s entire being in the instructional experience from many different perspectives promotes change rather than falling back into old unproductive habits. This increases the likelihood that students are learning rather than just memorizing a skill from one particular standpoint. Stimulating multiple senses in the learning process enhances the possibility of children performing the task independently.

Creating Environments to Encourage Student Empowerment

Thousands of baby steps taken in the first and second phases of learning eventually collected over a multitude of practice periods. These drills and practice sessions built student confidence and the desire to work independently. With each successful practice the students gained the verbal skills necessary to explain the working process needed to execute a particular proficiency. Thus, the power to achieve independence in performing a skill shifted from falling under the teacher’s accountability to the student’s responsibility. Space and context were shaped during the first two phases to create an environment in which students conquered baby steps and exercised small privileges to try their hand at problem solving. In the third phase, students looked for opportunities to manage more power for themselves. Ultimately this role allowed the learner to describe the problem, offer a solution for how to solve it, initiate the action, and adopt an “I can do it” attitude.
Teacher blunders. At first, I wanted to focus on creating a context that allowed students to feel comfortable and safe when calling me out on mistakes. This context would permit opportunities for students to feel empowered through that process. These instances were short in duration. Many times, other students in the group were not even aware that a peer had caught a mistake I made until one student voiced the words, “Shame, shame, Mrs. Carrig.” Then everyone looked around to check out my blunder. Some blunders were small—calling a student by the wrong name or writing an incorrect term on the white board. Others exhibited greater offenses, such as letting an answer slip when I should have given think time. Most times my reaction was simple: continue the lesson and try not to repeat the error. At other times, students questioned instructions I had given. Then I would answer, “Thank you, I understand your question, thank you for being patient with me and helping to clarify that” (Video 132, 4:50). An incident in that category arose during instruction with group B. At that time I voiced my intentions, “I will check the 1971 and then we will move on.” Dylan quickly restated the correct year, 1871. “Oh, goodness gracious, thank you Dylan for correcting me” (Video 133, 19:06). With each student’s observance of a mistake, I acknowledged the child’s ability to catch my error and graciously exhibited my humanness in making it.

Student initiatives. Student’s opportunities to feel empowered continued to grow in intensity. In the following example, Emily can’t wait to share her plans. However, during her first explanation she runs out of steam and stops to gather her thoughts. With another burst of energy, rambling words and counting pages, Emily presents a solution to the small group’s dilemma. The three children had offered three
different methods to reread the book “How to Measure the Weather.” Now they needed to make a choice and have consensus among them.

Me: “We have three different ideas, sentence by sentence—”

Emily: [interrupting] “How about we—“

Me: [holding my hands up with fingers splayed to stop her words] “Please wait, let me present all three ideas, [sentence by sentence,] all together, page by page.”

Emily began to share words that were not cohesive. Then she stopped and placed her head down on the table for two seconds. She picked up the book again and flipped through the pages.

Emily: “How about like this, how many pages? [turning to the last page.] There’s twelve. You can do, there’s three of us. Three, there’s 1,2,3, 1,2,3, and you can do paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, OK paragraph. [Pause.] OK, when it’s my turn to talk I read a whole paragraph, he does what he wants, and he does it his way.”

Me: “Oh…[voice going up and down] so give each of you their ways on their pages. [Turning to the two boys] Do you like that idea?”

Both boys concurred. (Video 139, 11:10 – 11:49)

I was delighted. “Wow, what a tremendous student initiative!” Emily’s solution was perfect. Furthermore, without her repeated trials to express this suggestion, the idea would have never entered my mind.

Sharing. Sharing often began in a very timid manner. Such was the case at the onset of the discussion of the poem entitled “Set for Life” with students of group A. The
transcript below reveals that those bashful feelings quickly changed as more ideas were voiced for the class to hear.

*Set for Life*

Instructions

Me: Circle just the periods. What does a period look like?

Noah: A little circle.

Me: Seven periods, so this poem has seven sentences, that’s it.

**I watched TV all day and night.** (First line of the poem.)

Instructions: Reread the sentence three times.

Me: How many of you have done that?

*All hands are raised.*

Me: I have done it.

*No further comments were offered.*

**My brain is almost gone.** (Second line of the poem.)

Me: What does that mean?

Nicholas: My brain is going to sleep.

Me: Why would your brain go to sleep after you watch TV so much?

Nicholas: It’s so tired of thinking what the TV is always saying.

Me: I like that idea.

Jack: It means that when I watched it for a long time, like for not going to school for like seven days, your brain is almost, the smartness of your brain is almost disappeared.
Me: Oh those are really some good thoughts going on.

Connor: [bouncing his clasped hands up and down on the table] It means kind of like if you’re sleepy, you’re sleepy and your brain is gone.

Me: Where did it go?

Connor: [rotating a pencil between his left and right hand] It went back [unclear].

Me: It went back [unclear]. [I was laughing and cannot hear the word either of us said, even after viewing the video seven times.]

Noah: I’d say it disappeared.

Me: Where did it disappear to?

Noah: Florida.

Me: Why?

Noah: Because it doesn’t want to think.

Lily: [moving her right hand in a chopping motion] It means that half of it is still there and half of it is gone.

Me: Where would half of it have gone Lily?

Lily: Half of it is sleeping and half of it is awake.

The last two hours that I watched it wasn’t even on. (Third line of the poem.)

Instructions: Reread twice.

Nicholas: Huh? How can they watch TV when it wasn’t even on?

Jack: Nothing’s on.

Lily: Imagining.
Me: They are imagining they are watching TV.

Noah: I got one, uh, if they don’t have a brain they’re thinking the TV is on.

Me: But it’s really not.

**Before that can’t remember, ‘twas some kind of shopping thing.** (Fourth line of the poem.)

Me: Boys and girls, will you put a rectangle around that word: ‘twas.

Jack: ‘Twas means was and?

Me: You are right it means was and, where is the special sign?

Jack: Oh right here.

Me: Where is here?

Jack: In the middle? At the end?

Me: It’s called an apostrophe, where is that apostrophe?

Jack: In the beginning.

Me: Why do we put an apostrophe in a word?

Lily: Because I’m thinking you want to put a word together and like you use the [apostrophe] sign in place of the letters.

Me: You put words together, what words do you think went together?

Jack: It and was.

Me: Nicely done, will you write that in front – it and was. Nicely done Jack. Lily, that was great starting that conversation so Jack thought about it and completed the answer. Let’s start before that.
Lily and Jack stumble on the word “can’t” but locate their spot and complete rereading the sentence.

Me:  Lily, Jack you did good.  Noah, Nicholas didn’t hear your voices let’s try it again please, ready.

All students reread the sentence.

Me:  What do you mean ‘twas some kind of shopping thing?  What’s this person doing Nicholas?

Nicholas:  Shopping?

Me:  On?

Nicholas:  TV.

Me:  You’ve done that?

Nicholas:  No.

Jack:  You play video games on TV.  Like when you play video games you shop.

Nicholas:  Oh you’re shopping for stuff that you want to buy like if you are playing “Minecraft” you want to get something that kills, like in a battle . . . you can buy something like a giant sword.

Me:  So you can shop on TV to play your game “Minecraft.”

Noah:  Or X-Box Live to play “Minecraft.”

I bought two vases, sixteen clocks and an engagement ring.  (Fifth line of the poem.)

The students are unable to decode the word engagement.
Emily: Enjectment?

Lily: Agreement?

Me: Good guesses, I like how you got the “ment.”

Nicholas: Can we look it up on our iPads?

Me: Ah.

Jack: Engayment.

Me: You’re close, we’ve got agreement, engament.

Emily: [opening up her iPad] Oh, oh I’m already at Safari.

*Jack and Nicholas have also grabbed their iPads, Lily continues to study the word on the paper.*

Jack: Lily you can get your iPad.

Lily: I know I’m just trying to figure it out.

Jack typing: J?

Lily: G? OK what’s e-n-g-a-j-e-m-e-n-t? Am I spelling it too fast?

Jack: It says an agreement ring, agreement ring.

Emily: It stands for love? Wedding?

Lily: It can’t be wedding. Because the “e” helps the “a.”

Emily: Imagine-ment.

Me: I’m going to give you one more minute, then I’ll help with the word.

Emily: Is it a gem?

Me: It is a gem, because the stone that is on the ring [showing Emily the ring on my hand] is made out of?
Nicholas: Element.

Lily: Jerment.

Me: Thirty seconds.

_Students are all gazing at their iPads with thoughtful looks._

Nicholas: This is hard.

Me: OK boys and girls, close your iPads.

Jack: Engagement ring.

Everyone: Ohhh!

Me: What is it?

Jack: Engagement ring.

Me: Very good.

On April 26, 2015, Mia and I engaged in a conversation that revolved around this social aspect of learning. We both stressed the importance of students communicating ideas not just once, but multiple times during a discussion. In this manner, sharing inhabited both the auditory and verbal domain. Students were offered opportunities to listen to one another, which in turn expanded their concepts of vocabulary terms and knowledge.

Without this mutual sharing of ideas, a learner’s own thoughts can become isolated and stagnant. At the conclusion of our dialogue, Mia stated that my work was introspective. Her compliment was heartfelt and pushed me to operate in the auditory/verbal domain as I pulled out my thesaurus to understand her thoughts (Audio #10, 10:30).

**Target performance.** In my opinion, students taking the OAA test was the ultimate example of student empowerment. At that moment in time I had to trust that the
learning experiences I had provided for the children would supported their labors during the few hours of the test. I hoped that when students engaged in this two-and-a-half hour target performance, they would display their ability to sustain attention to task and deliver their best effort. This intervention specialist’s fervent hope for these students who were struggling to read, and myself, was that gains would surface when comparing the fall and subsequent spring/summer scores. The following excerpt describes my perceptions of the testing period for Nicholas.

OAA testing today so students did not receive instruction in small reading groups. I tested Nicholas one-on-one. I requested this student because when he took the MAPS (one-on-one computer test that can be substituted for OAA test if he had passed) in February he completed the test in 20 minutes. The tester stated that he kept saying I don’t want to do this. I knew he would work for me. Nicholas worked a total of 105 minutes taking four breaks – one between each selection. He was not wearing his glasses. My head adds in the comment, already one strike against him. Strengths, Nicholas never complained once about doing the test. However, he did count how many pages [were] left on two occasions before he was finished. I can relate – I like to know the ending point - the end is in sight. So although Nicholas did not verbalize his [discomfort, his] actions demonstrated he wanted to be out of the situation. The IEP states he will read the selections to the tester out loud. Guessing, I’d say his accuracy rate was about 92 – 95%. His fluency was on the slow side but quite steady. Words he missed included – scientist, external, multi-syllable words. As the period progressed, Nicholas
needed extra redirection [to read all] line[s] of text [within the selection.] I did not think this was out of line because I do it for him every day in class when he loses his place. Nicholas often uses fingers on both the right and left hand to assist him in tracking through the text. I read the questions and responses and was very disappointed he missed so many. The test seemed very straightforward. In the past I would have said responses had been included for the purpose of tricking the child but I did not feel any of the questions were of this nature. He simply missed a lot. (4/21/2015)

Nicholas’s score on this trial of the test was below the cut-off for proficiency. At the end of summer, without any summer school intervention, he took the test again and scored a passing grade. Thus, Nicholas moved onto fourth grade without experiencing the repercussions of the Third Grade Guarantee. I cannot express his feelings, but I know the elation I felt for his accomplishment. I can only hope that part of the reason that Nicholas and most of his peers in my targeted reading groups passed was my instruction.

The diagram illustrated at the beginning of question 1 (Figure 14) displayed this final phase of the learning/instructional design model as the center point or target. The first phase ignited steam and built the desire and motivation to learn. In the second phase, the learner utilized scaffolds that encircled this center point. With the help of others, learners repeatedly practiced hitting the target. Eventually, help was removed and the student worked independently.
On May 11, my reflections about what was happening within my practice brought a childhood memory to mind. I remarked to myself that I was now viewing the memory from an adult’s perspective rather than a young girl.

I didn’t feel safe as a child talking in class – everything moved way too fast for me. The focus seemed to be on the product, not the process. This is the endpoint again. Focusing on the product – does that lead to the need for perfection?

Focusing on the process – enjoy, learn, have fun, relax. (5/11/2015)

Working within the target performance range becomes habit. The habit strengthens itself, if the learning process is not steeped in anxiety. Creating a learning environment in which skills are built through mutual respect, enjoyment, and repetitive practice of accurate skills leads to life-long learning, learning that puts learners at the center of their journey with confidence in their own skills.

**Applications.** An intervention specialist’s job is to close the learning gap. This gap is often created by a child’s home environment and/or lack of experience. In spite of these backdrops, administration’s expectations remain the same—get students to grade level benchmarks. How does an intervention specialist accomplish this goal? My reflections continually remind me to be positive, take baby steps, and focus on the here and now, the world within the circle of learning. Thus, in my future practice I need to remember to concentrate on the wonder and resilience of these children with special needs, rather than the low scores that define their learning gap. Changes can only be implemented through my course of action. If I continually show up ready to work and repeatedly demonstrate how to build connections with classmates, instructors, and the
academic material, the student will follow. When I allow children the freedom to experience difficulty, they learn how to problem-solve to resolve these issues. Building student confidence is paramount. I can support this goal by providing guidance through trial and error periods and exhibiting respect for a student’s solution, even when it does not match my own perspective.

**Sub-question 2: What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that directs my questions and planning for future activities?**

The information I focused on during student conversations and discussions highlighted feedback from both the children and me. This feedback was recorded in three manners—field notes, personal reflections journal, and memos written during analysis of both videos and critical friend conversations. “In-the-moment” signals included phrases and sentences describing my gut reactions that signified whether a task was working well or not. I perceived 65 percent of my reactions as negative, or indicating that something needed to be changed. (This percentage was calculated by comparing the number of incidents that were coded negative with the total number of reactionary events.) I also noted students’ behaviors that clashed with my objectives, implying that the lesson did not run smoothly. All of these reactions were clues to a possible problem. At these times, I engaged my problem solving strategies. I incorporated a cycle of recognizing a problem, identifying its components, choosing a strategy, implementing a course of action, and evaluating the results. Sometimes these cycles lasted for days, weeks, or months, while others were only a few minutes long.
Through self-reflection, I learned that any negativity I encountered or felt demanded a change. My fix-it nature, accompanied by these negative feelings, served as a strong motivator to get me to change what I could within a situation.

Notice that your focus goes to where the work is needed not those you have succeeded with. That also means I dismiss my successes – Alex, Lucy, Lily (3 out of 4 in room 123); Nicholas, Dylan, Jack (3 out of 6 in room 120) – a total of 6 out of 10 – 60% [are demonstrating improved work / study skills.] My mind goes to the things it needs to fix. (6/1/2015)

Furthermore, I’d rather take an offensive stance (promoting student advocacy), than a defensive one (guarding my insecurities). The following journal entry provides an example of an occasion when I switched my stance from defense to offense.

As I neared the end of watching the video I have a sense of exhaustion. I wrote near the end of the analysis that the focus of my lesson seemed evaluative rather than [aiming towards] fluency. That bothers me, frustrates me, maybe even judges myself, that I’m not doing the right thing. Five minutes after stopping the video that sense of exhaustion has left, what a relief. What’s the tension that’s at war inside of myself causing such strife? I use to have her [Annie] do the spelling words, sentences, and Bingos but the quality of sentences declined so drastically. I don’t think they declined because of Annie but rather because the students are not staying in at recess for incomplete work. I need to interact with them [the students] to understand what is going on rather than leave it in the hands of a third party [Annie.] Thus, some of this tension exists because I feel I am justifying my
actions and thus taking a defensive stand. I would rather play offense – keeping my opponent’s attention, showing the grand picture, demonstrating my strengths, rather than defend my weaknesses. (5/25/2015)

My opponents included parents, other teachers, and administrators who might question me about grades. By switching to an offensive stance and interacting directly with the children I gained first-hand knowledge of each student’s performance. With this knowledge I was able to answer all questions presented to me. Sometimes, though, I found myself moving too quickly to reposition myself from a defensive to an offensive standpoint. At these times, I realized I was leaning toward action when I had not yet taken enough time to investigate all possible sides of a situation. Hence, the findings for this question helped me to understand my personal thinking patterns.

The following roadmap separates this question’s findings into two sections. The first portion discusses my reflective thinking process. The path this process followed was particularly difficult to discern. In-action and on-action thoughts were easily identifiable, but I struggled with determining how the two contemplative modes worked together. I needed to utilize visual representation to clarify my thinking. Hence, I chose a SmartArt graphic that displayed hierarchy, inserting pictures and labels to assist me in visualizing this route. Naming each picture helped clarify the action my brain was performing at each step of the process. The second component illustrates how these reflective thinking processes specifically interacted with one student: Mason. Figure 17 below presents an outline of my reflective thinking process in-action, on-action, and in use with Mason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-action/On-action</th>
<th>Mason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Deliberations</td>
<td>● Mason’s power</td>
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I reflected on feedback, which consisted of my personal responses, reactions, comments, criticisms, and opinions expressed through thought, gestures, movement, and verbalization during moments of teaching. Sometimes my reflection on this feedback occurred as I was instructing. At other times, these reflective contemplations happened at a later period. Reflections that arose simultaneously with instruction, named “in-action,” materialized “in the moment” of instruction. These mediations ruminated in my head as I taught, demanding attention and often a change to the immediate instructional period.

Delayed reflections, titled “on-action,” happened after an event. On-action reflections referred to those introspective periods that occurred upon the completion of a lesson. Thus, I engaged in on-action reflections when writing lesson plans. During these contemplative periods I studied data from classwork and quizzes, spent time recalling the students’ actions/reactions to the day’s activities, and thought about my gut reactions to instruction. All of this input assisted me in preparing, often times in great detail, for future instruction. The following diagram, 18, presents these two separate paths that reflections on feedback could follow. When the reflection arose in the moment, in-action, I had two alternatives from which to choose. First, the reflection could entice

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**Figure 17.** Reflective Thinking In-action, On-action, and in Use with Mason

**In-action/On-action**

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immediate action, altering the current plan. Second, I could gather, organize, and store the information for future use. The second track displays on-action reflections, which supplied a wealth of information to prepare for future instruction.

*Figure 18. Reflecting on Feedback*
**Deliberations.** Throughout this study I repeatedly experienced occasions when two specific actions occurred simultaneously: teaching and engaging in a personal mental conversation that contemplated the pros and cons of a possible action I wanted to make in the present moment. Mia shared that she too was subjected to thoughts compelling her to make a change in the midst of an instructional period. She stated, “I go with the flow. I kind of start out with what I planned…and then something clicks with me. Something I hadn’t thought of before that I think would work better.” (Audio # 10, 0:30, 4-26-2015)

The following journal entry presents two examples of instances when I acted on in-action deliberations. It is interesting to me that I did not write the specific details of these conversations, simply sharing the outcomes. In the first example my deliberation offered two ideas—one suggestion seemed to be more encouraging than the other; I chose the option I deemed more supportive. The second example illustrates that many of my contemplative periods were utilized to organize a set of actions within a specified time period.

Both Noah and Connor needed me in close proximity to track and not just repeat the words. Once I put some coins down the boys had bought into the activity. I kept reminding myself not to be too critical and to honor their efforts. (Example 1) A few times I kept having conversations in my head – weighing the pros and cons of certain actions. Each time being positive won out. Although slow, Nicholas was a good leader – he made no mistakes…Connor struggled with words. My thought is he says the words half assed – mumbling through parts rather than being fully engaged. His reading and tracking displayed several
mistakes. At one point Connor did a good job of explaining what expression was. Jack’s leadership had good expression and phrasing but he did make one or two mistakes. Noah reads well but struggles to remain focused throughout the task. Each time the group read one particular sentence they said the word “lighthouse” rather than “light.” I called the fact that they made a mistake to their attention and was pleased that Nicholas could describe the mistake. They are learning to pay attention to their performance as a reader. The boys were satisfied with earning a BINGO as a reward – actually they were excited. I like that I can keep the reward simple. I don’t want to pull the coins out every day because then they would lose their effectiveness. We reread the story 6 times – I don’t know if that many times is really necessary but I feel that I needed to repeat the process with each boy and it is building stamina and endurance. Usually I only do two to three repeated readings. {Example 2} By this time I had the next sequence of activities organized in my head so I could explain the process to the boys. Two boys partnered and timed one another reading the fresh read. The other two boys worked with Annie and myself. (5/28/2015)

Hence, at times I moved the lesson along through changes to the original plan, while other times I simply gathered, noted, and stored the information for future reflection. The data in this one selection demonstrates that my ideas moved quickly and randomly from focusing one student to the next. Each data point began to pose partial theories of the student’s nature as a learner and their skills.
This one journal entry captured nine different sketches of what was going on in the moment. I am amazed that my brain could process so much detail when trying to focus on the here and now. However, without a written account of my thoughts, this auditory/verbal information simply felt like overload. Without experiencing the process of typing or writing my thoughts and then repeatedly viewing the visual representation of the data, sorting through my knowledge would be impossible. In the past, this caused a lack of personal confidence and the inability to trust myself. I did not believe that I knew what I was doing. Today, I love the rich, thick descriptions my brain provides, for these descriptions bestow so much more information than a single number could ever represent.

**Awareness.** How often do you participate in an activity only to realize later you wished you had paid greater attention to the “in the moment” happenings? When I teach I need to be mindful of what is going on around me. Finding the balance in focusing my attention between the presentation of the material and the students’ needs as they experience the lesson was extremely challenging. Remaining alert to a variety of elements within a situation, rather than simply engaging in tunnel vision of a single component, took practice. This awareness came after the fact, when the episode was over. The next story I share presents a situation in which my personal awareness would not have materialized if my co-workers had not verbalized and called attention to a rather astonishing deed I had performed.

The second day of Dynamic Indictors of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS) testing for the spring benchmark of 2014/2015 was upon me. Given a stack of first-grade
student benchmark booklets, I reviewed the two assessments for this grade-level test. First, the child was expected to decode nonsense words. Then he/she would read three grade-level passages for one minute each. Gathering my supplies—testing protocols, timer, and pencils, as well as my thoughts—I mentally reviewed my presentation for modeling both the individual sounds and the whole nonsense word. Next, I checked the first child’s score for the winter benchmark. This girl’s record indicated that nonsense words were just beginning to emerge at the end of first semester. While I waited for the young girl by her classroom door, her teacher mouthed something to me. I thought the message regarded the student’s low score for nonsense words and acknowledged that I had it covered. The student and I engaged in small talk for a few minutes before testing began. This young girl’s performance in reading nonsense words was still slow, but she demonstrated a slight improvement from her winter score. However, she totally surprised me by exhibiting notable confidence when reading the three selections, commanding great fluency and accuracy. At the conclusion of the testing period, I requested her help in showing the next child how to find my room and continued assessing other first-grade students. Later, I calculated the total correct words per minute for each child, recorded these scores on the front cover of each booklet, and submitted them to the school’s literacy specialist. At lunch, I attended a meeting in the kindergarten room. As I navigated my way around the miniature tables and chairs, I heard my co-workers calling out various phrases implying “good job.” I didn’t have an inkling what they were speaking about. I remained quiet, for the limited clues presented little to no information from which I could formulate a question. A few more minutes of conversation and the
whole picture materialized: the young girl I had tested that morning had never orally read a selection to any other teacher in the school. In that instant, I realized this was the classroom teacher’s silent message to me. I wrote the following entry in my personal journal later that evening.

Thank goodness I didn’t know that [the child had never read a story], I’m not sure it would have happened, for some reason she chose me to give such a blessing. I don’t know what I did different. Maybe I look different because I ride the scooter in the halls and talk to the students at eye level, it really does not matter – I was lucky. I’ll keep looking for those miracles. (5/6/2015)

These gifts encourage me to stay in the moment by slowing time down with deep calming breaths and absorbing as much information as possible. I certainly missed a lot of clues that day, including the obvious one: on the front cover of the young girl’s booklet there were no previous scores written in the section for oral reading fluency.

**Preparation.** Preparation periods for designing daily lessons were extremely important to me for several reasons. First, when the content was well organized, I had more energy to focus my attention on the students’ actions/reactions during instruction. This allowed me more opportunities to be alert and aware of student engagement with the activity. Second, if a child distracted me, which was more than likely to happen, this preparation allowed me to pull myself back to the sequence of events and stay the course. Third, teaching often ignited my zealous nature to build an abundance of elaborate fun activities. During these preparation periods I recognized those designs that would be difficult to execute and kept my plans doable. Each day’s lesson plan outlined a routine
of daily tasks and activities. I often wrote step-by-step directions to help refresh myself on the concepts, terms, and sequences that I would utilize during instruction. I also included directives for myself, noting last minute preparations that would need to be implemented on the day of instruction. Lesson plans are provided in Appendix A to illustrate the groundwork I engaged in to develop and organize for future teaching.

Even with these plans in place, I often wanted to take additional time to foster greater success with lessons—reflection for action. I used these additional planning/preparation periods to reflect on the implementation of my instruction. The following excerpt, taken from my reflection journal, describes my process of managing supplies. These concrete items spurred consideration of specific difficulties that could arise.

Prior to both sets of lessons I gathered my supplies and laid them out at the tables. I like having time like this to organize, it helps me remember all the activities I want to engage the students in. I also stop to think about the sticking points I might encounter. I often come up with a solution. However today I noticed that I could not remember my solution because I had not written it down or grouped papers together to help me remember. This is in regards to pairing students to work together. I’ve come to realize I do forget – it’s OK. In planning for the guided reading lesson I got the paper for the timeline – never used it but I think it’s better to over plan and have a backup plan. I like the kids to stay busy. If they finish a task faster than I anticipate I want the next one to be enjoyable – preferably not a worksheet. My first look at the graphic organizers and worksheet
indicated that only two of the six students were ready to move on. I left the papers out for a while and realized this could present a problem as I tried to manage more [students when] reading the story with me. Thus I regrouped and left only Mason and Nicholas to do the vocabulary activity. The rest, we continued the pattern of reading some of the story together as I’m trying to encourage them to investigate the text for answers on their own. I felt quite successful with this task. I’d love to explain what I did but without a visual I can’t describe the process. Overall what pushed me to change the grouping was my inability to take on more readers after I had [already] started a [different set of students in a] small group reading. (4/14/2014)

I find it interesting that even in my reflections I interrupt my thinking (two sentences referring to paper for the timeline) and present a justification for the action. These thoughts demonstrate a plan for the next activity and describe a personal belief to explain my reasoning. At the conclusion of this entry I insert an apology (sentence referencing my inability to provide an explanation) to excuse not providing an extended narrative of the instructional period.

These additional organizational planning periods helped to ward off chaos. At times, chaos inevitably materialized as a group of six students diagnosed with ADHD tried to relate to a new concept for the first time. This overwhelming level of energy seemed to consume me. Nevertheless, I tried to meet the needs of each individual, engaging as many techniques as possible to keep them all on the same page.
I didn’t go out to lunch. I sat and looked through math PARCC papers organizing for the afternoon lessons. This gave me a great sense of peace – I also wondered do I need to always be in control. I thought about wanting things organized towards my needs, so I can feel good in the middle of the chaos. The more the chaos of the lesson the more time I take to prepare for the lesson. I want to know that I did all I could to survive the “battle.” (4/15/2014)

In retrospect I wondered why I made an effort. I could not control the students’ reactions, nor their resulting behaviors. However, preparation provided that sense of being ready for anything. In this next entry, I began to understand my own need to organize my thoughts prior to a lesson. Thus, an answer emerges to my past experiences’ question of whether I was over-controlling and simply wanted things my own way.

About 9:00 I put today’s PIE lesson into place. It feels good not to be cramped, have time to envision how the lesson will flow. I’m not bothered if it does not go that way, I just want my ducks in a row. When I sway from the plan I’m [still] grounded. Thus when I’m reaching I won’t tumble and fall flat on my face. I’m anchored. I’m on solid ground. (5/11/2015)

No, I do not need for things to go my own way. I learned that when I’m secure in my class then students will also feel that security. Going that extra mile helps all members of the setting to become unified.

Mistakes. Mistakes occurred all the time when I taught my lessons. About ten years ago, when the scripted reading program was first implemented in my classroom, I focused so hard on the presentation of my lessons that I constantly messed up students’
names. Eventually I devised a solution in which students assisted me to execute my instruction in a better fashion. If I miscalled a child’s name, the children were asked to say “Shame, shame, Mrs. Carrig” while moving their pointer finger back and forth. Whenever the students utilized this action and phrase, it pulled me back in the moment to recollect myself and attend specifically to the children whose names I messed up. Today, I still teach my students this action and phrase to help me catch my mistakes, otherwise these errors could often go unheeded. Also, I like modeling how I deal with these blunders and how natural it is to make mistakes. When students call my attention to an error it causes me to stop and think. Many mistakes occur because I’m thinking about the next step of a lesson while still articulating conclusions for the present action. Thus, my instructions utilize wrong terms, or I blurt out information that I wanted the students to verbalize themselves. After most occurrences I simply accept my humanness, but sometimes I’m annoyed, particularly if I’ve made several errors in a row. Generally, a quick personal assessment evaluates why I am making so many errors, and whether I can change my ways in the moment. I certainly try.

For me, multiple mistakes caused feelings of “I’m not good enough,” “I need to try harder,” (as if I were not already giving it everything I have) or “I’ll just remain silent.” Furthermore, I often cautioned myself not to bring my emotions into the moment, for they used up a lot of energy. These periods of despair often occurred after some type of school-wide assessment. The following three journal entries illustrate my point. The first was written after scoring students’ paragraphs in written expression for a student learning objective (SLO) in third-grade language arts. The second entry
documents my feelings after the third graders spring benchmarks scores for DIBELS. I know I felt despair and struggled to pull myself out of the feeling. The final entry discusses a student who just recently entered our school.

Everybody went up at least 1 point for the SLO – except maybe Henry. My first reaction – I’ve worked all year and that’s the best I can do? Wow Care (my nickname for myself) that’s harsh – why are you so negative, distrustful of your skills? If I take the blame before others heap it on I’ll know what to expect – ugh, that’s stupid, ugly, unfair, not very loving! I’m the one who is accepting the blame, I’m not sure it is mine to accept. (4/3/2015)

…The student’s score tells the story – has a history – that he’s not good enough. I am often part of that story – double ugh. I need to peek but not dwell, be aware but still change the perception, celebrate the small successes, encourage and trudge through the muck of “poor” performance. That word “poor” certainly has a history that implies that the student is not trying, does not attend, fools around, etc., but if I were in that child’s shoes wouldn’t that be my choices too? I wouldn’t want all those ugly feelings that accompany the inability to read. Don’t make it such a big deal – it will happen, be patient, keep trying, believe in yourself. (5/6/2015)

…I did lose my temper while the students were reading the fresh read, particularly with Noah. He has some great skills but not in work ethics. I have to remember that the previous school kept labeling him in this manner [as ADHD and bi-polar].
I need to be patient and keep modeling what I want. It’s OK to lose my cool but you get more by demonstrating kindness. (5/26/2015)

In each journal entry I acknowledged my feelings, and then wrote how I wanted to change my approach in future situations, moving from a negative to a positive viewpoint.

Mistakes also led me to make changes that made a significant difference in my instruction. I’ve included three excerpts from my journal documenting these changes. In each circumstance, information gathered from previous experiences propelled decisions I made for that day’s lessons. In the first example, Tina, a third-grade classroom teacher shared that students’ writings continually focused on the negative traits of a friendship, behaviors the child did not want their friend to display. These students’ paragraphs received low scores because the children did not express a trait a good friend would possess. This information prompted me to begin discussions with student pairs focusing on the negative aspects of friendship, since it was easy for children to describe. Then, I requested that the students describe an opposite trait. In the second situation, I had forgotten to prepare for DIBELS progress monitoring. During my last minute examination of student progress, my thoughts revealed that I was on target with the underlying skills that helped the children to improve their oral reading fluency. In the final example, I noticed that students were bogged down with copying sentences from the board. In turn, this limited the amount of discussion the students shared about the selection that they read chorally.

Friend’s discussions - I loved being the secretary for discussions of the characteristics of a good friend. Tina’s idea about starting with what you do not
want a friend to do really helped the students to talk about this subject. The students liked the visual or the list I created as they spoke, even commented on words that were long – made them feel smart that they had thought of the idea. I kept probing about “What does it look like if you don’t want your friend to do ______?” I was excited to share the results with classroom teachers. (3/25/2015)

I had forgotten I had to DIBEL, so I got the supplies out for that while students continued to read. Only got Connor, Jack and Nicholas done. Connor’s score was awesome, he is reading so well with just a few mistakes. We reviewed these mistakes. I remember thinking, I’m right on target with his objectives on the IEP – the type of words he missed fell into the targets written. I also was proud of myself that Annie had three different sets of flashcards addressing those objectives this week and was collecting data. What an accomplishment for me.

When Jack was called to read DIBELS he took the initiative to bring up his binder to act as a slant board – his score, without the book in front of me I do not recall wpm or accuracy. What I can remember is that I wasn’t mad, so he must have done OK. (4/17/2015)

…I made two changes in instruction after watching the lesson’s video. First after reading a paragraph or two – the kids led this – they are strong readers, I had them bring their papers to the floor. My job [was] to scribe their ideas into one or two sentences. Their job look back in the selection and think about how to form a sentence. Noah was not looking back – playing with his fingers. Others seemed to be involved – here is a time that I let them “free for all” with their thoughts –
not calling on a raised hand – I think that gets in the way of the discussion. I do need to have a discussion about waiting for a turn, listen patiently and then join in the conversation. Maybe a chart indicating who talked and how often to demonstrate this interchange to the students. After the timeline sentence was written students reread twice and then returned to their seats to copy. I rewrote the sentence for Lucy and Noah to have up close. As they finished writing I had an opportunity to help Lucy and Noah with concerns in attaching more post-it notes, looking over others work for mistakes, and instructing them to reread. This sequence worked much better in focusing for the task, rather than overlapping tasks and limiting energy levels. (That happens a lot – I think that’s the nature of life.) The hour went by quickly. (4/28/2015)

Mistakes, mine or those shared by a co-worker, helped generate thoughts and reflections of how to improve instruction.

**Values, beliefs.** Changes often stimulated memories accompanied by strong feelings from my past. In this manner, “in-the-moment” reflections sometimes revealed possible reasons that I no longer engaged in particular activities. These reasons seemed to be motivated by two priorities: work and efficiency. I believe these two particular values continually influenced my automatic habits as pressure built to be the best, and to accomplish as much as possible within given time limits. In the first example, a change occurred in the daily schedule for Mia and me when no substitute was available for the physical education instructor. First, this caused us to lose our planning period and second, we were expected to provide some type of physical activity for the students. My
initial reaction was anger, but once we decided to allow the students to play on the playground for the forty-minute period I accepted the inevitable. With this acceptance, I realized that I loved watching the students play; I hadn’t done that in a very long time. Then this thought tumbled along—there’s always more important work to be done (5/1/2015). Wow, I had adhered to that thought for years, unconsciously choosing work above play over and over and over again.

In the second example, I was feeling antsy and wanted to move the lesson along at a faster pace. However, the students seemed very comfortable with the tempo of the vocabulary term review. This review included clap and spell, providing a verbal description, and having each child in the group use the term in an eight-word sentence. I later recognized that my comprehension of the term caused me to feel the tasks were redundant, but since the students were not at this level of knowledge, the activities were exactly what they needed (5/4/2015). In this next example I modeled illustrating the setting of a book.

I loved drawing my picture while the kids worked. I haven’t done that in ages and ages. I really got excited as I first started to make the mansion – it looked so cool and I was proud of myself for drawing so well. It was fun and I haven’t allowed myself that pleasure in a long time because drawing a picture was not as important as any other task I had to accomplish. I’m learning to let go of those priorities and tell myself to stop and enjoy the day. (5/28/2015)

Overall, each of these examples provided a great discovery as to why I make the choices I do when planning instruction. In this final entry, I was trying to explain to myself how
my beliefs were beginning to change, which in turn affected the choices I made in the school day.

I kept thinking the students made this choice to not do homework and this is the consequence, it’s OK that I’m not fixing their problem, that the school hours are not being used efficiently, that I’m not teaching them and I have time to do so. These are all beliefs I had in the past that held me bound to making the decisions I had made in the past – work, work, work. I think I’m concerned I will get lazy and not deliver an honest day’s work to my employers. I know I judged co-workers in the past feeling that they were not doing their part – today I realize it simply is not my business. We all work hard and sometimes we simply need a break, so do the kids. So although my students had to sit in study hall – it’s the kind of break they have earned. It’s not my responsibility to make sure that every moment that can be used for teaching is. It’s deeper than that. I’ll try again – I’m trying to get the students to a certain point – set of skills, I need time to do that – so I use every minute available but that can be exhausting for both the students and myself. I am certainly made of drive – get to the endpoint, keep my focus on the goal but too much drive makes the tool dull. A dull tool does not perform as well; this is true about the kids too. I guess not making Nicholas complete all the work is not such a bad thing, that would have been my aim before, just work, work, work until the list of assignments was complete and the student was exhausted. Maybe sitting and doing nothing is OK. I always thought that doing the work helped one to become better – not if there is resentment, anxiety, fear.
These feelings can block learning. I grew up with a phenomenal work ethic – and I love that I can engage but I think I’ve learned that it is equally important to disengage – have fun. Also it is not my responsibility to change a student’s personality – model yes, change no. (5/8/2015)

**Applications.** Intervention specialists are required to meet the individual needs of each child with special needs. Achieving this goal entails mindfulness of the student’s actions when learning. In turn, this necessitates mindfulness of one’s own actions and thoughts in the moment—in-action reflection. Some of these contemplative thoughts simply direct the teacher to be the best instructor possible at that moment in time. Some thoughts propose possible paths of how to utilize the resources available in the moment. Others begin to build theories of how the child operates within his/her world. However, when teacher’s thoughts are not present in the moment and are otherwise engaged, then habits take over. Habits operate without thinking. Habits may be good and beneficial, but allowing one’s thinking to be on automatic-pilot permits choices to be made without conscious thought. Eventually, this repeated pattern of unconsciously making choices causes an intervention specialist to begin questioning his/her practice. I believe that anxiety and stress begin to build as an instructor loses touch with the action in the moment.

On-action reflections seem to be at the heart of this intervention specialist’s instruction. Without engaging in a reflective process, a teacher is simply delivering a lesson, not observing how students have interpreted the instruction, or if they have understood the concepts. Thus, reflection collects data from which the intervention
specialist can individualize and design instruction that is modified for each student’s needs to enhance learning. The student is not simply memorizing; rather, the skill becomes part of his/her repertoire and skill set. The instructor’s reflections build theories that take shape and explain how the child operates within the school environment. From these theories, hypotheses can be made describing what types of instruction would best suit the student’s needs. Trial and error experiences produce data to inform further decisions. Thus, in-action gathering, organizing, and storing data, combined with on-action reflection on this data, enables an intervention specialist to create lessons that enhance learning for children with special needs.

Finally, reflections reveal information about one’s self as an instructor. Permitting these thoughts to surface and be viewed allows the teacher to possibly clarify unconscious ideas that affect instructional choices. In turn, self-confidence develops as a deeper awareness of one’s value choices evolve. A happier, more confident, more prepared intervention specialist results in a more fruitful practice and better instruction.

**Mason**

Mason entered our school at the beginning of third grade. He was older than his peers, very athletic, but lacked social and verbal skills. When he perceived that he was in trouble, Mason’s demeanor caused him to run and hide. After the first three days of school, Mia and I vented our frustrations about this new student, and then we got to work devising a behavioral plan for him. In general, our goal was simply to encourage respectful behavior from all third graders. Specifically, Mason was urged to remain quiet during instruction and use positive talk when responding.
**Mason’s power.** Mason was initially viewed both as a threat and an annoyance, because his behaviors often exhibited power over this intervention specialist. As Mia stated in a critical friend conversation, he exhibited confusion and disorganization (Audio #3, 2:42, 3/30/2015). The following excerpt describes Mason’s behaviors while chorally reading with three of his classmates—Connor, Nicholas, and Dylan. Mason squatted on the chair, complaining that his stomach hurt and he needed to use the bathroom. However, he had just gone during the previous music period, less than thirty minutes earlier. The other students looked at the text, tracked with their finger, and chorally read the passage. Mason sat on the chair on his bottom, with his legs bent like a frog and hands clasped around his ankles. He poked his finger in his left ear. I got up from my seat and moved to his right side, reading with the students as I walked. I kindly requested that Mason please put his feet down, while bending over and pointing my finger to the words on the page of his text. His feet didn’t move, so once again I requested for him to please put his feet down. He complied. Remaining by his side, I continued reading and tracking as the other boys read. After a few minutes I returned to my seat. Mason sat on his chair with his right hand by his mouth. He did not read, but placed his thumb in his mouth and picked at his teeth. Then he picked at his nose. Mason was quiet and did not read. When the students finished reading the book, I gave Mason permission to use the restroom (Video 141, 31:19).

Me: With all this going on I’m not feeling real confident I’m presenting something that I like, that they [the students] have a good sense of what’s going on.
Mia: I know exactly how you feel. Exactly.

Me: Can you describe that in your own words?

Mia: You get, and it’s because of some of the kids in the room, Mason, you have a good plan and then Mason is doing this over here, or he’s not in his seat, my attention is drawn to him and I’m not focused on what I need to be teaching. I feel when that happens I’m not teaching. (Audio #3, 4:41, 3/30/2015)

Thus, Mason’s power diverted my role from teaching to reacting to his current needs.

At the onset of the school year Mason’s language displayed a negative nature. Thus, Mia and I designed a sign to be used with all third grade students: “Be a respectful third grade student – 1. Be quiet, 2. Be positive.” With the use of this sign and three coins Mason learned to control his calling out. At first, a chart with daily rewards was utilized to shape more positive behavior. Mason colored in one square for each coin he kept every day. Rewards were randomly placed. In this fashion, Mason worked for rewards that he had requested—eating lunch with the teacher, reading a book with a classmate of his choice, computer time, and a prize from the prize box. After six weeks, Mason responded to the presence of only the coins. When he disobeyed one of the rules he lost a coin; when all three coins were lost then Mason came in at recess for a specified period of time. He honored this consequence, and quietly sat for the duration. However, when the teacher’s union requested that no students stay in the classroom during the recess period my leverage was gone.

At one point I was extremely annoyed with Mason. In the past I would have simply started a three count and told him he had to stay inside at recess but today
started our day of working to contract – no students at recess. Thus I was not prepared how to deal with Mason’s misbehavior. At one point I sent him down to class to sign the chart – I needed him to go for a walk and burn off some energy. As he left the class he grabbed Jack’s pencil, the students observed this and told me. I asked them to let it go, if the pencil was not returned I would give him a new one. At the end of class Jack and Mason sat down to discuss the missing pencil. Jack expressed that he was sad his friend would do this, Mason apologized. I dismissed Jack and spoke some more to Mason – telling him he had good friends and that he needed to treat them accordingly. Mason gave a few sentences back that I did not really understand, [specifically] what the reference was about to his family not caring. (4/15/2015)

On April 20, 2015, Mia listened as I vented my struggles to once again manage Mason’s misbehaviors during my small group instruction. As further evidence of her helpful and engaging nature in this study, she suggested that Mason could stand on the wall at recess. I decided that, yes, that would work. The following transcript expounds the rest of our conversation:

Me: What I am saying is, Mason is the only student that I ever feel has more power than me. Do you get that same feeling?

Mia: At times, I feel he challenges me all the time.

Me: Can you explain what you feel those challenges are like?

Mia: In my head I’m going, OK, what am I going to do if he doesn’t listen to me?

I have been lucky, for example, when we were out in the other room [in the hall
for math] he wants to sit wherever he wants to sit. I say you sit here. It’s a matter of who is going to last the longest, him or me. I will sit and wait until he does.

Me: He’s the only student I ever code as having power, other situations have power, but Mason is the only student that I ever see as having power. Do you feel other students for you, have power?

Mia: James V, I don’t know whether he has the power or he just wears me down. Eventually he does do what I ask him to but I think he is showing his power over me with his stubbornness. He does not do it right away. That exhausts me because it is a power struggle. He is defiant.

Me: Why do you think the other students do not fall into this category [of exhibiting power over the teacher]?

Mia: Because they are not defiant.

Me: It’s the defiance that gives them power?

Mia: Yeah, absolutely.

Me: Why do they fall into this defiance? Is it their misbehavior?

Mia: I think it’s what they have come to accept as acceptable. I think Mason has gotten away with his attitude and then maybe a teacher will back off.

Me: So he has learned that.

Mia: If I give the lip and if I just don’t do it they will stop and I’ll get what I want.

Me: It intrigued me that this was the only student that I felt had power and it bothered me.
Mia: It does worry me. Especially if he is not going to do it, then where am I going to go with it?

Me: How much backup plan do I have to have in my head? I’m very careful not to back myself into a corner.

Mia: Exactly. I think Mason has gotten a relationship with us now and he will eventually do it because he does trust us. He knows we care about him. I think that does make a difference because I will say, “Come on Mason.” Then he will do it. He does not do it willingly, but he will do it. I think because he knows we like him, we care about him.

Me: That made the change getting him to follow what we are doing. I like that idea.

Mia: Maybe it’s more of a defensive thing with him than a power thing.

Me: I see it as power over me.

Mia: I know, if he only knew what was going through my head.

*We both start laughing.* (Audio #8, 0:00 - 6:19)

Overall, Mason lacked the endurance to stay with a difficult task. His first years of school were experienced in two separate settings in a larger metropolitan district. Thus, he had not had the opportunities his current classmates experienced that built trust and support, which signified to students that they would endure the challenge. Later that evening, I wrote the following paragraph in my personal reflections journal.

Mia and I discussed the power struggles we have with Mason and one other student. I don’t feel this kind of friction from any of my other students. I really
want to stay out of these power battles. In my personal life I don’t engage in power battles – I would rather show kindness and respect. Mia mentioned that Mason recognizes that we exhibit these behaviors (kindness and respect) towards him and is learning to demonstrate them himself. However, his academic skills are so low that I believe he feels threatened because of this. He has learned a different set of skills that he utilizes to challenge his peers and the teachers. One of these skills is trying to be funny – he’s good at it. I think Mia and I have done a good job of helping his classmates to bring him into the community – at the onset of the year if there was a problem Mason’s name was at the center of the situation and students were quick to blame him, he was getting the reputation of being a bad boy. Today, when the students were writing about people Mason’s name was picked often and he was described by his peers as being cool and awesome. (4/20/2015)

**Mason’s reading skills.** Mason was older than all the other third graders because he had repeated first grade. However, his reading skills were significantly lower than any other child at this grade level during the 2014/2015 school year. Thus, the literacy specialist worked individually with him five days a week for forty minutes each day. I was thrilled that this service was offered to Mason, but also had significant reservations. Often I found myself alternately among blaming, questioning, and judging this specialized instruction.

Mason really does not want to read the stories. He will track for a little while but then he is not even in the right place. I get annoyed. Mason is receiving
instruction five days a week for 40 minutes, one-on-one – and he simply says to me – I don’t want to read. This is a can of worms I struggle to put on paper, my thoughts and feelings are aimed at the method utilized for instruction. The scope and sequence seem very much like the Direct Instruction lessons I taught several years ago. I’m cringing my eyes and trying to blow off steam as I type this. Mastery is required before moving on. Data demonstrates that Mason has achieved 83% accuracy in reading a list of words. I want to scream this is not enough. My perception of the whole thing is that this approach is looking at the student from the perspective that he cannot do things. It’s pushing him to continually combat those negative feelings about reading rather than building positive thoughts. For me it feels as if the time is not being used efficiently.

Then there is the conversation that no one else can work with Mason and his instructor because they will not understand the language going on. What the hell are we teaching the kids? Reading is so difficult and secretive that others cannot join in the process? Ahhh! (4/1/2015)

On April 30, 2015, my personal reflections once again reiterated these concerns about the effectiveness of this specialized instruction. I felt that Mason continued to internalize the message that reading was hard and wanted to avoid the task. Igniting his desire to engage in reading, in spite of his fear of so many words, continued to be a challenge I constantly battled. I tried to sustain patience and empathize with this fear, but my overall sense was that I was not succeeding (3/23/2015). Mia and I both spoke of how far Mason had come
since the beginning of the year. However, his very low reading skills constantly posed a challenge for both myself and my students during small group guided reading instruction.

One student was particularly helpful when interacting with Mason—Jack. Within their partnership, Mason verbalized how difficult everything was, but Jack soldiered on, persevering to complete a task. Mason liked Jack and would follow his lead. I was grateful; although Mason often copied, he was learning to work with other students.

Mason is getting in the way – this seems too difficult and he’s off task. I was grateful for Jack’s offer of help. I also liked that Jack did instruct Mason to write a topic sentence that included the elements that were missing in his [Jack’s] own paragraph. I have to be OK that although this is not Mason’s thinking he is working somewhat on the task. (3/28/2015)

…Mason does not want to read, it really affects the presentation of my activities, or maybe that is just in my mind. Jack and Mason worked together to complete the cloze activity. To indicate which terms were correct I gave smiley faces or stars once the student had read the sentence. If an answer was incorrect I had the students think about the meaning and why it didn’t fit in the sentence. Mason has a good short term memory and can repeat the sentence he just heard Jack read. (5/20/2015)

Mason and I were fortunate to have Jack’s assistance during instructional periods. He acted as a buffer in helping Mason complete assignments with dignity.

My perception that Mason exhibited power influenced my planning periods for several reasons. First, I was always considering how to engage him in the planned
activity. Mason struggled to maintain attention to task for long periods of time. He was also quick to demonstrate avoidance behaviors or call out silly ideas to gain attention from his classmates. Thus, I tried to have back-up plans in place so a lesson would not be interrupted by his choices. These plans included (a) working in a small group for ten minutes with the assistant, (b) working with younger students, and (c) reading a selection on the iPad with a peer. Scheduling times and personnel for these backup plans, preparing materials, explaining the activities to my assistant, and checking that peers wanted to read with Mason all took time and thought. Second, Mia and I wanted Mason to feel valued within the learning community. Planning to achieve this goal included weekly discussions about changes in Mason’s behavior, observations of good qualities he exhibited, and wonderings how to elicit more of these positive behaviors. Furthermore, there were times when my reaction to Mason’s behaviors was the driving factor of my choice. Hence, I pondered how to change my point of view, just a little bit at a time.

Mason’s low reading scores also presented a challenge because he was grouped with five students whose ability to read was significantly greater than his. My planning included mentally acting through the steps of each lesson, and deconstructing the skills needed to perform the task. When I encountered a task that was beyond Mason’s ability I designed a scaffold that enabled him to feel a part of the group, feel success. Furthermore, I wanted to give the message that this was a safe place to learn. When Mason behaved poorly I always made a point to identify the good qualities he exhibited, but I also called him on those that needed to be changed. Thus, my reflective planning when dealing with Mason was both in-action and on-action.
Applications. I do not get a student like Mason every year, but many years such a child does join my class. My overall conclusions are that I was simply mad that his past school system and home environment had created such a state of affairs. Many times I found myself reacting to the situation and wishing for things to be different. When I was tired, it was even more difficult to remain calm and peaceful, and to present my best self as an educator. A lot of energy was invested, and when the results were minimal at best, it was difficult not to get resentful towards the student. Mason didn’t request this way of life; he was simply doing what he had been taught. However, intervention specialists are human. Further resentments may be felt as the tasks of un-teaching bad habits and demonstrating better coping techniques are added to an instructor’s list of responsibilities. Acceptance can be a difficult action, particularly when the role of counselor and even mother falls onto the teacher’s shoulders.

Sub-question 3: How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making?

Outside factors influenced my decision-making by distracting me from my primary professional purpose—teaching. These outside influences fell into one of three categories—institutional influences, limitations of resources, and interruptions. For me, a message from any outside event conveyed a notion of urgency and the need for immediate attention. Messages came in various forms: the school district’s relentless supply of emails, professional learning days, uncooperative technology, teacher-based team’s online weekly forms, and IEPs’ ever changing compliancy standards. In addition to this constant barrage of messages stating “do this now” were the staff’s many interpretations of what to do. These multiple layers of interpretation left me feeling
powerless, unstable, and exhausted. An overall sense of not feeling “good-enough” existed within me. In retrospect, that actually seems very realistic—how can one feel good enough when the path is so murky? Thus, my reflections were influenced by countless people, places, and things. In turn, this provided me with a sense of instability from factors outside of my classroom as well as within. Ultimately, I learned to move beyond the distractions by collaborating with my co-workers, and giving value to my unique approaches in addressing the problems these distractions presented.

In this next section, an explanation of the nature of these three categories of outside factors will be provided. Each category is divided into specific conditions that label a particular facet of the outside factor. Every sample will first include a vignette illustrating how I experienced the situation, and then an explanation describing what that experience meant for my practice. The chart below, Figure 20, outlines these categories of outside factors and their sub-divisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Institutional Influences</strong></th>
<th><strong>Limitations of Resources</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interruptions / Disruptions</strong></th>
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<td>● Space</td>
<td>● Loss of assistant during planning period</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Student Learning Objective</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Individualized Educational Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Applications</td>
<td>● Applications</td>
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</tbody>
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*Figure 19. Categorization of Outside Factors*

**Institutional Influences**
Government educational regulations, such as Common Core standards, teacher evaluations, and student assessments, impacted my teaching position from the outside world. Prior to implementation, these policies were interpreted by the school district’s administrators. In-service activities, monthly teacher meetings, district e-mails, and word of mouth were the construction zone for informing and educating the teaching staff of their proposed responsibilities in regards to these directives within our classrooms. Creating meaning of government regulations in this manner allowed anxiety to flow rapidly throughout our work force. Implementation of these directives became the charge of each individual school building (K-4, middle school, etc.). Under the principal’s direction, the building’s employees stumbled and discovered their way through the directives. A special education supervisor added her own interpretation of the overarching policies for students utilizing special education services. Hence, the principal and supervisor volleyed questions and concerns between their staff and the administration.

At the center of my teaching world was the “Dream Team.” This group of three third-grade classroom teachers, Mia, Tina, Marie, and myself, were thus named by our principal for achieving 95 percent passage rate of our students in regards to the Third Grade Guarantee. Throughout the school year, this team supported each other as a model of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development in four specific manners: (1) providing motivation and prior knowledge for each other, (2) supporting one another to accomplish a variety of tasks within a larger activity, (3) communicating thoughts and ideas in a safe environment, and (4) role reversal – at any given moment my peers and I switched roles.
between knowledgeable peer and learner. Figure 21 below diagrams these layers of interpretation within the school environment of government educational regulations.

![Diagram of Layers of Interpretation of Government Educational Regulations](image)

**Figure 20.** Diagram of Layers of Interpretation of Government Educational Regulations

**Walk-through.** Sophie, my principal, surprised me with a walk-through on March 30, 2015. Her visit was probably no longer than ten minutes. Seated at the rectangular table nearest my work area, Sophie observed the lesson and typed on her iPad. Then she was gone. Later that day, Mia patiently listened as I shared my anxieties about the experience. The first words that tumbled out of my mouth were that I was being singled out and, thus, Sophie was looking for things I was doing wrong. Mia quickly inserted this positive consideration: “Instead of what’s right?” I conceded,
sharing eight different manners in which I had prepared and organized for the lesson. Of course, these positive ideas quickly turned sour as I recounted the students’ desire to use the restroom (How dare they!) and technology not working. These events diminished my confidence in presenting the lesson. Mia reaffirmed that good plans were thwarted when a teacher’s attention was drawn to a student’s difficulties rather than the lesson. She stated that at these times she did not teach very well, graciously affirming my feelings. I continued to describe the students’ enjoyment of the book as they drew pictures depicting details of the story, wrote words to define the characters’ actions, and discussed the concept of friendship. Then anxiety descended again. I explained my concern that Sophie’s short walk-through did not allow her to see the big picture of the three-day lesson, or the amount of work that went into what I did. Mia agreed, “There’s examples of teachers who don’t deserve an accomplished rating, who have that status because of some arbitrary system, it’s not right. Judging me on something that is professional, something my job depends on, you take it internally and say, ‘I’m only average.’” My response to Mia expounded on past actions when I ignored my anxiety and pushed myself to do more and more, never taking time to credit myself for what I was doing. At the end of our critical friend conversation, I shared a memory that had surfaced during our talk. In that recollection, I described another time when Sophie had observed a lesson, and stated that I was very loud when I taught. I accepted her critique—it was true—and we discussed another matter at hand. Before I left her office I turned and asked, “Okay, I’m loud, but was my lesson any good?” I desperately wanted feedback, and at that time wasn’t capable of evaluating my own actions. Sophie’s response provided affirmation of
a job well done. “Yes,” I acknowledged to myself, “a job well done in taking a baby step to discuss my shortcomings.”

Sophie’s evaluation that day spurred me to critique myself, reflecting on my strengths and weaknesses, rather than relying on someone else’s appraisal. The following journal entry describes my assessment of the lesson.

Sophia observed me today. Mia and I spoke about it later in the day. When I did look at the review I achieved “skilled” in each category. This was certainly a disappointment because I have always obtained a few accomplished ratings. The first thing that goes through my head is that “I’m not good enough.” Of course that stayed with me for quite a while and I even caught myself sulking when we were at the board meeting later in the day. I wanted to share my scores with Mia but it wasn’t the time or place. I did call her later this evening but she didn’t get back to me. Now that I’m mostly removed from the feelings that went with the “non-evaluative walk-through” lots of factors come to mind. First I was very prepared for that lesson with the parts I could plan. I know I cannot know how the kids will react, for me that’s the “artistry” in teaching – working with a group of students whose reaction to reading is – I can’t and I don’t want to. How to get them to buy into the activity anyhow? Particularly when the finished product is writing a paragraph, a task that is even more difficult. Sharing my paragraph [that was written based on the picture book used during the lesson] was not effective because I had no way of projecting for the students to see – I showed them on the computer but it didn’t make an impact. I also demonstrated how I used the
graphic organizer to develop my sentences for the paragraph. I didn’t like my cumulative activity – sharing with one another – it was not strong enough. The activity I had planned – reading Elephant and Piggy books did not pan out because I had not gone to the library the day before and the school library did not have these books in.

The evaluation was probably indicative of those seven minutes but truly missed the big picture of what was going on. I need to be positive with myself and accept that the evaluation system is simply that – not the end all be all of who and what I am as a teacher. I need to listen to me and not be swayed by the feelings of inadequacy that a set of words can ignite. I know I accomplished what I wanted to do and that I’m working to make a difference for the students. (3/30/2015)

Despite acknowledging that this walk-through was a small slice in the big picture of the unit I was instructing, the event influenced my decision when I made future plans. First, I engaged in dialogue, exposing my anxieties as a teacher to a trusted colleague. Exercising Vygotsky’s ZPD by using Mia as the outside circle moved me beyond the loop of anxiety through communication of these thoughts in a safe environment. In dealing with these anxieties I recognized that they were feelings, not facts, and made a choice about what I wanted to do rather than just grumble about the walk-through. My desire was to evaluate myself, and so I did. Next, I acknowledged that the evaluative system has flaws and chose to accept its limitations. In preparation for future walk-throughs, I practice two daily routines during lessons: (a) I write and review learning targets at the onset of each lesson and (b) I engage students in conversations that guide
them through the questions the principal may ask when she walks into my classroom. Returning to the example of the March 30 lesson, I had my assistant make a hand-written copy of my paragraph about friendship. The students marveled at how evidence from the picture book was used to explain my ideas. Last, Mia and I discussed whether using Elephant and Piggy books for the next part of the friendship lesson was rigorous for third graders. We both agreed this type of picture book matched the requirements, so I went to the public library and checked out six books. Performing each of these tasks energized my thoughts and allowed me to create and hold the belief that I am an effective teacher.

**Student learning objective (SLO).** Curriculum in third grade written expression was controlled by grade level Teacher Based Team’s (TBT) weekly decisions. This process began with administration of the student learning objective (SLO) pre-test, which was uniform throughout the school district. The pre-test consisted of reading two grade level passages and writing a paragraph addressing the prompt. Then throughout the school year, TBTs met weekly to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing and to design instruction to advance skills. In April, the SLO post-test was administered. This test was exactly the same as the pre-test. The diagram below, Figure 22, outlines the SLO process.
Figure 21. Student Learning Objective (SLO) Yearly Process

This diagram (Figure 22) illustrates a process that seems to be succinct. However, distractions occurred because correctly filling out the online TBT form became the focus of these meetings, rather than designing, implementing, and evaluating instruction. This result materialized when TBT forms were submitted to the Building Leadership Team (BLT) for evaluation and comparison of all grade level TBT forms. Teachers felt pressured to follow the pattern of those teams who earned better evaluative scores, even if the information was not really applicable to their grade level. On April 15, 2015, SLO scores were to be submitted. After the principal declined my data, I wrote the following entry in my journal.

What a joke the whole SLO experience turned out to be. We as teachers spent so much time creating plans, executing lessons, worrying about the student
performance, grading the assignment – for me I certainly struggled with my subjectivity in being fair to the students’ efforts or was I grading “easy” so my “grade” would look better. Anyway, the SLO information was declined by my principal this afternoon because the union contracts (or lack of) do not have language explaining how SLOs are to be used in a non-evaluative year. I am not being evaluated this school year. (4/14/2015)

SLOs were taken into consideration when planning instruction for my students throughout the academic year. First, the third grade teachers shared many good ideas for instruction of written expression during the TBT meetings. I used these ideas as starting points when designing lessons for my students in the guided reading groups. Second, the team worked collaboratively to create rubrics for each pre- and post-test assessment. These rubrics were invaluable in pushing my students to work toward grade level expectations. Hence, my co-workers provided the outside circle of ZPD for me by supplying background knowledge: possible lessons and rubrics that ignited my ideas to plan for future instruction. Third, I engaged in conversations with Mia to work collaboratively and score assignments of those students we shared, thus lessening the bias I might impose on the grading process (Audio #7, 4/14/2015). Mia stated her strategy for unbiased scoring, “I purposely did not look at their ‘before’ scores so I wouldn’t be influenced.” This would not apply for me because all my scores had been exactly alike, a four. However, Mia’s input was invaluable as we scored student work together. Utilizing this knowledge from all members of the third grade TBT provided experiences that cultivated my level of actual development, Vygotsky’s inner circle in his model of
the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD.) Thus, I gained confidence in my ability to independently problem solve dilemmas regarding written language.

**Individualized educational plans (IEP).** Writing an IEP was time and labor intensive. It took me approximately six hours to complete one entire report. Our school district’s union contract permitted me two days to write IEPs during regularly scheduled school hours, but then I was expected to prepare substitute plans for my classes. Thus, I rarely chose this option because preparing lessons for a substitute simply added more stress to an already heavy workload. With no reduction of my teaching responsibilities, I had to squeeze this six hour assignment into the weekly work schedule. Every spare minute was spent writing IEPs—before school, at the lunch/recess hour, at the end of the school day, and in the evening at home. Consequently, time for writing lesson plans was nearly non-existent and routines were used whenever possible. Also, during these IEP writing sessions much of my attention during instruction was focused on the child whose IEP I was currently creating, trying to include the latest data available. Therefore, for me writing an IEP was a significant distraction in regards to planning lessons and teaching. As I had nine students using special education services, this schedule adjustment occurred nine times. During each stint I felt I was being neglectful of my duties of organization and preparation in designing lessons. Tension built as I tried to find balance between my role as a teacher, and my obligations as a reporter who creates the IEPs.

Writing each IEP was also an experience in frustration. Although this government document no longer conjured up fear for me, the interpretation of the rules changed each year without direction. Often a procedure that was utilized the previous
school year was no longer acceptable for current practice. This morphing of rules depended upon one’s special education supervisor. Furthermore, different supervisors’ interpretations were contradictory. It was so easy to be sidetracked from teaching as I tried to blend the child’s needs with common core curriculum and the latest unstated procedures for using the correct verbiage throughout the document.

Since IEPs are a federal policy and mandate, each student’s IEP was a driving force in my instruction. Each student’s goals and objectives needed to be attended to during daily lessons. Hence, creating these targets required finesse, correlating each objective to the Common Core grade-level standard and the child’s needs. In some respects writing an IEP was like writing a year-long lesson plan. When designing this plan I needed to be specific enough to quantify the skill to be measured, but open-ended enough to allow wiggle room in exploring various strategies to obtain that skill. Furthermore, the data collection process for these objectives needed to be simple and straightforward. Gathering data was a necessity, but not at the expense of reducing time spent on instruction. A dilemma appeared when I received an IEP written by another intervention specialist. The IEP raised questions in my mind of the meaning of its objectives or accommodations, because the IEP’s writer and its implementer (me) were coming from different perspectives. The same set of words could ignite a variety of different ideas for practice. Thus, I struggled and debated whether my path of action served the intended goal. Furthermore, an IEP was a legal federal document and teachers were fearful to offer different interpretations that negotiated wiggle room within the report. When a situation built to this level of anxiety, I learned to back down and travel
the safe route—honoring the interpretation of my supervisor or principal. However, I did collect data and keep my eyes open for an opportunity to offer an alternative interpretation when the members of the IEP team might be more open-minded about the suggestion. At these times, my colleagues and I reversed roles of more knowledgeable peer and learner within Vygotsky’s ZPD by working as a team to negotiate the situation and implement new ideas for instruction for students with special needs.

**DIBELS.** A single DIBELS score could exhilarate me or depress my thoughts. Furthermore, I often found myself taking a defensive stance when student scores plummeted. In the following reflection I note four reasons for the downfall and thus justify the student’s insufficient performance with regards to making benchmark.

DIBELS – when the first set of readers – strong third grade students - struggled with words in the selection I knew my students were not going to show that miraculous score (reason 1). I also knew that the last set of scores [from the previous month] were false advertisement. Using only one reading was not the same as three (reason 2). On top of which it [the selection] was not of the same caliber as those in yesterday’s readings – the multi-syllable words [from the previous selection] were more relevant to the students’ life (reason 3). Not wearing glasses was also a concern (reason 4). I knew this would be the case but I guess there was wishful thinking on my part. (5/5/2015)

Once again, I was distracted by conditions I could not control by permitting this outside measure, the DIBELS score, to define my value as a teacher. Later that month I realized that no one in the district was punishing for low scores, and I didn’t need to either.
When I stop and think about it no one, not the supervisor, principal, literacy specialist say anything negative, I guess simply seeing the low numbers makes me want to do a better job. I am doing a good job, the students and their families have to learn to do their part. It’s a matter of knowing what my responsibility is and what it is not. (5/20/2015)

My daily reflections helped me to discern these responsibilities. In conclusion, I felt that my first responsibility was to avoid being distracted by high or low numbers. Even high scores could present a false positive that oral reading fluency was improving. Another obligation was to refrain from getting caught up in the blame game. Listing excuses would not change the student’s background or experiences. My role as an intervention specialist was to enrich the students’ lives in conjunction with both of these elements, background knowledge and learning experiences. However, I could not make up for a childhood of choices the students’ parents had made for them. Nor should I; it was not my life or my choice. I believe that the students’ perceptions about their skills and their challenges in learning to read were affected by the disparity of the have and have-nots. There was a block, not a flow of information. Thus, my final challenge was to locate the crack in the protective shell a child unconsciously built around himself as he/she blocked incoming information.

Locating that crack required lots of observations, trial and error periods, and perseverance. One morning, Connor’s protective shell cracked a little bit when he shared the following story after reading a DIBELS selection for progress monitoring.
After reading his DIBELS in the morning Connor asked me if he could tell me something. Of course – the evening before his father had found two baby kittens by the dumpster. He told me about their back legs being so tiny – I asked a question to get him to express the size of the legs – the size of his thumb. As I’m writing I think about all the questions I could have asked him but didn’t think to do so. He hadn’t named them yet but they would keep them and take care of them. They already have a boy cat at home and this cat doesn’t like these two baby girl cats. I hope I remember to inquire about these cats on Monday.

(5/8/2015)

Several weeks later Connor expressed sorrow when relating that the two kittens had not lived. This was sad, but I was grateful and honored that I took those moments to listen. In the past, consumed with my duties of teaching and data collection, I often missed opportunities to make a connection with the students. Weaving these connections into future instruction is important. It is through this interweaving of multiple connections between all members of the learning community (teachers and teachers, students and teachers, students and students) that the fabric becomes strong and durable. In this manner, I provide the outside circle of ZPD for my students by modeling participation within the larger scope of the learning community.

Finally, I tried to take my own advice and not make a mountain out of a molehill. In other words, DIBELS was just a score, not the end of the world. I wrote the following message to myself.
Don’t make low scores such a big deal – improvement will happen, be patient, keep trying, believe in yourself. I need to peek [at the data] but not dwell, celebrate the small successes, encourage and trudge through the muck of “poor” performance. That word “poor” certainly has a history that implies that the student is not trying, does not attend, fools around, etc., but if I were in that child’s shoes wouldn’t that be my choices too! I wouldn’t want all those ugly feelings that accompany the inability to read. (5/6/2015)

Hence, I hope to change those ugly feelings into experiences of fun and joy, not only for my students, but also for myself. To accomplish this goal I intend to focus on the child, trying not to be distracted by the assessment number.

**Applications.** Institutional influences were about who wielded the power to determine which interpretation to follow and what process to abide by regarding OTES, SLOs, IEPs, and DIBELS. An intervention specialist needs to tread carefully. Negotiating these power struggles was often exhausting; my energy was used to attend to the latest procedural update, rather than focusing on planning and teaching. Remaining positive in such an unstable environment was difficult. Anxiety loomed large and produced more anxiety. My best solution is to let go of what I can and still remain true to my own values as a person. Battles will come and go; I need to choose the ones I wish to fight with care. For in every battle innocent individuals will be affected. I need to remember that those around me may not wish to fight the fight. So in the end, I have learned that I do not have to strive to be at the top of the pile. I am fine remaining
unnecessary in the middle. I simply do my job to the very best of my ability, and try not to worry about what goes on around me.

**Limitations of Resources**

My resources included the following: space, time, routines, and supplies. Issues with each specified resource presented a unique frustration for me. In turn, this frustration caused me to be distracted and preoccupied with the limitation the resource displayed within my practice. I perceived these limitations as difficulties. In this next section, I first provide a description of each resource as I experienced it within the parameters of this self-study. Then, I present an explanation of how I moved beyond the distraction and changed elements of my teaching practice.

**Space.** The special education classroom I shared with two other intervention specialist was cramped with furniture and supplies. Each of us had a table at which to work with students, a desk, a file cabinet, bookcases, and shelves. All three teacher desks were positioned on the inside, or east, wall of the classroom, while two of three student work areas were arranged by the windows, or west wall. The tables for these two sections were separated by two seven-foot cabinets placed side by side. The third work station was situated on the north wall of the room. Our entry door was located at the southeast corner with a computer desk directly to the right of the entrance. A sensory corner, complete with a trampoline, rocking chair, and tent was tucked away in the northwest corner. The Apple TV hung at the north end, directly above the third student work station. My portion of the room encompassed the south side, including an alcove that used to be a coat closet with an adjacent sink. Two shelves lined the upper third
portion of the alcove wall. The entire top shelf housed teacher’s manuals and resource books for instruction. The second shelf held index cards, math flashcards, charts, and incomplete student projects. The scooter’s parking space, positioned in the southeast corner of the alcove, was wide enough to back up my vehicle into. A calendar display was positioned on the wall below the shelves on the southwest corner of the alcove. My parking space and the calendar were divided by a rectangular table, with the short side positioned on the alcove wall. Two adjacent student desks butted up to the long side of the rectangular table. My dark blue amoeba table was crammed into the space between the sink, the seven-foot cabinets, and two additional bookcases. It was a very close space.

Working in this environment presented two main distractions—the noise level and moving people. I often reminded my students that we needed to remain conscious of our noise level because two other groups were working in the same room. This notice was for me as well as the children, for when I become excited I tend to be loud. During testing sessions, the room needed to be nearly silent in consideration of fourth-grade students exhibiting autistic tendencies. I wanted to be cognizant of all students’ needs in the room while I was teaching. Sometimes meeting these accommodations simply meant finding another place for instruction. Moving to a separate location felt as if I was leaving parts of me behind because I used a wide variety of manipulatives during instruction that needed to be gathered and relocated with me. Without fail, I always forgot some essential tool, and was forced to improvise a plan to work without it. The next challenge I faced was arranging the children’s seats. Students were often distracted
as adults and peers came and went throughout the instructional period. Most often I conducted my lesson by the windows, which faced the opposite direction of the entrance to the classroom. Thus, it was paramount to invite and motivate learning that caught and held the children’s attention. Otherwise, I lost students’ responsiveness to the buzz of the outside environment just beyond the windows. When I needed to configure three distinct spaces in my work area for pairs of students to collaborate on an assignment, I often used trial and error. When one configuration worked particularly well, I took note and repeated the experience. Overall, to optimize student productivity, I considered both noise level and organization of space when designing lessons.

This environment was not my ideal choice for optimal learning. However, I was powerless to change it. Thus, space limitations needed to be dealt with by the simple act of acceptance. I needed to direct my energy toward implementing lessons that pulled the student into the excitement of the activity, rather than allowing them to attend to the environment around them. I depended on the collaborative nature of the students to encourage them to work together and build a collective enthusiasm for learning. Sometimes we hit the mark, other times we missed, but we always continued to foster connections among group members. This formation of bonds helped me to encourage learning, particularly when a skill was difficult. Once again, I acted as the outside circle of ZPD, providing motivation and support to sustain learning for my students.

**Time.** For most of the school year my day began around 7:45 AM and ended as early as 4:00 PM, though sometimes as late as 7:30 PM. I preferred to work and organize in my teaching space, rather than take materials home. When I completed lessons,
graded papers, or designed a project from home it seemed that I spent twice as much time working. At home I organized, stacked, and labeled everything with notes; when I arrived at school many additional minutes were necessary to reorganize everything within my school space. On April 15, 2015, the teacher’s union requested that all members “work to contract.” This meant arriving at school at 8:45 AM and leaving at 3:55 PM. Teachers were also asked not to work during the lunch hour. I agreed not to meet with students during recess, but refused to pass up 50 minutes available for preparation. In the afternoon Mia and I co-taught a math class consisting of thirty students, twenty of whom struggled with the subject. That last minute preparation helped to execute a lesson that offered favorable results.

The following passage documents a single school day (4/20/2015) when I worked to contract. From the moment I walked into school until I left, my attention was pulled from one task to another, allowing no downtime to regroup my energy. Thirty minutes prior to my first class I organized supplies. This included checking the appropriateness of pictures of the spelling word list on Google Images; copying a set of poems (beginning of the year until current date) for Noah the new student; making three sets of flashcards, including 1) this week’s spelling words, 2) a compound word list from the current passage, and 3) twelve one-syllable words with suffixes; and lastly making copies of the word sort, spelling homework, reading passage, and fresh read story. I used two strategies during this preparation time to optimize my efficiency. First, I isolated myself wherever possible, for when someone stopped to talk the distraction often caused me to forget about my current task. Second, I set a timer that allowed only ten minutes to
complete a given job, then I moved on whether I was finished or not. Annie, the classroom aide, came in as students arrived so I stopped and explained the day’s plan. I didn’t give her an opportunity to ask questions, but simply dove right into the scheduled activities for the Prevention, Intervention, and Enrichment (PIE) period. PIE slipped by in the blink of an eye. Next came my planning period. Mia and I had scheduled time to talk. However, I knew she needed ten to fifteen minutes to organize so I set my timer and started to record grades. My task was interrupted when Annie inquired about accommodations that she, as Lucy’s proctor, could use for the OAA the next day. My ten-minute explanation included examples and descriptions of this process using a current third-grade reading test. As my explanation to Annie came to a close, the timer went off. It was time to speak with Mia. We talked for less than fifteen minutes. Mia watched the clock the entire time. She was kind, though, and never verbalized her concern. Then came my two guided reading groups. Using Notes on the iPads students generated lists of family members, people in the neighborhood, school personnel, and celebrities to write about. Then, each child chose two people from their groupings and created a Venn diagram identifying similarities and differences between these people. Some students also wrote a topic and concluding sentence. Just before the lunch period I prepared supplies for the afternoon math class. During the lunch hour I attended a special education meeting devoted to projecting next year’s special education assignments in the building. I discovered that I would be the cross-categorical intervention specialist during the 2015/2016 school year. Our meeting concluded five minutes past the scheduled lunch/recess period. Moving on to Mia’s third grade classroom, I redirected two students
beginning a change in their math instruction to their new placement. Then Mia and I divided the students into two groups and began instructing our portion of the math lesson. I loved using the coins for math. However, it took a lot of effort checking fifteen students for each step of the process. Annie was present in the classroom, but was mainly occupied with keeping Mason on task. Her presence was very helpful, for I could concentrate on the majority of the students rather than focus on Mason. After math I administered the reading benchmark test to Emily and Lily. These children had both been absent on Friday and needed a make-up session to complete this assignment. At the close of the day I checked out Henry’s daily chart and student planner. He was missing the graphic organizer needed to complete the evening’s math word problem, so I sent him over to Mia’s classroom to get a copy. While he secured this worksheet, I wrote his mother a note about the upcoming problem solving team meeting on Friday, May 8, at 10:10. Finally, at the end of the day I submitted the special education supply order, due that day for the next school year, to the office. I had the list ready to go that morning, but no opportunity to get it there. I quickly spoke with Mia, gathered my papers, packed up, and left. My brain was engaged every minute of the school day; this is the case day after day when limiting my working hours.

Tension was created as I struggled with making decisions that honored how I thought my time should be utilized, and how other’s imposed decisions upon my practice dictated the manner in which my time was used. My values emphasized using time efficiently and productively. The daily operation of the school system seemed counter-productive to these values. Flitting around from one task to another presented an
environment in which all activities seemed to be completed inadequately. My entire being yearned for more time to stop and think, organize as I reflected on the pace and sequence of tasks during an instructional period, individualize instruction, and reteach concepts. The busy-ness of the school day caused one distraction after another, building up tension that induced reactionary responses rather than deliberate choices to “act upon” a situation. Furthermore, the overload of assessments took away from instruction. The unit benchmark assessment for reading was a three-day ordeal. For me that meant three days lost on instruction.

Liberation from “working to contract” came on May 11, 2015. The following journal entry describes my relief at resuming my preferred schedule.

I went back to my 7:30 am to 6:15 pm schedule today – this is so much calmer for me. I spent the first 90 minutes working on Nicholas’s IEP. I loved that I could write when it was quiet – I need time to collect my thoughts (it’s interesting that this is exactly what I am doing – taking time to review experiences I have with the child and recall how he acts within the situations). I know this child, I have lots of experiences to draw from. This takes time. I write, I read, I reread, I rewrite.

(5/11/2015)

Once again the impact on my practice was an attitude of acceptance. I needed to accept that meeting my needs as an effective instructor required more hours than those proposed by the contract. It was my choice to select the hours I wished to work. Likewise, I needed to hold firm and honor boundaries that defined the days’ ending points, namely, giving myself a break each evening from work. I discovered that relentlessly tackling a
task simply led me in circles. My final conclusion was to follow my own inner guidance on how much time I needed to use in completing a task. When I paid attention, I realized that my in-the-moment reflections provided an intuitiveness of when to take a break.

**School routines.** One elementary school–wide routine implemented at this building was a period entitled PIE. PIE stood for Prevention, Intervention, and Enrichment. Every day each grade level in the school received a forty minute block for PIE instruction. During this time all students in each grade level were grouped by ability and received instruction according to their specific needs. As many as eight teachers were assigned to an individual grade-level block. Providing this resource permitted students with greater needs to have small group instruction. Eighty-nine students at the third grade level benefitted from this collaborative group of staff members working together. These instructors included the three classroom teachers, the literacy specialist, three Title 1 teachers, and myself, the intervention specialist. The literacy specialist had one student, Mason. Since no other child in the third grade had skills at his low level, a unanimous decision was made to leave him as a group of one. After spring break, one student entered the school who seemed to exhibit skills similar to Mason’s. However, the principal denied the request to place him with the literacy specialist. Therefore, the child was placed in my group of six students (group A for this study). One of my students was moved to a Title 1 group. This created a domino effect, bumping one child, and then another, out of each Title group of six students. The last student bumped returned to a regular classroom for PIE. Sixty-four students were grouped with the classroom teachers.
Mia taught the enrichment group of children. The third grade PIE block was scheduled from 9:25 until 10:05.

PIE was cancelled approximately thirty percent of the time for official school business. This business included Title 1 district-wide meetings, data days, school-wide testing of DIBELS benchmarking, OAA, and PARCC testing. I chose to take my group of students on most days whether PIE was cancelled or not. Both classroom teachers agreed with this decision. Thus, my group met unless I had a special education meeting or there was a scheduled assembly. To motivate my students to arrive promptly to class, I developed a routine the children enjoyed—learning all types of poems. The group worked up to the final minute and were often last to enter their encore class (physical education, music, or art).

I learned to ignore this inconsistent implementation of the school-wide routine. I also learned that I had no control over others, particularly their griping, gossiping, and anticipation of negative events to come. Although there seemed to be a great discrepancy of responsibilities between classroom teachers and Title 1 instructors, it was not my job to fix this problem. Resenting this issue only caused distress for me. Thus, I put up blinders and tried my best not to be distracted by the politics of the school environment. I focused on my students’ needs and worked to my values of using time wisely as I understood it. If I was unhappy with a behavior I engaged in, then it was my choice to stop.

**Supplies.** The greatest difficulty in regards to supplies was depending on technology, or rather, acknowledging that a device (i.e., computer, iPad, internet service,
Apple TV) would malfunction at some time during the lesson. For example, to project a copy of a worksheet onto the screen required the Apple TV, a computer or iPad, and the appropriate transmitting service between the two devices. When I planned to implement this technology I performed a trial run prior to group A’s lesson. Once all systems were working properly I left the technology in the “ready to go” mode. It was a fifty-fifty chance that the connection would still be working when the students arrived five minutes later. As my motto was to use time wisely, I chose not to battle with technology—when it didn’t work, I didn’t use it. Student iPads offered the same challenge. When their device froze I tried to reboot, but if that option failed I stopped; I didn’t want to be distracted and spend time on non-essentials. Students learned to accept the following choices. When a student iPad malfunctioned my first back-up plan was to allow students to use my iPad; it wasn’t as nice as the children’s devices, but it served the same purpose. (As a side note, teacher iPads were purchased prior to buying the students devices. I imagine that the quantity of the second purchase, devices for all students in the district, allowed for an upgrade of the product.) If that was unsuccessful, then the student had the option of sharing with another child or using a whiteboard. Mia and Annie were very good at problem-solving poorly functioning technology. When I experienced a problem during class, I always took time to question one of them during a planning period. For my benefit, we often reviewed the process needed to fix the issue several times. When that issue occurred in the next few days I generally remembered the process, but if several weeks passed my memory was unreliable and I would have to ask for help again. Sometimes there was so much going on that I did not even think to request help from a
co-worker. A technological component was expected within each lesson, and as a part of our OTES evaluation. Thus, I tried to incorporate routines that I could depend upon—Google Images, Educreations, and notetaking. Fortunately, the students understood the features of these programs better than I did. I valued their knowledge. Certainly, this was an example of role reversal within the ZPD model; at these times my students were often the more knowledgeable peers and I the learner.

Technological glitches impacted my practice in numerous ways. First and foremost, I learned to rely on co-workers and students to assist with the difficulties I experienced throughout the day. Preparation was key to less distraction during a lesson. This included writing down step-by-step directions for each specific task, and having students’ user identifications, passwords, and bar codes easily available. Also, I checked out sites prior to class instruction, looking for possible pictures or information that would interject an unfavorable topic during instruction. To avoid students venturing off onto other sites, during discussion iPads were placed in the middle of the table for the screen to be viewed, but not touched. Overall, I realized that the malfunctioning technology was simply another school tool. This tool required preparing and designing routines that offered the best service for student learning. Technology’s idiosyncrasies merely challenged me to move past the frustrations of a tool I was still learning to exercise within the service of my practice.

Overall, each limitation pushed me to accept the existing conditions and focus my energy on tasks and activities I could control. In this process, I had to first recognize that I was permitting the limitation to distract my attention from teaching. Then, I needed to
make a conscious effort to stop the behaviors that accompanied these distractions, namely gripping about things I could not control. Next, I pondered how the limitation affected the implementation of my lessons. Experimenting with various tasks and procedures, I observed, through in-the-moment reflections, the resulting outcomes. When an outcome was favorable, I repeated the process. Each time I obtained a promising result I built upon the experience. In this manner, I moved myself from complaining about the school environment to building a practice in which I counted my blessings and focused on me in the midst of my practice. I could always do something about my own attitude; sometimes that meant sitting still and reflecting.

**Applications.** In my role as intervention specialist, I often want to operate outside of the limitations of space, time, routines, and supplies. In my impression, limitations restrict the final product. When I identify my practice in terms of these limitations, then I continue to view my situation within these boundaries. I want to imagine my practice beyond this framework. The first diagram I designed during the analysis period of this self-study depicted a dotted circle in which routines were housed inside the form and play was situated outside. Play was about the freedom to express, to mold, and to shape habits into better skills. It was often messy and disorganized. Play was not concerned with choices. It engaged in lots of movement, interaction, and feeling. Play was without time limits, for I wanted to operate on an endless source of time and energy. I wanted to be idealistic, allowing myself to build a history, let my mind wander, and make connections. Inside the dotted circle was the need to focus in order to accomplish a task. Fostering one’s ability to focus required engaging in routines. I
wanted my state of mind to operate in this dotted space outside of structured routines. My goal within my practice was to problem-solve how to maintain this feeling of freedom even when pressures of accomplishing a task loomed large. Vygotsky’s model of ZPD assisted me in preserving this feeling of freedom by using co-workers, and even students, who acted as more knowledgeable peers to guide me through difficult periods of instructional design.

**Interruptions/Disruptions**

Interruptions occurred daily and, quite often, hourly. The two greatest events that caused a distraction for my instruction were the loss of my assistant during a planning period, particularly without advanced warning, and problem solving team (PST) meetings. Each type of event altered my choices during the workday, which often forced me to let go of an expectation. Sometimes the event caused intense feelings and caught me off guard.

**Loss of assistant during planning period.** Annie was the third grade classroom assistant. She had been hired for this position because the third grade classes were large, consisting of two groups of twenty-nine and one group of thirty students. Our class sizes frequently fluctuate. Annie supported the two inclusion classrooms, while a second assistant aided the other third grade teacher who had no students with identified special education needs in her room. I benefitted greatly from Annie’s assistance throughout the PIE period and my planning period. To assist with daily planning she performed two types of tasks. First, Annie scored assignments that were not included in the students’ grade. In this manner, I was able to keep track of the children’s understanding of the
material. This also permitted me to be aware of those students who were missing assignments. Annie’s second set of duties was to help me to prepare props for the guided reading lessons. For example, when the class was studying vocabulary words, Annie would put magnetic letters that spelled each term in a plastic bag. Then throughout the week, these visuals were readily available for use. She also made audio tapes on my iPad of the various reading selections. Lastly, Annie produced multiple copies of specially designed graphic organizers I had created for my guided reading lessons. I counted on Annie to perform these tasks so I would have time to plan, write IEPs, or evaluate assessments included in the quarterly grade.

In a blink of an eye, Annie’s assignment could change for the day. For example, this occurred on March 28, 2015. On this day, Annie was asked to watch over a class of students while the music teacher individually administered his SLO assessment. Presenting a rebuttal didn’t seem like an option to me. The music teacher wanted each child’s best performance on the SLO. I understood; without an additional person to keep an eye on the class this would not have been possible. However, it changed my work schedule. That day Annie was scheduled to correct and organize five sets of thirty homework assignments. Now it became my responsibility. After a quick reflection I acknowledged that it was always my responsibility. Now my choice in dealing with the work needed to be changed; I couldn’t present feedback to the students for yesterday’s performance. I would also have to wait a day to get a pulse of which students understood the concepts and which did not. A similar situation happened on May 1, 2015, when no
substitutes were available for music or art. This time, Mia, Annie, and I lost the planning period.

NO SUBSTITUTES for music or art, which in turn means no planning time for classroom teachers and the additional responsibility of watching the students during that time period. It was a beautiful day so Mia and I agreed we would take the students to the playground for the 40 minutes. Annie joined us too. Three adults watching 29 students worked out well. I rode my scooter out and watched six boys from a distance playing football – overall they did quite well. After 15 minutes the game broke up – it was getting a little aggressive and needed a reminder to keep hands and feet to one’s self – only two of the six boys heard this message, the others had dispersed and I was not about to chase them. Annie stayed by the merry-go-round for most of the period. I loved watching the students play – I hadn’t done this in a very long time – there’s always more important work to be done. Annie and I helped one student gain enough confidence to come down the fire pole for the first time. We tried to encourage Emily but she repeatedly stated that she was afraid. I didn’t push it. (5/1/2015)

What a revelation. In that moment I realized that “work” had always taken precedence over “play.” Furthermore, I didn’t have time for play, there was too much work to be done. After that event my attitude changed, and I began taking time to play, trusting myself to complete the work anyway.

My personal reflections were full of these interfering moments, and I found myself getting lost in each little episode. Pouring forth descriptions in addition to my
reflections allowed me to observe a personal pattern. My behavior during these events displayed respect, kindness, and consideration. However, my thoughts were often judgmental, particularly towards myself.

Writing this information down presented an opportunity to review these thoughts on multiple occasions. Given these repeated reviews, I looked beyond the harsh judgment to the belief behind the action. Then I considered, “Do I want to continue to honor that belief or change my habit?” For example, going outside for that planning period helped me to let go of the urgency to get things done here and now. I began to realize I would get the work done—I always did—and permitted myself some time for relaxation during the school day. Losing a planning period and/or assistant started out as a distraction, but my personal reflections allowed me to view the experience from multiple aspects. Each aspect built a more complete picture of what was really happening in the moment. More knowledge led to better choices, particularly in changing my internal attitude to make a better day.

**Problem solving team meetings.** Problem solving team (PST) meetings occurred at the request of a parent or classroom teacher. The purpose of each meeting was to gather a team of professionals and discuss the difficulties a child was experiencing in school. Then the team designed a six to eight week intervention to implement. This type of meeting occurred after multiple interventions had first been attempted by the classroom teacher and intervention specialist. The team members included the school principal, the school psychologist, a parent, the home liaison, a school counselor, the classroom teacher, and the intervention specialist. The school principal or psychologist
recorded the information presented during the conference. Meetings were generally scheduled during the school day while students attended encore classes and the teacher had a planning period. At the onset of the conference, a discussion of student progress was conducted in regards to both work habits and academics. Next, school personnel reported on those interventions tried thus far and the outcomes. Parents generally shared their concerns. Even when the team suspected a possible disability, an intervention needed to be designed and implemented for six to eight weeks before moving forward with testing. Sometimes the team’s conversation led to an obvious intervention, but more often the situation was complicated, requiring several thoughts to be considered before designing the intervention. During the course of this self-study I attended three problem solving team meetings. I will share my experiences from two of these.

One meeting focused on Henry. His classroom teacher, Tina, and I both felt he needed specialized instruction for math, but our first concern was his lack of effort and motivation. He required repeated prompts to participate during instructional periods, as well as additional reminders to engage in daily classroom routines. Furthermore, Henry’s reading grades demonstrated a substantial drop that coincided with a significant event that had happened to his sibling. A day prior to our meeting I spoke to the school psychologist to apprise her of these concerns. I wanted her to have advance knowledge of these matters so she could make any preparations necessary for the PST. At the meeting I was asked to share about Henry’s performance in math class. To honor this request, I described the child’s actions by portraying situations that occurred in the classroom. Henry was often resistant during these experiences. I took my time to present
the information with truthfulness, being careful to use words that displayed an account of
the event that was honest and not hurtful. Henry’s mother concurred with my thoughts.
She had also experienced difficulties trying to motivate Henry. At the time of the PST
meeting a daily chart was sent home that focused on four behaviors. These behaviors
included: (a) getting started on work, (b) giving eye contact, (c) following directions, and
(d) participating in activities. As teachers we acknowledged whether Henry exhibited the
behavior in each of his classes, circling zero, one, or two. Zero denoted that Henry did
not display the behavior during that period, while two indicated he demonstrated the
action throughout class. Mom was responsible for the incentives if he earned 60 percent
or better of the possible points. She shared that nothing seemed to be working. As the
conversation progressed around the table, the following terms were used to define
Henry’s actions—anxious, obsessive/compulsive, and in need of sensory stimulation.
Mom shared specific rituals Henry engaged in at home to feel safer. These ideas
prompted the suggestion to involve the school’s occupational therapist (OT). An OT
observation the year prior had noted his writing habits, but not his sensory needs. Next, a
suggestion was given to allow music breaks if Henry did a good job attempting math
problems. At the conclusion of the meeting, the school’s agreement with Henry’s mother
was to try to develop a ritual that would be implemented prior to math class in the
afternoon. The following journal entry describes my thoughts about this additional
responsibility I had just gained.

Oh my, I just [have to] trust myself to put something together. The psychologist
showed an APP she was using with students at the middle school but it seemed
too advanced for Henry. I would need several 10 to 15 minute periods to implement it – right now I just do not have a block of time like that in my schedule. (5/8/2015)

Later that day I received a chart from the psychologist on which to document each day I met with Henry and implemented the intervention. The intervention was not clearly defined, but the dates to be executed were May 11, 2015, until the end of school.

The second PST was a follow-up meeting that concerned Zoe in Marie’s class. At her previous PST meeting, a decision was made to move Zoe to the inclusion math classroom for additional services. One extra service was the presence of three adults throughout the lesson—the classroom teacher, the intervention specialist, and a classroom aide. An extra set of hands and eyes were helpful because Zoe required lots of prompting to assist her in problem solving. She struggled with things that many in the class had mastered, like how to secure a working marker or obtain a new glue stick. The second provision permitted students the opportunity to test in a small group setting. In this environment students were closely monitored, offered mathematical tools to use, and given extended time to complete the assessment. These additional services supplied Zoe with a little more attention during instructional periods. In this manner, she earned a 69.5%, a “C-” in math for the fourth quarter.

Zoe’s greatest strength was her ability to draw. Her illustrations demonstrated tremendous attention to detail for each item within her picture. However, Zoe was very quiet in the classroom; she often did not follow directions or ask for help. Thus, adults needed to be ready with an inquiry that assisted Zoe in thinking through how to engage in
the class activity. Otherwise, Zoe remained baffled and unaware of how to keep up with
the class.

On May 28, 2015, I arrived a few minutes late to the PST meeting to find the
parent already talking. I also discovered that my supervisor was in attendance. This was
an asset because my supervisor did not react to the heightened anxiety of the mother.
Both the home liaison and the counselor were present to speak of their interactions with
Zoe. The counselor presented the findings of the Conners’ Rating Scale (a tool for
screening and diagnosing ADHD in children) completed by Zoe’s mother. Although
these results were biased because only the mother’s point of view was considered, the
team’s suggestion stated that Zoe needed more social interaction, as well as guidance in
learning to take the initiative to help herself. At this point, Maria, the classroom teacher,
excused herself to return to class and teach. I was thankful that Maria did not hear the
parent’s complaints about Zoe’s current 504 plan, nor the slow process she felt she had
endured to secure help for her daughter. Maria had also endured this slow process, often
speaking to Zoe’s mother several times a week. After the mother shared her feelings, I
began to believe that the mother was embarrassed by her past actions. She had been
aggressive, presented herself in a negative manner, and blamed the school for the slow
process of procuring additional assistance for Zoe in math. I admired her courage to
express those feelings and could understand her point of view. However, I also felt she
exaggerated the failings of her daughter; I think all of us at the meeting felt that way.
Zoe’s mother repeatedly reiterated that she had done everything the school requested and
still her daughter’s problem was not resolved. Her resolution was to have an IEP written for Zoe.

It is interesting to note that at Zoe’s previous PST meeting someone suggested that her mother call an advocate, and so she had. That advocate questioned whether the school’s actions had the best interest of her child at heart. Namely, the advocate stated that the school had not honored the conditions of the 504. Hence when the teacher assigned a little more homework, Zoe’s mother was quick to pounce, claiming that the conditions of a shortened homework assignment had been violated. Another of my contemplations focused on the literal interpretation of these practices and plans. I told Zoe’s mother that three adults were present during the math instructional period, but this was not always true. The following journal entry describes a “trade” I made.

I think about having said we have three adults in the room while we teach, however today I made a trade with Tina so I could have Annie for the testing period with Mason, Henry and Noah. Mason and Henry simply do not work well within the group of 10 students for testing. Anyway, the point is, if the parent had come into class today there was not three adults, but rather two because I had to juggle the resources to serve another need. (5/28/2015)

This trade served the students’ needs in two manners. First, Annie had the opportunity to closely monitor the small group of children during the math assessment. She could read the problem and pace each child individually. Second, these three students would not interrupt others’ work periods. For me, on this particular day, the need for individualized
assessment of these three students was greater than that of having a third set of hands and eyes during the instructional period.

**Applications.** As an intervention specialist I need to suspend judgment about the child and their family. As the saying goes, “Easier said than done.” I may think I know what is going on at home, but it really is none of my business. Watching the dynamics of a parent’s interaction during the PST meeting provides many clues in dealing with the student at school. This meeting can also promote collaborative teamwork with the parent to serve the best interest of the child. With this information, an intervention specialist may find the fortitude to inch beyond those times when annoyance with the student, and his/her situation, consumes the energy needed to improve the state of affairs. Listening to the parent’s story may help to build compassion for the student and the environment in which he/she is being raised.

PST meetings reminded this intervention specialist that the school does not have all the answers. At times the discussions seemed only to promote more questions. When confused with the directive formed during a PST meeting I engage in two actions. First, I give myself some time to allow an answer to emerge. For example, with Henry’s intervention I tried a slightly different approach to building a ritual each day. However, after a two-week period my effort was still floundering, so I elected to be honest and speak to the school psychologist about my lack of progress. Hence, my second action was to admit defeat. With this admission I engaged in Vygotsky’s model of ZPD by seeking further help from more knowledgeable sources.
Interruptions and disruptions often sidetracked my work as an intervention specialist. With the assistance of reflective thinking I was able to pull myself back to the purpose of my job, to teach. However, sometimes it took a few days to work beyond my issues with each incident. Speaking with Mia was always a positive way to vent my feelings and then consider my options. Once again, Mia presented an outside circle of ZPD for me by providing a safe environment within which to share these thoughts, feelings, and ideas. I loved that reflective thinking reminded me that I wanted to present my best self in my practice. However, that did not happen within an instant. I often needed time to reflect on my current actions and what changes I would need to make to get to the best possible situation.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As an intervention specialist, the cultural and historical environment within which I teach shifts contexts continually. Some of these shifts were in response to the school’s report grade of academic warning from the state of Ohio. The staff’s sense of responsibility created an urge to do better. Thus, the staff endured a rigorous data collection processes, extensive documentation of practice, and further professional development to overcome this label. To meet all of these demands, new technology was introduced. This tool provided a plethora of information if one took the plunge to search. This information included (a) student performance and growth on interactive graphic organizers, (b) vertical alignment of specific skills according to individual student’s achievement, and (c) math coherence maps. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that these ever-changing historical conditions greatly determine which opportunities a human can experience. Gredler (2009) stated that “individuals react or respond to stimuli in the environment or stimuli within themselves” (p. 4). I reacted to stimuli within myself as internal thoughts issued these two warnings. First, there wasn’t time to utilize these tools; the school day already presented a never-ending list of tasks to accomplish. Second, why should I bother? This internal message surfaced as I took to heart the words communicated along with the presentation of these technological possibilities, “Everything looks OK, but it is not. Plan and look ahead to next year. The strategies you are using are not moving students forward.” The negative implications of these messages began permeating my own feelings about how I taught. I was unaware that the
interpersonal (social) process of moving the school out of academic warning was becoming an intrapersonal one. The staff’s feelings of inadequacy transformed my personal thoughts, suggesting that my teaching was not good enough. Thus, my definition of myself as an intervention specialist was created and shaped by the environment within which I labored. Furthermore, I had no control of the requirements that were dictated to change the school’s label. This in turn generated tension as my internal values resisted many of these stipulations. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory was embodied within my teaching practice.

The philosopher Augustine (354-430 AD) acknowledged that “the development of self-knowledge comes from striving to know one’s self” (Tarricone, 2011, p. 14). Descartes (1596-1650) further illuminated that accepting one’s beliefs or illusions as real transpires through the process of thinking, reflecting, introspecting, and reasoning. I was considered an accomplished teacher in regards to the Ohio Teacher’s Evaluation System (OTES), but could not reconcile this belief within myself. Following the path of these ancient thinkers encouraged me to wonder why. My wondering initiated a journey in which I strived to focus on the process, rather than the achievement. I trusted that a path would emerge and thus, this self-study was conceived.

**Overview of Study**

My research utilized a self-study methodology to investigate my personal teaching practice. The following research question guided my work: How do I use reflective thinking to inform my choices in designing instruction that helps students with special needs and those at-risk to learn strategies and use tools to become independent
learners? The subsidiary questions included: (a) What elements do I consider when creating scaffolds that allow students to work within their zones of proximal development? (b) What information do I focus on during student conversations and discussions that directs my questions and planning for future activities? (c) How do outside factors influence the decisions I am making (e.g., content of classes, administrative decisions, and my disability)?

The setting for my study was a suburban elementary (K-4) building in northeast Ohio. Sixty percent of the school’s population of 335 students received a free or reduced breakfast and/or lunch. I became a member of this staff during the 2012/2013 school year, when consolidation in the school district initiated the closing of four elementary buildings. During that school year I instructed first grade students with special needs. Two years later, several of these children, now third graders, participated in the small groups that were videotaped for this study. Data collection began March 23, 2015, and continued until June 5, 2015—a ten-week period.

As a result of this study’s analytical process, three major findings emerged:

1. The principles that enabled me to create scaffolds facilitating students to work within their personal Zones of Proximal Development exhibited values and standards that ignited an invitation to learn and be motivated, designed scaffolds, and created environments to encourage student empowerment.

2. My personal attention was directed to those tensions in my practice that required change by igniting a problem solving sequence that offered possible strategies and solutions.
3. I felt that outside factors including institutional influences, limitations, and interruptions distracted me from my primary purpose—teaching.

From these findings I drew several conclusions. First, a reflective thinking practice enables an intervention specialist to discern which thoughts transpire from school/societal deliberations from those that result from his/her own viewpoint. In grappling with the contradictory messages of these two forces a practitioner develops his/her voice and the self-knowledge needed to define his/her position within a given tension. Second, incorporation of a feature of play into daily lessons encourages children to acquire greater attention to tasks, thus increasing cognitive development. Third, the development of individualized scaffolds employs a deconstructive/reconstructive nature to achieve independence in skill execution.

In Chapter 5 I discuss these conclusions and their implications for an intervention specialist working within an inclusive classroom. As a teacher committed to self-study research, I hope that my research will help teachers identify their personal positions within the tensions of teaching. Utilizing Vygotsky’s model of ZPD, intervention specialists may identify co-workers that provide the outer circle of support to deal with these tensions. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this research and offer suggestions for future research.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Overall, my findings illuminated three processes that I utilized to enrich my teaching practice. First, for me the process of self-reflection exposed hidden messages, outdated beliefs, and unresolved issues that impacted decisions within my practice. The
discovery of these views permitted changes that enhanced my understanding of personal
and professional mannerisms. Second, the element of play permeated my decision-
making process as I reminded myself of the following message: Do not focus on the
problem; find an alternative method (i.e., object, game, task) to create fun and
engagement. This theme of play was evident in the findings of all three subsidiary
questions. First, investigation of the principles that were evident when creating scaffolds
within students’ ZPD illuminated that fun and motivation initiated each of the three
phases of the learning/instructional design. Next, analyzing in-the-moment instruction
illustrated that this theme of play prompted a positive change when a problem solving
sequence was ignited. Finally, in regard to influential factors, play presented a
framework in which to operate with a limitless supply of energy and time. The final
process I analyzed featured the deconstructive/reconstructive nature of the reflection-in-
action and reflection-on-action practice.

Self-Reflection

Engaging in the practice of reflective thinking altered my way of operating within
the world. This practice affected three different aspects of my life: personal, social, and
instructional. At the personal level, reflective thinking facilitated changes in the private
messages I communicated to myself. Socially, self-reflection helped me to unravel the
conflicting messages from the various cultures within which I participated. At the
instructional level, within my teaching practice, reflection encouraged me to focus on in-
the-moment decisions that were being made during the delivery of lessons to the children.
These facets were not experienced in a linear fashion, rather, a reflective thought at a
personal, social, or instructional level occurred unpredictably. During the analysis stage, a self-awareness evolved that my reflective thinking had touched my life in these three distinctive realms. However, my understanding of these lived experiences happened sporadically as they occurred throughout my self-study.

First, self-reflection permitted me to focus on the person of Carol, examining many feelings that I had chosen to ignore for years. These feelings encumbered how I operated in the school environment because they created much unresolved tension and anxiety. Yes, I had determination and made many strides in dealing with my disability, but I also pushed myself too hard. My focus was on the goal, an achievement that I was progressing towards for myself. This in turn made me very critical of myself, for my attention was always given to visualizing the gap between where I was and where I wanted to be. Thus, I communicated a lot of messages to myself that stated I was not good enough. Unknowingly, these thoughts permeated many of my actions and blocked my determination to heal. Vygotsky (1983) emphasized the need to focus on positive aptitudes and qualitative traits in the nurturing of children with disabilities. I thought I did focus on positive aspects of my disability by engaging in actions to improve my health. However, my goal to strive for a return to “normal” as I had experienced it prior to my heart condition impacted my personal messages to myself and undermined my own beliefs. Furthermore, using the scooter in the school environment brought my impairment into the public domain. Vygotsky asserted that an impairment is perceived as abnormal when it comes in contact with a societal context. In this manner, my disability
led me to restructure my social relationships as it displaced my systems of behavior (Vygotsky, 1983). However, I tried to carry on as if it was business as usual.

Self-reflection urged me to take notice of my demeanor towards myself. I began to observe when the things I said to myself were not kind, and changed the message. When I was tough on myself, I learned to stop and take a break rather than demand another chore be completed that pushed me past the point of exhaustion. I also started to note the values and talents hidden behind my actions. I liked what I saw. Once again, my determination encouraged me to be the best person I could, only now I was reminding myself that I deserved kindness, patience, and encouragement from me. Furthermore, reflection initiated the process of wondering, “If I gave myself these messages, what messages did the children entertain?” I realized that I did better when others listened to me and permitted me to share. So on occasion, I began talking frankly about my experiences with my students. Vygotsky (1962) stated that communication with an adult provides a significant step in the development of a child’s pseudo-concepts as they coincide in context with the adult’s concepts. Thus, in sharing my personal experiences, I was helping students navigate their feelings, which emerged when dealing with their difficulties in learning. This is similar to the experiential knowledge that influenced the decision-making process of teachers in a study conducted by Quezada and Alfaro (2007).

The social aspect of my reflective practice consisted of negotiating the messages that came from the various cultures in which I lived. Previously, I stated that I was looking for the right answer to every question I possessed. What I did not realize was that each culture had its own agenda and therefore the “right” answer was only attainable
when viewed from their specified perspective. I often felt as if I was jumping fences as I listened and agreed with one perspective and then heard another’s argument and could see the value of that perspective. These conflicting messages kept me on a wild goose chase as I read more and more, thinking I would come across “the answer.” This habit simply provided more conflicting messages. Furthermore, messages received from outside factors within my teaching practice conveyed the notion of urgency and the need for immediate attention. I realized that unless the message was dire, I could choose to take a wait-and-see approach. Such an approach was more indicative of the reflective thinking I was trying to incorporate within my practice. I allowed myself the opportunity to sift through the staff’s many interpretations of what to do. This collaboration with co-workers and acknowledgment that my unique approaches had value helped me to address the problems these distractions presented. Vygotsky’s ZPD was operating within my practice as my co-workers discussed their perspectives of the outside factor and offered options for possible solutions. Their descriptive sharing helped me navigate the new procedures imposed by these outside influences. This is similar to the findings by Moseley and Ramsey (2008), who described the process of reflection as being connected to change. They explained that researchers who are reflective inquirers need to acknowledge that probing is likely to raise issues of change. This in turn will involve a confrontation of inconsistencies within and between existing core values.

My research adds significantly to the literature on reflective practices in teaching. First, my study describes the self-reflective process as it affected a practitioner’s personal, social, and instructional realm of being, thus, providing a self-portrait of an
intervention specialist. Second, this research illuminates the elaborate path of the reflective thinking process, both in-action and on-action. Furthermore, a case example demonstrates the application of these in-action and on-action processes for a student with special education needs. Current literature only discusses questions and/or steps utilized to develop a reflective practice. Finally, this self-study provides empirical evidence of rich, thick descriptions that explain the complex nature of students’ learning. Hence, my research portrays an intervention specialist in action, utilizing reflective thinking that informs his/her choices in designing future instruction for individual students’ needs. Current literature simply conceptualizes this objective of matching instruction to meet children’s needs.

Play

The theme of play presented itself throughout this journey. For me, this element involved the acquisition of joy to assist in overcoming difficulties. In the prologue, this message was evident as I realized that teaching helped me to take the focus off my illness and instead center on the enjoyment of interacting with children. Play resurfaced once again at the conclusion of the data collection process. At that time, I wrote the words play and routine on five by seven pieces of paper and pondered how these concepts worked together within my practice. The following excerpt from the findings of this research reiterates my feelings about play:

This diagram depicted a dotted circle in which routines were housed inside the form and play was situated outside. Play was about the freedom to express, to mold, and to shape into better skills. It was often messy and disorganized. Play
was not concerned with choices. It engaged in lots of movement, interaction, and feeling. Play was without limits, for I wanted to operate on an endless source of time and energy. I wanted to be idealistic, allow my mind to wander, build a history, and make connections. Inside the dotted circle was the need to focus in order to accomplish a task. Fostering one’s ability to focus required engaging in routines. I wanted my state of mind to operate in the dotted space outside of structured routines. My goal within my practice was to problem solve how to maintain this feeling of freedom even when pressures of accomplishing a task loomed large.

As I reread the words I wrote, it seems that I equated play with freedom. According to Vygotsky (1978), when children want to resolve the tension of unmet desires, participation in worlds of illusion and imagination allow them to attain their unrealizable longings. I feel as if I wanted to permit children to remain children. In this framework of play, students have the opportunity to cope and understand the skills that are being thrust upon them. Within this world of play, students learn self-control as they follow the course of their greatest challenge by rendering themselves submissive to rules and rejecting their own wants. Maximum pleasure in play occurs when a child subjects to rules denying his/her own impulsive actions. Thus, play continually creates demands on the child to act against their immediate impulse. Hence, a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play. It is to be noted that these achievements are not leaps and bounds above where the child is performing, but simply baby steps beyond their current struggles. In regard to my own illness, my gut instincts seemed to recognize that
the only way to meet the challenges I was enduring was to participate with children in periods of play.

This element of play resurfaced when analyzing data to investigate the principles that were evident in my practice when creating scaffolds within students’ Zone of Proximal Development. My findings for this query fell into three categories. Each category emphasized a specific purpose and phase of the learning/instructional design. A tier system was used to illustrate these three phases. The purpose of the first phase was to incorporate a sense of play and fun within the instructional period, inviting students to participate in the learning process. The goal of this invitation was to encourage and motivate children to partake in the lesson. However, my students are children who struggle to follow classroom rules and learn. These children display behaviors that often distract all members of the learning environment. Such situations sparked personal associations that the student was a problem and one that needed to be fixed. Moving beyond this perspective of a problem to be fixed, I imagined how fun could be used to draw attention away from the difficulty and towards positive learning. I modeled placing my focus on a prop, activity, or token that enticed learning, then my attention was not being targeted on the student as the problem.

Thus, my findings supported Hodge and Chantler’s (2010) conclusion that reflective thinking allows teachers to find the most suitable solutions to the matters that concern them. I was concerned with restructuring the learning situation. My objective for restructuring positioned task engagement as the focal point of the lesson, drawing students’ attention towards the activity, rather than allowing distractions from an outside
element in the environment to occur. Knowing my students’ ways of being in the learning world assisted me in personalizing their learning experience. Furthermore, presenting students with verbal descriptions and written targets reminded them of the rules of engagement for play.

Mason caused drama and provoked distraction within the classroom. The findings of this research describe the struggles Mia and I experienced when trying to entice Mason to engage in lessons. Vygotsky (1978) stated that in play, a child always behaves beyond his average age and above his daily behavior. This did not seem to hold true with Mason. However, in retrospect, maybe it did. Prior to his presence within our classroom, Mason had attended an inner-city school. Possibly, the behavior he displayed during our classroom play opportunities was above his daily behavior, we just expected more. Thus, Mia and I strived to improve Mason’s behavior and academic skills. In regard to behavior, Mason’s sense of play often disrupted everyone else’s learning. So Mia and I worked tirelessly to establish common meanings among all members of the class of our school’s expectations of behavior. In regard to Mason’s reading skills, he exhibited avoidance behaviors. Block, Parris, and Whiteley (2008) described that students simply want the reading task to be over. I discovered that Mason participated in an activity when paired with a peer by his side. Researchers Calfee and Drum (1978) posed this question: “What happens in the mind of the student during the acquisition of reading?” I now imagine that Mason needed his friend’s presence to assist in developing a positive relationship with the written word. In this type of situation, Mason ventured to express his thoughts and feelings about the information in the selection. It was a baby
step, but Mason was learning to interact with the written page and voice his thoughts about what was read. With a classmate by his side, it seemed that he felt a sense of safety and ventured to improve his reading skills. Thus, for Mason, a positive play situation included a peer’s presence. In this manner, Mason’s peer represented the support he required to initiate this baby step in terms of his personal ZPD.

**Deconstruction / Reconstruction**

During the analysis stage of this study, I recognized that when my gut perceived a negative circumstance my whole system went on alert, urging me to “fix the situation.” At these times, I engaged my problem solving strategies. Prior to this study, that process often displayed my impulsive spirit, with a willingness to make a positive change, but not a lot of forethought. As I understood more about the reflection process the following procedure emerged: (a) recognize a problem, (b) identify its components, (c) choose a strategy, (d) implement a course of action, and (e) evaluate the results. Schön (1983) explained that by turning thought back on action and questioning, a practitioner deals with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. As understandings surface they are criticized, restructured, and embodied in further action. In this manner, reflecting on knowing-in-action goes together with reflection on the matter at hand as the practitioner tries to make sense of puzzling, troubling, or interesting phenomenon. Schön (1983) also argued that learning could occur by reflecting on dilemmas that are encountered in practice. Through the use of reflection-in-action, practitioners can continue to develop their conceptions related to practice. Thus, reflective practice can be promoted as a tool to improve classroom instruction.
Today, I would define my problem solving technique in terms of deconstructing, or reconstructing, a skill or situation. For me, the nature of deconstruction entails decomposing a skill or situation into the smallest units I can define at that point in time. Next, these units are sequenced to create a procedure that may lead to a routine. Then this procedure is modeled for the student. When the child interacts with the procedure I observe, noting which steps, if any, are performed without difficulty. Opportunities are provided for practice. If a particular step seems extremely difficult for the child, further deconstruction may be implemented through the use of multiple senses. As a final element of the deconstructive process, this intervention specialist, or a more knowledgeable peer, provides the student with models of inner language by repeatedly naming actions. Reconstruction consists of restructuring to build connections with prior knowledge and peers. The instructor’s reflections build theories that take shape, explaining how the child operates within the school environment. From these theories, hypotheses can be made describing what types of instruction would best suit the students’ needs. Trial and error experiences produce data to inform further decisions. Thus, in-action gathering, organizing, and storing data, combined with on-action reflection of this data, enables an intervention specialist to create lessons that enhance learning for children with special needs (Schön, 1983).

This deconstructive/reconstructive nature was revealed when investigating the principles that were evident in my practice to create scaffolds within students’ Zone of Proximal Development. These principles included: (a) enabling students to put forth their best efforts, particularly when I, the intervention specialist, could not be directly by
their side; (b) supplying various experiences and practice periods to enhance academic and behavioral skills; (c) creating organization and forward movement in the midst of chaos; (d) demonstrating strategies to students that enabled them to continue thinking and working through difficult learning tasks; (e) engaging a multitude of ways for students to drill skills that allowed them to endure the doldrums of repetition; (f) involving a student’s entire being in the instructional experience from many different perspectives to promote change to occur rather than falling back into old unproductive habits; and (g) stimulating multiple senses in the learning process to enhance the possibility of children performing the task independently.

**Conclusions**

I learned to collaborate with my co-workers, constructing knowledge that transformed our practices as we tackled everyday hurdles of the educational world. Thinking as an art became my goal. This demanded that I learn to locate and value my personal stance within the broader scope of the school’s position. As I traveled along this path, I established my voice. The following passage is an excerpt from my journal describing this freedom.

Trudging this path with myself was difficult. Although I considered myself an honest, diligent worker, I also possessed a niggling sense that I lacked verbal skills and the ability to express myself. Furthermore, when I experienced fear my auditory/verbal skills hightailed and ran, leaving me struggling to present a composed person to the outside world. It is through the implementation of a reflective thinking practice that I captured my thoughts – each and every one a
verbal entity, and made them hard copy. I loved hard copy – now my thoughts were written down and the data presented itself in visual form, not auditory and verbal. I knew how to create using visual data. Transforming verbal into visual data provided a multitude of opportunities to view the information from various perspectives. Now my strengths of organization and movement were brought to the forefront, as I read and reread those thoughts that had once confounded when they simply floated around in my head. (1/16/2016)

Although I still choose to be quiet on many occasions, and my actions look the same as before, my internal behavior has changed. Now when I bristle at ideas that cross my mind, I mentally stop and examine my reaction. Today, I believe the existence of one right answer is unlikely; rather, I imagine that a right answer presents itself in each and every moment as an experience unfolds.

Based on what I found, these are my recommendations for intervention specialists within inclusive classrooms. First, begin keeping a reflective journal that documents thoughts about your daily practice. This written expression allows you to view patterns of personal behavior, reveal feelings that may be ignited by specific students or situations, and acknowledge the successes you experience within a day. Reflecting on in-the-moment thoughts and feelings presents opportunities to unravel personal messages hidden under the surface that are often obscured by the outside educational world’s message, that teachers need to do better and to do more. Such a manuscript provides a visual record of tensions and contradictions within your practice. This visual record permits you to put these tensions aside and come back with a fresh set
of eyes on another occasion. Thus, a reflective practice permits you to respond to your own tensions and resolve these issues, creating motivation and desire to make improvements and change within your practice.

My next recommendation would be to create an element of play when designing scaffolds for the outside zone of a student’s ZPD. In this manner, you encourage the student to maintain greater focus on difficult tasks. Many students with special needs experience difficulty remaining focused and attentive to task. These distractions limit the child’s engagement with an activity and, hence, their lack of full participation in social activities limits their development of higher mental functions such as self-regulation. As Vygotsky (1978) asserted, play continually creates demands on the child to act against their immediate impulse, maintain attention to task, and improve their self-regulatory skills.

My final recommendation focuses on utilizing a deconstruction/reconstruction process when designing scaffolds to work within a child’s zone of proximal development. A skill or procedure can be decomposed in a variety of manners and then reconstructed. Through trial and error periods you, as the intervention specialist, can design a well-fitted support that assists a child in grasping a confusing concept that blocks progress in gaining independence with a skill. Also, taking into consideration the various modalities through which a student can experience a skill is another matter to contemplate during the deconstructing and reconstructing process. Furthermore, the process requires the inclusion of a verbal component, modeling the inner language a child needs to learn that will lead to independence with the skill.
Limitations

The limitations of this research are defined by the nature of self-study, which focuses on a single participant—myself. My research provides one person’s perspective of an intervention specialist’s decision-making process when designing instruction for students with special needs. This perspective presents an example, or case study, from which other intervention specialists can identify similarities and differences to their own practice. Therefore, this restriction signifies caution in generalizing these findings to the actions and processes of all intervention specialists.

Future Research

Future research could utilize the self-study methodology to investigate how the findings would change if the intervention specialist had no disability. Another possibility might be to change the focus of the participant’s parameters (i.e., setting—middle school, high school; type of school district—rural, urban, or suburban), eliciting different results. Having multiple critical friends may change the reflective process within a self-study. If these multiple studies surfaced, then a researcher could compare and contrast this group of case studies of intervention specialists.

Final Thought

My research study defined and portrayed the daily actions of this intervention specialist. This self-portrait provides literature to document the extensive number of decisions I made within my teaching practice. The findings elaborate on the principles, values, and standards that I used to inform future instructional decisions. These findings also present diagrams to illustrate my personal thinking patterns with regard to the
following inquiries: (a) investigating principles that were evident in my practice when creating scaffolds within students’ Zone of Proximal Development; (b) reflective thinking paths during in-action and on-action processes; and (c) the influences of outside factors within my teaching practice. My journey has provided me with a bountiful source of self-knowledge and understanding. My hope is that intervention specialists can identify components of their practice within these pages and elicit helpful changes for themselves and their students.
EPILOGUE

The most difficult educational task I encountered was writing and then explaining my written work. At times, the writing process for my comprehensive exams and then this dissertation was painful. My student nature was fearful and reacted when I perceived tasks to be difficult. In these moments, my frustration brought me to tears, condemnation, and a few times hysteria. After the breakdown, I’d pull myself back together, wondering how I would complete the assignment when the feeling that I did not know what I was doing prevailed. Then my teacher personality began to make appearances and utilize strategies. These strategies included giving myself smiley faces, typing “I can” over and over until the fears calmed down, journaling my reactions, and then going for a walk. I was amazed that ten minutes later these frustrating feelings were gone. This change surprised me because the frustration always stayed with me when I pushed myself to keep working. My reflective thinking process exposed these two different personalities within myself. However, at first I was only aware that the strategies I implemented were part of my teaching repertoire.

I am very fascinated that I have very different perspectives of myself as I move from the role of student to teacher. As the student, I continue to see myself as a struggling learner who takes an abundant amount of time to make correct word choices and rephrase a sentence. The teacher in me names this perfectionism and gives the student pep talks before working. The teacher in me loves her work, but the student hates it! That may not be so true now; I actually caught myself cheering today when I completed a four-sentence paragraph in great time for me. As a teacher I can describe
exactly what I am looking for within an assignment and pinpoint the errors. My student self struggles to correct these errors. My teacher personality has that feeling of knowing; the student does not possess this same image. In the role of student I seem to be more subservient and acquiescent. I wonder if my student nature will change at the end of this doctoral journey. I also wonder if the teacher in me is so passionate because at some level I understand and know the fear that students experience.
APPENDIX A

INTERVENTION SPECIALIST’S LESSON PLANS
Appendix A

Intervention Specialist’s Lesson Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIE 9:20 – 10:05</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connor, Emily, Lily, Jack, Nicholas, Noah</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday 3/30/2015</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bean bag toss</strong> – acquaint new student with old students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poem</strong> Temper Tantrum (Have Annie pull out Alex’s things, put in a three prong folder and send home, copy poems for Noah and make a cover sheet for him) each student share a favorite poem with Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phoneme Cards</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Words Your Way</strong> Sort 29 – page 75, ur, ure, ur-e, oddball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word list – turn, burn, hurt, church, nurse, purse, burst, surf, curb, blurt, curve, were, purr, urge, pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 3 minutes to cut out list of words</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Separate into two piles – words with silent e / words without silent e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Paste those with no e in the category “ur”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Google images – churn, hurl, curb, burst, surf, blurt (check these prior to class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Discuss the difference between the other two piles – “ure” “ur consonant e” – categorize the remaining words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Google images – lure, pure, urge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Oddballs – were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonetic Story</strong> Nell, Chuck, and a Puzzle – read one time to partner, Connor and Lily, Jack and Emily, Noah and Nicholas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fresh Read</strong> The Party – underline evidence in the story that supports your answer, Annie can work with Noah at this time – written response – complete sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spelling Homework</strong> 3 times each, 4 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie – Fry words, word sort read – begin at sort 7 – page 26 – how many words can you read in a minute, go over spelling tests – correct misspellings and sentence dictation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Monday 3/30/2015 | Guided Reading 10:45 – 11:40  
Connor, Mason, Dylan, Emily, Jack, Nicholas |
| --- | --- |
| Teacher read *Tyronne the Horrible*  
Discuss traits of a good vs bad friend – refer to student charts with characteristics collected last week  
Writing prompt – How was Boland a good friend to all of the dinosaurs, even Tyronne?  
Opinion – what I think and why I think this  
**Model**  
**Topic sentence** – Boland was a good friend to all of the dinosaurs, even Tyronne by listening to each of them.  
**Supporting evidence** – First Terry told Boland to try to be friends with Tyronne so Boland took an ice cream cone as a present. Tyronne squashed it on Boland’s head. Next Stella said to stay cool. Boland was scared but he tried not paying attention to Tyronne because he did not want to be bullied anymore. Tyronne stomped on his tail and stole Boland’s sandwich. Then Stego suggested that Boland fight back. The fight was short and Boland had many bruises. Therefore, fighting was not such a good idea. Since none of his friends’ ideas worked Boland decided to listen to himself. The next time Tyronne asked Boland for his sandwich he gave him a double-thick-red-hot-pepper-sandwich. The sandwich burned Tyronne’s mouth and he never bothered Boland again.  
**Closing Sentence** - Boland was a good friend by listening to everyone and trying their ideas, including his own.  
Partners – read one of the Elephant and Piggy Books by Mo Willems – discuss how the two characters are friends to one another. |
| PIE 9:20 – 10:05  
Connor, Emily, Lily, Jack, Nicholas, Noah |
| Wednesday 4/15/2015 |  
**Poem**  
*Um,* each student picks their favorite to share with Noah  
**Phoneme Cards**  
**Words Your Way**  
Sort 30 – page 76  
Word list – hard, march, yarn, chore, score, thorn, horse, snore, bore, warn, warm, worth, worst, earn, pearl  
Use rainbow alphabet rubber letters – one person – large white board and magnetic letters, begin with war, add a letter to the end to spell a word the describes words told to a person telling them of possible danger (**warn**), change the final letter to get a word that means somewhat hot (**warm**), change the initial letter to an “f” to tell the place where barn animals live (**farm**), take |
off the final consonant and spell the word that is the opposite of near (far), change the vowel to spell a word that describes giving a gift to someone (for), add “th” to the end spell a word that means to move to forward (forth), change the initial sound to a “w” to spell a word that means the value or cost of an item (worth), change the ending to a blend “st” to spell a word that is the opposite of best (worst)

**Phonetic Story** two readings sentence by sentence – teacher / student, student/teacher

**Fresh Read** draw a picture of the story

**Spelling Homework** – 8 pictures, 4 sentences
Annie – Fry words, go over spelling homework – time reading the list of words twice

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**Poem** binder, use iPad to put on video camera and record read poems – 7 minutes

**Phoneme Cards** – half circle, on the floor, sitting Indian style hands in lap, quick sounds – two finger tap, long sounds – stop when clicking fingers

**Words Your Way** rubber letters in rainbow formation, one person with magnetic letters on large white board, Annie gives coins, for each four coins get a teddy graham, write words on a half piece of paper, clap and spell words

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1. Today I see children in the hall, yesterday I _____ an elephant at the zoo.
2. Change the first letter in saw to a word that means a rule that people must follow or they might have to go to jail.
3. Add a letter to the end of law to describe the green grass growing in your yard.
4. Change the first letter in lawn to make a word that means the sunrise.
5. Change the beginning and end of dawn to spell a word that describes what you do in art class when you want to make a picture.
6. Change the beginning of draw to spell a word that is a synonym for hay, sometimes people make hats and baskets out of this material.
7. Change the beginning of straw to spell a word that describes the sharp nail on an animal or creatures hands and feet.
8. Change the beginning and ending of the word claw to describe what a baby does to move before it learns to walk.
9. Change the beginning of the word crawl to describe a piece of clothing woman wear on the shoulders to keep them warm.
10. Change the beginning and ending of the word shawl to describe the feet of a cat, dog or bear.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11. Change the beginning and ending wound of the word paws to spell a bird that hunts for prey like mice and chipmunks.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonetic Story</strong> Teacher read Jake’s Thrill, students draw pictures, choral read one time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fresh Read</strong> together grade multiple choice answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spelling Homework</strong> 3 times each, 4 sentences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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