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Teachers' Negotiation of Curricular Adaptation: Understanding the How and Why in Intensive Reading Settings

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

TEACHERS' NEGOTIATION OF CURRICULAR ADAPTATION:
UNDERSTANDING THE HOW AND WHY IN INTENSIVE READING SETTINGS

By
Lindsey A. Chapman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

August 2018

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UNDERSTANDING THE HOW AND WHY IN INTENSIVE READING SETTINGS

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Teachers' Negotiation of Curricular Adaptation:

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Understanding the How and Why in Intensive Reading Settings

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Batya Elbaum.

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The adoption of packaged curricular programs to promote literacy for adolescent struggling readers (ASRs) has become progressively more widespread as a result of increasing policy and accountability pressures. Greater attention is now being paid not just to what program is being used, but how it is being implemented. Yet, teachers are largely left out of decision-making with regard to curriculum and implementation. For teachers tasked with providing remedial instruction to ASRs, pressure to implement a program “with fidelity” are compounded by expectations related to high-stakes testing and accountability. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and perspectives of teachers of ASRs regarding implementation of a packaged curricular program. Using implementation science and existing literature on curricular adaptations as a foundational framework, this qualitative study investigated the following overarching research question: *How and why do intensive reading teachers adapt their curricular program?*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten intensive reading teachers from a large, urban school district in the Southeastern United States. Analysis of the data yielded six themes which cut across two higher-order groupings: i) systems negotiations and ii) inter-/intrapersonal negotiations. Overall, findings from this study illustrate the

complexity of teachers' decisions to adapt their curricular program and reveal a number of ways teachers are adapting the curriculum amidst ambiguous pressures to implement "with fidelity". This study's findings have implications for implementation researchers as well as for school and district administrators leading implementation efforts in the district.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family who have supported me without question during this process. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine. Thank you each for believing in me and for the seemingly unending sacrifices you each made to help me accomplish my goal. To Jay and Derek, I promised you that I would make this all worth it. The best is yet to come.

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“Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.”
–Melody Beattie

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Chapter I: Introduction

The adoption of packaged curricular programs to promote literacy for adolescent struggling readers (ASRs) has become increasingly widespread (Lane, 2014). Prior to the No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001) era, implementation of mass-produced, packaged curricular programs was mostly limited to low-income, urban schools (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Now more than ever, however, a wider variety of schools and school districts across the country are adopting these programs to meet policy requirements for “research-based” curricular programming under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015), especially for high-stakes subject areas such as reading (Davis, 2009; Dulude, Spillane, & Dumay, 2017). These types of curricular programs have highly structured lessons and word-for-word scripts for teachers to follow during implementation (Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, & Rintamaa, 2013; Ede, 2006). They also outline the sequence of lesson content and pace of delivery (Savino-Garzon, 2013). Schools and school districts turn to adoption of these programs to provide structured guidance to teachers in what and how to teach (Dahlkemper, 2003; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999) in hopes of raising student achievement.

In addition to purchasing and disseminating these curricular programs, districts are now paying much more attention not just to *what* program is being used, but *how* it is being used or implemented as well (Stein & Kim, 2011). Problems arise, however, when a district’s view of implementation becomes largely focused on adherence to a program’s prescriptive lesson plans and/or pacing schedules, rather than addressing the broader and more nuanced factors affecting program outcomes for students and program acceptability to teachers. Rigid demands for implementation contrast markedly with growing

acknowledgment in the literature that recognizes the need for teachers' professional judgment to make curricular programs fit local contexts (Smith, 2003).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of implementation in order to determine how, and why, teachers do or do not make adaptations when implementing an intensive reading program designed for ASRs. The study applied a "bottom-up" lens (Maheady, Rafferty, Patti, & Budin, 2016) in recognition that teachers are the main catalyst for implementation of any program in practice. In interpreting teachers' descriptions of their perceptions and experiences, the study drew on implementation science and research on teacher adaptations to better understand teachers' experiences that determine how and why they make adaptations.

Background

Educational researchers have long debated the best method to scale up research-based instructional practices into widespread use (Quinn & Kim, 2017). Most practices supported by the research literature do not ever find their way into common use; in fact, Douglas and colleagues (Douglas, Campbell, & Hinckley, 2015) reported that just 14% of research ever becomes incorporated into classroom practice. Curricular reform and related policies over the past two decades aimed to alter this trend in order to increase student achievement by ensuring that instructional programs and practices used in classrooms were grounded in scientific research. In other words, all programs and practices used should have reliable evidence demonstrating that they work (Smith, 2003).

In 2001, the NCLB Act (2001) formalized efforts to bring practices that have demonstrated positive research outcomes into schools by imposing mandates. NCLB required that schools implement only 'what works' in order to rectify what was seen as

stagnant, unsatisfactory student achievement in American public schools (Bouffard, 2003; Maheady et al., 2016). According to federal NCLB legislation, ‘what works’ is determined by evidence of a program’s likely effectiveness (Smith, 2003). When effective practices and programs are implemented, according to NCLB advocates, there is less guesswork for teachers in determining what and how to teach (Century & Cassata, 2016; Dahlkemper, 2003; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Based on this logic, reduced ambiguity in classroom decision-making should improve instructional quality and increase student achievement (Slavin, 2002).

Although NCLB is no longer in place, current educational reform initiatives that have replaced NCLB still have implications for curriculum and instruction in American public schools. Under ESSA (2015), schools and school districts are still required to prioritize implementation of evidence-based interventions. Legislative initiatives like NCLB and ESSA that have fueled the implementation of packaged curricular programs operate under the assumption that ‘what works’ is determined by examining evidence from rigorous, scientific research (California Department of Education, 2017). However, when there is a singular focus on ‘what works’ it becomes challenging to question who it works for (Biesta, 2007). In other words, there is insufficient attention given to understanding what works *for whom* and *under what conditions* (Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2013).

There is still both inconsistency and ambiguity in how evidence-based practices are identified and labeled, however (Maheady et al., 2016). This is because terms like ‘evidence’ and ‘research’ mean different things to different people (Century & Cassata, 2016). As a result, the words ‘evidence’ and ‘research’ are being overly and at times

inappropriately used (Cook & Cook, 2011). This issue is far from being merely a semantic one; the use and misuse of these terms have wide-reaching implications for teachers, curriculum adoption, and the ‘who’ and ‘how’ of instructional decision-making in practice. For example, Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, and Klingner (2015) noted school districts sometimes cite their own conceptualizations of research as justification for requiring teachers to “flip flop to and from conflicting practices” (p. 169). Regardless of programs’ empirical basis, teachers are being required to implement them, often with little say or decision-making authority.

Implementation Science

Implementation science is a promising field of inquiry that can inform investigations aiming to uncover the complex factors that impact teachers’ experiences in implementing curricular programs (Cook & Odom, 2012). Lessons learned from existing implementation research highlight the need for careful consideration of the characteristics, beliefs, and perspectives of teachers during as well as the organizational context within which they work (Century & Cassata, 2016; Drake & Sherin, 2006). Therefore, understanding factors that affect implementation from teachers’ perspectives is crucial.

There has been considerable debate about fidelity of implementation in both research and practice for quite some time (Cook & Odom, 2013; Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Friedman, 2005). Fidelity is often defined as the extent to which implementation of an evidence-based practice is enacted as prescribed, or intended, by the program developers (Cook & Odom, 2013; Olswang & Prelock, 2015). However, as of yet, there is no universally accepted conceptualization of what fidelity means, how it should be

measured, or how it most effectively translates from controlled research settings into typical classrooms (Century & Cassata, 2016). Stringent expectations for high-fidelity implementation are put in place based on an assumption that any changes to a practice or program (referred to as adaptations) are detrimental to its effectiveness (Penuel, Phillips, & Harris, 2014). Accordingly, the underlying goal of high-fidelity implementation is to minimize the ‘teacher effect’ (Forbes & Davis, 2010) on the implementation of structured curricular programs.

However, regardless of the differing perspectives, there is a universal goal in terms of identifying the best avenues for meaningfully integrating evidence-based information into practice (Century & Cassata, 2016; Olswang & Prelock, 2015). Implementation science was created as a multi-disciplinary field of scientific inquiry (Cook & Odom, 2013). One early promise of implementation science is its potential to address practical issues in fitting programs to local context. Implementation science emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing both a) the *active ingredients* (Fixsen et al., 2005) of the program being implemented and b) factors affecting implementation in order to better understand implementation processes (Century & Cassata, 2016; Fixsen et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2012). Importantly, with regards to implementation fidelity, however, implementation scientists acknowledge that changes made by teachers to programs, known as adaptations, are an inevitable part of large-scale implementation efforts (Penuel et al., 2014).

Teacher Adaptations

Borrowed from the preventive health literature, the following is a definition of *adaptations* made during curricular implementation:

deliberate or accidental modification of the program, including (a) deletions or additions (enhancements) of program components, (b) modifications in the nature of the components that are included, (c) changes in the manner or intensity of administration of program components called for in the program manual, curriculum, or core components analysis, or (d) cultural and other modifications required by local circumstances (Backer, 2002, p. 4).

In an educational context, adaptations can vary in cause, form, and consequence (Leko et al., 2015). That is to say, while some adaptations have been found to ‘lethally mutate’ (Brown & Campione, 1996) a program, others may instead enhance its effectiveness (Leko, 2015).

Decisions about implementation in typical classrooms, including when and how to adapt, occur frequently both before and during instruction (Penuel et al., 2014). Leko (2015) described teachers’ decisions to make adaptations as an implementation “conundrum”. More recently, though, there has been growing acceptance that fidelity and adaptation are “complementary rather than contradictory aspects of program implementation” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 3). Implementation researchers support this changing perspective by describing adaptations as a means to respond to the local, contextually-driven needs of students (Kim et al., 2017). Further, adaptations can serve as a mechanism for teachers to construct their own understanding of a curricular program and the instructional approaches the program may dictate (Spillane et al., 2002).

Leko, Roberts, and Pek (2015) conducted the first and, to date, only explicit study of teachers’ adaptations to a packaged intensive reading program. The authors theorized that some secondary intensive reading teachers address their concerns by making changes to the curricular program. The study’s findings suggest that teachers use adaptations as a way to reconcile personal, contextual, student, and program needs (Leko et al., 2015).

Leko et al.'s (2015) study provides an important starting point for additional studies of implementation and adaptation in the unique context of intensive reading for ASRs. It also suggests that teachers' interpretations of a number of factors differentially influence their implementation decisions.

While much attention has been given to the contents of curricular programs and their empirical underpinnings, understanding the personal contribution and beliefs of those who implement them is equally important to understanding implementation (Drake & Sherin, 2006). An implementation science perspective alongside existing literature would suggest that teachers' implementation decisions (i.e., whether to adhere to or adapt the curriculum) are impacted by a number of intertwining areas of influence. Leko et al. (2015) concluded that intensive reading teachers' experiences making adaptations to a prescriptive reading curriculum were driven by: 1) teacher qualities, 2) individual student needs, 3) organizational context, and 4) program features. Importantly, these areas of influence are differentially interpreted through the teacher's lens. Thus, at the core of teachers' implementation decisions (i.e., whether to adhere or to adapt the program) are teachers' beliefs and perceptions.

Teacher beliefs. Whether passively or actively, teachers are the main catalyst for bringing about change in classroom practice (Craig 2012; Ingersoll, 2007). Therefore, the characteristics and/or qualities of the teacher appear to be an important factor to explore when investigating implementation and teachers' decision-making (Leko et al., 2015). This is significant given that teachers are implementation drivers; without them, the implementation of any policy and/or mandated practice or program cannot take place (Pace & Aiello, 2016; Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). The ways in which teachers

view their own beliefs about pedagogical practice influences how they implement a program (Brothwell, 2016). Other characteristics may include teachers' experience, educational background, certification, and their self-perceived confidence and competence in their teaching ability.

Organizational context. Implementation researchers tend to agree that implementation is impacted by organizational context due to the heterogeneity of schools and school environments (Century & Cassata, 2016; Lasky, 2005). Schools vary widely in terms of their student and teacher populations, the level of professional community and collaboration present within the school, administrative support, and accessibility of resources and instructional support (Stein & Kim, 2011). Teachers' implementation experiences will vary depending on the specific conditions under which they work and the ways in which they interpret the organizational dynamics of their environment (Stein & Kim, 2011).

Organizational context also includes the school or district level influences on program implementation, including the flexibility teachers feel is afforded to them related to instructional decision-making (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Specifically, teaching a high-stakes subject such as intensive reading can affect teachers' working conditions especially when working in contexts with accountability provisions tied to students' test results. Often in these cases, schools and school districts may influence what and how intensive reading is provided, and teachers may differentially interpret pressures associated with this hierarchical decision-making (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992).

Student needs. Existing research suggests that a significant factor affecting implementation is teachers' beliefs about how to differentially respond to students'

diverse learning needs (Remillard, 1999). For teachers supporting ASRs, pressure to raise student achievement scores on state assessments is high and adds an additional point of consideration in meeting student needs (Baglieri, 2016; Ivey & Broaddus, 2000; Zeichner & Hollar, 2016). This pressure comes from the well-documented risks associated with older students' failure to achieve reading proficiency. As such, intensive reading courses serve as the last opportunity to build and/or remediate the reading skills needed to meet the increasing demands required for high school graduation, post-secondary coursework, and the workforce (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Therefore, responding to students' needs is pressing, especially given the inherent difficulty in reversing poor, already established reading trajectories (Lane, 2014).

Program features. Teachers actively process requirements, materials, and guidance embedded within curricular programs through the lens of their own experiences, expertise, and preferences (Penuel et al., 2014). Teachers develop their own perceptions of a program's effectiveness, its fit for their students, and the extent to which it requires them to change their existing instructional practices. As such, teachers' beliefs about a program influences how they use it in their classrooms. For example, teachers may prioritize specific program features that they believe align most closely to their desired goals and pedagogical preferences.

Significance of the Present Study

It is essential to better conceptualize how teachers respond to mandates to implement a particular program while at the same time trying to maximally support students' progress (Remillard, 1999). An implementation science perspective would suggest that teachers' implementation experiences (i.e., making decisions whether to

adhere to or adapt the curriculum) results from a negotiation among multiple, interrelated areas of influences. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how teachers' beliefs about specific program features, organizational context, and their roles affect implementation decision-making and curriculum use within specific contexts.

Following the lead of Leko et al. (2015), this study adds to the emergent body of literature on curricular implementation in intensive reading in two significant ways. First, the present study investigated adaptations from an actor-oriented perspective, seeking to understand teachers' experiences to determine how and why teachers adapt curriculum from the teachers' perspective. By elucidating the perspectives of teachers, the study will help school leaders understand teachers' current implementation experiences as they balance fidelity and fit in practical settings. Additionally, findings from the study may enhance curriculum developers' understanding of the professional development supports teachers may need in order to decide how best to implement curricular programs to meet student needs (Penuel et al., 2014).

Second, while the investigation of adaptations is increasingly common in other fields, e.g. community psychology (Beets et al, 2008; Colby et al, 2013; Kelly et al, 2000; Miller-Day et al., 2013) and content area curriculum research (Drake & Sherin, 2006; Forbes & Davis, 2010; Penuel et al., 2014), much less research has focused on the implementation of reading curricula (e.g., Datnow & Castellano, 2000). Few studies have addressed post-elementary reading, and intensive reading programs in particular, despite the high stakes associated with reading outcomes for ASRs. The present study therefore extends our limited knowledge of how teachers' beliefs and perceptions drive their instructional decisions when implementing a packaged curricular program. As a result,

we can begin to better understand what adaptations teachers make within this specific context, and, perhaps more importantly, why.

Chapter II: Literature Review

...But you can't use that because it is not in the curriculum, not in the guide that I have to read through. I have to carry [the teacher's manual] with me because, apparently, I'm not able to recite the definition of an alliteration unless I have a book in my hand (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015, p. 274).

Implementation Science

Identification of evidence-based interventions and practices is intended to bring the best evidence from research outcomes into schools to solve problems of practice (Maheady et al., 2016). Notably, education researchers, particularly in special education, have made vast improvements in their ability to use quantitative methods to identify these evidenced-based practices in controlled research settings (Odom et al., 2005). However, once evidenced-based practices (or programs) are appropriately identified, their potential success relies on the quality and sustainability of their implementation (Cook & Odom, 2013).

In a widely referenced review of implementation research, Fixsen and colleagues (2005) cautioned, "Only when effective practices and programs are fully implemented should we expect positive outcomes" (p. 4). This notion guides traditional perspectives on fidelity and maintaining the integrity of evidence-based programs and practices during implementation. From a researcher's perspective, measurement of fidelity should document a study's internal validity and ensure that study outcomes were a result of the program's effectiveness rather than extraneous variables (Carroll et al., 2007; Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). Measurement of implementation fidelity from this perspective often focuses on teachers' adherence to curriculum materials as well as exposure, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness (Dane & Schneider, 1998).

However, there are multiple and sometimes conflicting views as to exactly how fidelity should be measured. While some argue that adherence or exposure singularly can be used to measure fidelity, others believe a combination of factors must be examined in order to evaluate fidelity comprehensively (Carroll et al., 2007).

Outside of controlled research settings, sustaining and monitoring high-fidelity implementation is particularly challenging (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Issues of fidelity outside of research settings pose complex challenges for schools (Harn et al., 2013). Just as there is no consensus as to the most appropriate way to measure implementation fidelity, there is not yet agreement as to what constitutes appropriately high levels of fidelity in practice (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). This is due in part to issues related to the feasibility and sustainability of high-fidelity implementation in real-life classroom contexts (Harn et al., 2013; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). Similarly, the intended purpose of monitoring fidelity in practice differs vastly from that in research and program evaluation. Rather than supporting internal validity, fidelity in schools is measured to ensure quality implementation that will enhance student outcomes (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Yet, there is little guidance for schools and districts in how to meaningfully assess and interpret fidelity (Harn et al., 2013). As a result, fidelity requirements may be misinterpreted and/or inappropriate to meet practical goals of implementation.

Further, the predictive relationship between high levels of fidelity and increased student outcomes has not been consistently demonstrated in the literature (Harn et al., 2013). Quinn & Kim (2017) noted that fidelity-driven implementation is rarely successful once replication is attempted in larger-scale effectiveness studies. As a result of these issues, perspectives on implementation are changing, and alternative methods to

instructional scale-up are being explored (Harn et al., 2013). For example, proponents of an integrity perspective on implementation generally accept that some level of teacher adaptation is inevitable and not necessarily harmful so long as the integrity of the program is maintained (Penuel et al., 2014). As such, fidelity from this perspective is judged by a determination of a) whether or not programs are delivered in a manner that maintains the integrity of the program principles and b) whether or not adequate exposure to the learning opportunities within the program is afforded (Dane & Schneider, 1998). In this view, adaptations to noncore parts of a program are encouraged so long as they do not interfere with the integrity of the program.

Teacher Adaptations

Perspectives on implementation vary most significantly when examining the extent to which adaptations to a program's intended design hinder or enhance its effectiveness. As of yet, adaptations have been studied most extensively in other domains including preventive health (i.e., Beets et al, 2008; Colby et al, 2013; Kelly et al, 2000; Miller-Day et al., 2013) and content areas like math and science (i.e., Barab & Luehmann, 2002; Choppin, 2011; Drake & Sherin, 2006; Forbes & Davis, 2010; Penuel et al., 2014; Wallace, 2012). Consistent across the preventive health studies is the idea that adaptations are a challenge to be addressed when examining implementation (Colby et al., 2013). Researchers in the field of preventive health also identified a need for a balance between fidelity and providing implementers with the autonomy to adapt programs as needed (Miller et al., 2013). With regards to project-based learning curricula in science, existing literature suggests that adaptation to fit programs to local contexts must be accepted and even accommodated by curriculum developers (Barab &

Luehmann, 2002). Similar efforts in other math and science studies reflect this perspective in order to increase the sustainability of curricular programs in real-life classrooms (Drake & Sherin, 2006; Penuel et al., 2014).

Implementation science recognizes the need for closer examination of curricular programs by both developers and the schools that adopt them in determining how and why teachers might adapt (Fixsen et al., 2005). Simply knowing that a program ‘works’ is not enough. It is also critical to identify the specific program elements that contribute to its success (Blase & Fixsen, 2013). These are a program’s *core components*, or active ingredients, that underlie a program’s effectiveness (Fixsen et al., 2005; Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2014). From an implementation science perspective, a program’s core components are what should be implemented with high fidelity, or as prescribed (Fixsen et al., 2005). This should afford program implementers the flexibility to adapt noncore components of a program as they see fit without compromising its overall effectiveness. While it is not currently standard practice in program development to identify the core components, this is changing. In reading, curriculum developers are making increased efforts to identify a program’s core components and empirically test their impact (i.e. Kim et al., 2017; Lemons et al., 2014). Recent studies have also attempted to identify core components of existing programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in order to strengthen implementation (Molloy et al., 2004).

With core components of a program identified and changing perspectives on what fidelity means in practice, it appears adaptations have the potential to positively impact student outcomes in reading. One relatively new avenue of quantitative research focuses

on the effects of adaptations on performance outcomes for students (Kim et al., 2017; Lemons, Fuchs, Gilbert, & Fuchs, 2014; Quinn & Kim, 2017). Lemons et al. (2014) provided treatment teachers autonomy to adapt noncore components of the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) program using an experimental design. The control group implemented PALS entirely as designed. Results favored students of treatment teachers across the academic year ($ES = .25$ to $.60$ across reading measures; Lemons et al., 2014). Notably, while this is a potentially promising finding, there were limitations in the study's randomization and a detailed description of how and why treatment teachers adapted the program was not provided. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute the effects of adaptations generally on increased student performance without identifying or differentiating the nature and function of the adaptations made. Differential characteristics of the teacher implementer were also not provided in detail.

Similarly, using a cluster-randomized control trial, Kim et al. (2017) observed adaptations that extended and/or modified the program procedures of READS, a summer literacy program. Findings from student literacy scores at post-testing were consistent with those of Lemons and colleagues. In both studies, the effectiveness of the program tested was enhanced rather than hindered by teachers' adaptations. However, this study had a similar limitation to the Lemons et al. (2014) study. Because both of these studies were focused exclusively on student outcomes, providing in-depth information about the nature and function of the adaptations teachers made was outside the scope of each study's intended purpose.

Several additional studies have also addressed adaptations to reading programs though significantly less than in other disciplines. One study of Success for All (SFA)

used interview and observation data in two elementary schools to investigate the extent to which teachers' beliefs about the program impacted their implementation fidelity (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). Findings from the study revealed that all teachers in the sample, regardless of their beliefs about the program, made adaptations while implementing. The scope of adaptations, though, varied widely from minor changes of timing to major deletion of core components of the program.

Several implementation studies have attempted to examine implementation fidelity in relation to other teacher characteristics and skills. A study of Children's School Success (CSS) found 'high implementer' teachers to have stronger classroom management skills and higher student outcomes than teachers implementing the program with low levels of fidelity (Lieber et al., 2009). In contradiction, high levels of fidelity were not associated with higher student outcomes in other studies in implementation of a kindergarten reading program (Simmons et al., 2007). Instead, more frequent adaptations reflective of the teacher's content knowledge and responsiveness to student need, rather than strict adherence to the program's script, were found to increase the effectiveness of the program (Simmons et al., 2007). Though the findings from this study cannot be generalized, it sheds light on the importance of examining teachers' expertise and qualifications when looking at the characteristics of the implementer.

However, given that most existing reading studies were conducted in elementary settings (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Lieber et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2007), a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences making adaptations in the specialized context of secondary intensive reading is incomplete. Leko and colleagues (2015) attempted to better understand the adaptations made by secondary intensive

reading teachers using a highly structured research-based program. Using grounded theory, the authors identified “reconciliation through adaptation” as the core concept underlying their theory of teacher adaptation in this context (Leko et al., 2015, p. 173). While the study provides a sound launching point for future research, there are a few limitations. The authors focused solely on one curricular program, System 44, so it is not necessarily representative of other programs used with ASRs. The study also did not differentiate between the experiences of middle versus high school teachers and both were included in the study’s limited sample. What is also missing in the design of this study, though, is consideration for the varied autonomy afforded to teachers given the study took place within the context of a larger university-school partnership for research. While teachers in the study were afforded the flexibility to adapt, current literature on autonomy suggests that this may not be the case for teachers universally (Cucchiara et al. 2015, Zeichner & Hollar, 2016). In other words, expectations for adherence vary across differing organizational contexts.

Teachers’ Beliefs

The relationship between teachers and curricular programs has been described in the literature as complicated (Lee & Min, 2017). This is in part due to teachers’ response to the perceived need to use curricular materials alongside a desire to be responsive to their students during implementation (Remillard, 1999). Teachers’ prior beliefs and experiences contribute to the ways in which teachers navigate pressures related to curricular implementation (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Allen and Penuel (2015) described teachers’ “ambiguity and uncertainty” (Allen & Penuel, 2015, p. 140) with regards to the curricular implementation process especially when there is incongruity between their

personal goals for instruction and those mandated from a particular program. While some teachers were able to productively navigate these difficulties, other teachers struggled internally to make sense of the expectations for implementation placed on them.

Existing research further highlights the ways in which teachers' beliefs shape their interpretation of and response to curricular programs (Bouffard, 2003). For example, Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, and Klingner (2005) conducted interviews and focus groups of special education teachers asked to implement research-based practices. Teachers in the study reported difficulty in differentiating instruction for the needs of a variety of learners in their classrooms and an exorbitant amount of time required to meet implementation demands (Boardman et al., 2005). Some teachers in the study also found the implementation process overwhelming and expressed a skepticism with regard to research findings (Boardman et al., 2005) that is commonly noted in other areas of literature (Carnine, 1997; Greenwood, 2001).

Boardman et al.'s (2005) findings also highlighted teachers' beliefs about the inadequacy of training they received specific to implementation. Across the literature on implementation, this notion is echoed in other studies. The amount of implementation support (i.e. professional development, observations with feedback, instructional coaching, etc.) teachers report receiving varies widely across studies (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011). Many teachers report feeling as though the support they receive is insufficient for successful implementation (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011) and/or a source of confusion and ambiguity (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Other teachers describe implementation support as entirely nonexistent (Weiss et al., 2013).

In addition to inadequate training and support for implementation, multiple studies highlight that teachers respond negatively to the scripted nature of packaged curricular programs (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Camp & Oesterich, 2010; Crocco & Costigan, 2010; Savino-Garzon, 2013). Findings from these studies noted teachers' beliefs that their role in the classroom has shifted from that of a curriculum 'maker' to a curriculum 'implementer' (Craig, 2012). Whereas autonomous teachers decide how they will teach, and, similarly, how their students will learn (Renzulli et al., 2011), teachers have reported that scripted curricular programs have contributed to their autonomy being "systematically stripped away" (Zeichner & Hollar, 2016, p. 120).

Similarly, results from these studies suggest that teachers believe that implementation of prescriptive and rigid curricular programs leaves them simply unable to meet the needs of diverse learners (Camp & Oesterich, 2010). Teachers resisting implementation of a scripted curriculum studied by Camp and Oesterich (2010) cited a 'curriculum mismatch' between the program and the needs of these students. Other teachers in the same study called for a need to "recenter [curriculum] on students" (Camp & Oesterich, 2010, p. 20).

These findings have been corroborated in other studies (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Teachers expressed concern that the specific requirements of programs left them unable to tailor the instruction to the varying needs of their students and in fact, restricted their growth (Crocco & Costigan, 2007).

Additionally, teachers felt that the constraints of the reading programs did not allow the students to develop confidence in their reading abilities (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006).

Though each of these studies was limited in sample size and lacked generalizability as a

result of their qualitative approach, the corroboration of research findings across studies is a point to consider.

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

A grounded theory approach to qualitative research can “generate or discover a general theory or abstract analytical hunch based on study of phenomena in a particular situation” (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p. 197). A grounded theory not only describes the phenomena of interest, but explains it in addition to providing predictability within a specific context (Corbin, 1990). It is particularly useful for inquiry into phenomena where previous research is scant thus making it an appropriate approach for the present study given the limited knowledge of middle school intensive reading teachers’ experiences implementing a packaged curricular program (Engward, 2013).

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, one of the most critical aspects of the analytic process involved the explicit acknowledgment of the researcher’s positionality. The researcher is a former MDCPS reading teacher with many shared experiences with the research participants. As such, explicit points of reflection and dialogue were needed to ensure methodological and interpretive transparency, given that the researcher’s teacher-identity “functions centrally” (Trainor & Graue, 2014, p. 271) to this line of research and the researcher’s perspective. Critical self-reflection helped in the identification of areas that may be overemphasized in order to ensure a more balanced analysis of data.

Reflexivity was addressed at multiple time points during the study. According to Berger (2015), reflexivity refers to a “process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement an

explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). While memoing serves multiple purposes in qualitative research, reflective memoing, in particular, can aid in ensuring that one’s identity (or identities) are not causing a misinterpretation or misconstrued view of the data.

These types of memos help document the process of reflection. During data analysis, the researcher’s own perceptions and biases were challenged at times. As demonstration of this process, one reflective memo related to the perception of teachers’ autonomy read,

I’m beginning to question my view of the centrality of autonomy in all of this as I once thought. It seems most of the teachers are able to negotiate some level of decision-making, and even those who say they can’t make any decisions are providing examples of adaptations they make in the same breath. This is something to discuss further.

Setting

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) is the fourth largest public school district in the United States with a student population of 356,086 enrolled in its 467 schools and a diverse teaching force of 18,275, of whom 5,500 teach at the secondary level (MDCPS, 2017). MDCPS has 48 traditional middle schools and 49 K-8 centers (MDCPS, 2017).

Intensive reading. This research specifically targets middle school intensive reading teachers within MDCPS, and as such, it is important to provide context for the demands and requirements related to this specialized setting. In Florida, Statute 6A-6.054 Section 1003.4156, F.S. (2016) requires both middle and high school students scoring below proficiency on the state assessment to have extended time for reading intervention. Typically, this entails a double block of reading during the school day in order to provide

enrollment in an intensive reading course. The number of students enrolled in these courses varies by school, however, given that just 57% of students in MDCPS met proficiency standards on the 2017 English Language Arts component of the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA; Florida Department of Education, 2017), it is not unreasonable to estimate that in some middle schools, more than half of the school's student body meets eligibility for intensive reading.

It is important to note that MDCPS provides additional guidelines to schools for intensive reading courses. Teachers must be considered highly qualified to teach reading. That is, all teachers assigned to intensive reading courses must hold a Master's degree in reading and/or a valid reading endorsement on their Florida teaching certificate (MDCPS2014). Teachers must use curricular materials for these courses from a pre-approved list of evidence-based programs adopted by the district (MDCPS, 2014). These programs include Read180 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), National Geographic Inside (Cengage Learning, 2014), and System 44 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006) among others (MDCPS, 2014).

MDCPS has three types of intensive reading courses at the middle school level: Intensive Reading Enrichment (IR-EN), Intensive Reading (IR), and Intensive Reading Plus (IR+). Students are placed into the appropriate section of intensive reading using technical assistance guidelines provided by the district for analysis of students' diagnostic data (MDCPS, 2014). Students with extensive deficiencies in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are placed in IR+ and are instructed using the Read 180 and System 44 intervention programs (MDCPS, 2014). Students who demonstrated proficiency on the state assessment in previous years are typically assigned to IR-EN

(MDCPS, 2014). Students who don't meet the criteria for IR+ or IR-EN are placed into IR. This course is intended to address deficiencies in vocabulary and comprehension. The National Geographic Inside program is the most widely used intervention program for both IR and IR-EN in MDCPS since its initial adoption by the district in 2014.

Procedures

University Institutional Review Board approval was received for the study on July 7, 2017 (see Appendix C). Research approval from the Research Review Committee of Miami-Dade County Public Schools was obtained on August 15, 2017 (see Appendix D).

Sampling. During the first round of data collection, maximum variation sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) was used. This type of sampling is nonrandom and purposive in that participants are carefully chosen based on characteristics of the larger population (Creswell, 2013). The rationale for using maximum variation sampling has to do with interpretation of commonalities found among participants. In maximum variation samples, commonalities are more likely a phenomenon generalizable to the larger population (Robinson, 2001).

While the study participants were homogeneous in terms of their teaching assignment, the district within which they work, and the curricular program being implemented, the sample reflected heterogeneity in terms of the teachers' personal and demographic characteristics (i.e., years of experience, age, gender, and racial/ethnic background) as well as school level characteristics to reflect the varying organizational context within which teachers work (i.e., their geographic location within MDCPS, school grade, and size) to the greatest extent possible. It was also important to identify participants with both positive and negative feelings about the National Geographic

Inside program they are mandated to implement. Because data collection occurred concomitantly with data analysis, the researcher was able to ensure that both positive and negative views about the program were reported.

Recruitment. To aid in recruitment and access to participants, participating teachers formed a referral chain to identify other district intensive reading teachers (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). From these referrals, existing participants were deliberately selected based on their ability to meet the research need and their potential contribution to the information of interest (Robinson, 2014). Existing professional contacts from the researcher's previous employment and/or research activity in the district included a number of school principals, current and former intensive reading teachers, and district curriculum support specialists. These contacts were the first line of recruitment for study participants. While it is difficult in qualitative research to make determinations of an appropriate sample size a priori (Morse, 1995), the range of expected participants is 10-15 teachers as a minimum sample of ten participants is advised when using maximum variation sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Sampling continued until data saturation, or 'data adequacy' was reached in data collection (Morse, 1995).

Participants. The target participants were middle school intensive reading teachers working in MDCPS. Teachers of Grades 6, 7, and 8 were deemed eligible for inclusion in the study if they met the following criteria. Participants had to have been assigned to teach intensive reading (IR or IR-EN) in a MDCPS middle or K-8 school within the last three years using the National Geographic Inside program. Finally, temporary and substitute teachers were excluded from eligibility in the study as they are

not given the same mandates and responsibilities as classroom teachers. Similarly, paraprofessionals and other teacher assistants were excluded from the sample.

Based on the aforementioned criteria, ten MDCPS middle school intensive reading teachers participated in the study. In total, teachers from eight schools were represented. All eight schools received either a B or C school grade designation during the 2016-2017 school year. Geographically, all three regions of MDCPS were represented. While some of the similarities among participants were to be expected (i.e., most of the sample held a reading certification), several differences are notable such as the range of teaching experience (1-30 years) and the number of years implementing the Inside program (1-4 years). More detailed participant information is shown in Table 1.

Data collection. Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews (Drever, 1995). Semi-structured interviews are a commonly used interview method and were selected for use to balance the need for a specific focus on adaptation while leaving opportunity for participants to expand on these ideas as needed (Drever, 1995). Use of an interview guide to organize predetermined interview questions and topics helps meet this purpose. Interview guides help provide the flexibility to build rich conversations with participants while staying focused on a predetermined topic of interest (Patton, 2002).

There were 13 open-ended questions on this study's interview guide (see Appendix A). These questions were written and developed by the researcher using existing literature and the study's framework as a guide. Questions were piloted with one 6th grade intensive reading teacher in the fall of 2016 and later revised for clarity and specificity to the intended research purpose. Revisions included condensing, reordering, and removing questions.

Table 1

Study participants' demographic and background information.

Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Number of Years Taught (Total)	Number of Years Taught (Current Position)	Advanced Degree(s) Earned (if applicable)	Certification
1	White	14	3	• Master of Science in Reading	• Reading K-12 • English 6-12
2	Hispanic	20	4		• Elementary K-6 • English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) • Middle Grade Language Arts 5-9
3	Black	4	4	• Master of Education	• English 6-12
4	Hispanic	16	4	• Master of Science in Reading	• English 6-12 • Reading K-12 • Varying Exceptionalities (VE)
5	Black	1	1		• English 6-12
6	Black	22	4	• Master of Science in Reading • Educational Specialist in Education Leadership	• Education Leadership • Reading K-12 • VE
7	White	10	3		• Elementary Education K-6 • Reading K-12 • ESOL
8	Black	37	4	• Master of Science in Reading	• Business Education • Gifted Education • Reading
9	Black	25+	4	• Master of Science in Reading • Master of Science in Exceptional Student Education	• Exceptional Student Education (ESE) • Reading, K-12
10	Hispanic	10	4	• Master of Science in Reading	• ESE • Reading

These revised questions probe several broad areas designed to capture the thoughts, feelings, and actions of teachers implementing an intensive reading curriculum: a)

teaching background and demographic information, b) beliefs about the intensive reading curriculum, c) adaptations, and d) planning and instructional decision-making. Teachers were asked to share their beliefs about the Inside intensive reading curriculum and how they use it in their classroom. Further questions related to adaptations were intended to differentiate the types of adaptations teachers report making (i.e. *Are there any parts of the program that you feel you need to change?*) and their intended purpose (i.e. *Why or why not?*). In terms of instructional decision-making, teachers were asked explicitly the extent to which they have the flexibility to make changes to the curricular program and their lesson planning process.

One interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and were conducted in a location of each participant's choosing. Prior to the start of the interview, verbal consent (see Appendix B) was obtained from each participant. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data and transcribed verbatim immediately after the conclusion of the interview. Interview data remained strictly confidential as no names or other identifying information were recorded, shared, or reported following the interview. Pseudonyms for both the teachers and their schools were used in transcriptions and in all reporting of the data. Audio files are housed on a password-protected and secured drive at the University of Miami.

Data analysis. Qualitative data analysis involves working closely with data to organize, synthesize, and extract patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). Interview data, once transcribed and quality checked by the researcher to ensure accurate transcription, was analyzed concomitantly with ongoing data collection. Because the

analytic process was iterative, the process was ongoing rather than a linear progression of steps. Data were frequently revisited, connections were reexamined, and focus and understanding of the data were refined (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Analytic memos helped document this process. Below shows an excerpt of an analytic memo written during the initial coding of the first interview related to the district's requirement to implement the technology-based i-Ready program during her class:

Almost half of her teaching time has been replaced by a computer! That seems like a long time for the students to sit in front of the computer (in addition to all of their other classes that have computerized learning). This could be classified as a "forced adaptation," perhaps? Her curricular obligation seems to be more i-Ready than Inside. Maybe this is because it is easier to monitor or monitored more frequently by administrators and/or the district?

The overall analytic approach to coding was inductive. An inductive approach identifies codes as they emerge from data. The coding process involved three recursive steps: 1) assignment of open codes to individual chunks of data, 2) grouping of open codes into families, and 3) identification of theme(s) that emerge from the categories of data identified in the second step as shown in Figure 2. Importantly, the coding process utilized the constant comparative method to refine relationships, concepts, and ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the analytic process, collaborative meetings and ongoing communication with a second qualitative researcher ensured close alignment between the identified codes and the data. Peer debriefing, member checks with study participants, and maintaining evidence of an audit trail enhanced the trustworthiness of

the data coding and analytic process (Barbour, 2001; Trainor & Graue, 2014).

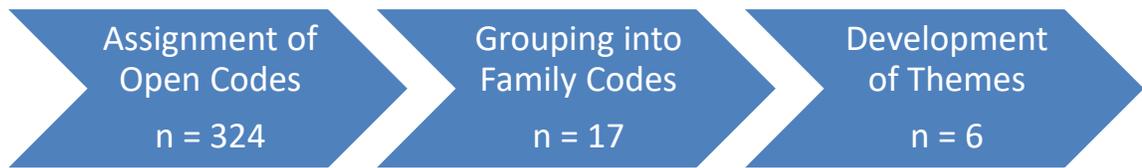


Figure 1. Progression of data analysis from open coding to theme development.

Saturation. While there is no “one size fits all” conceptualization of data saturation, it is often viewed as the point in data analysis at which no new themes arise (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, consistent with grounded theory approaches, beginning the initial analytic process prior to the conclusion of data collection allowed the researcher to appropriately determine the point of theoretical saturation needed to cease sampling of additional interview participants (Morse, 1995). Similarly, intentional measures were taken to promote data saturation with regards to the study design such as ensuring that the same types of questions were asked to multiple participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Chapter IV: Findings

With each decision that they enacted, the intensive reading teachers in this study felt they were balancing pressures related to curricular implementation from multiple sources and for a multitude of reasons. Thus, the core concept from the study's findings was negotiation. The term negotiation reflects the "give and take" approach teachers utilized when making decisions. They negotiated both internally and amongst other stakeholders (i.e., administrators, students, and district personnel) with regards to what they felt they could and/or should do with what they felt they had to do. These negotiations were driven by the teachers' responses to pressure from accountability systems as well as in response to their personal beliefs about their practice.

Analysis of the data yielded six themes that elucidated the idea of negotiation, as shown in Figure 2. The six themes were further structured into two higher-order groupings: i) negotiation in response to systems pressures and ii) negotiation in response to inter-/intrapersonal beliefs. Below, I describe the key findings related to each theme. For each theme, a figure highlights the progression of coding that supported its emergence.



Figure 2: Summary of qualitative findings.

Negotiation in Response to Systems Pressures

Three themes support the idea that teachers in the study found themselves navigating demands of multiple stakeholders, based largely on the unique contexts in which they work. While making instructional decisions, teachers negotiated within multiple systems at the school, district and state level. These systems influenced teachers' instructional practices through processes such as providing district expectations, the implementation processes mandated by their district, and the high-stakes accountability demands associated with teaching reading.

Theme 1: (In)fidelity by design. Figure 3 highlights the progression of coding that built the foundation for Theme 1. This theme centers around the messages teachers described related to whether and how they were expected to implement the Inside program “with fidelity”. Although all of the ten teachers recalled being told to implement the program with fidelity, this message was often vague and/or in conflict with other expectations communicated by administrators, school-based instructional coaches, and/or district personnel. In order to meet the system expectations, the teachers negotiated their instructional decisions, a process that led to a heavily adapted implementation of Inside.

Fitting it all in. While on one hand, all ten teachers received messages at some point about implementing with fidelity, they were all simultaneously required to implement an additional technology-based program called i-Ready (Curriculum Associates, 2017) during their scheduled intensive reading. Consequently, having to dedicate a predetermined amount of time weekly to i-Ready left teachers with no choice but to adapt the Inside program. Most commonly, teachers reported reluctantly deleting the grammar components as well as any other “less important parts” of the program in

order to fit it all in. The writing instruction offered by Inside, too, was deemed by most teachers to not fit within their allotted time: “An essay? I don’t know if I’m ever going to get to that,” said a mid-career intensive reading teacher.

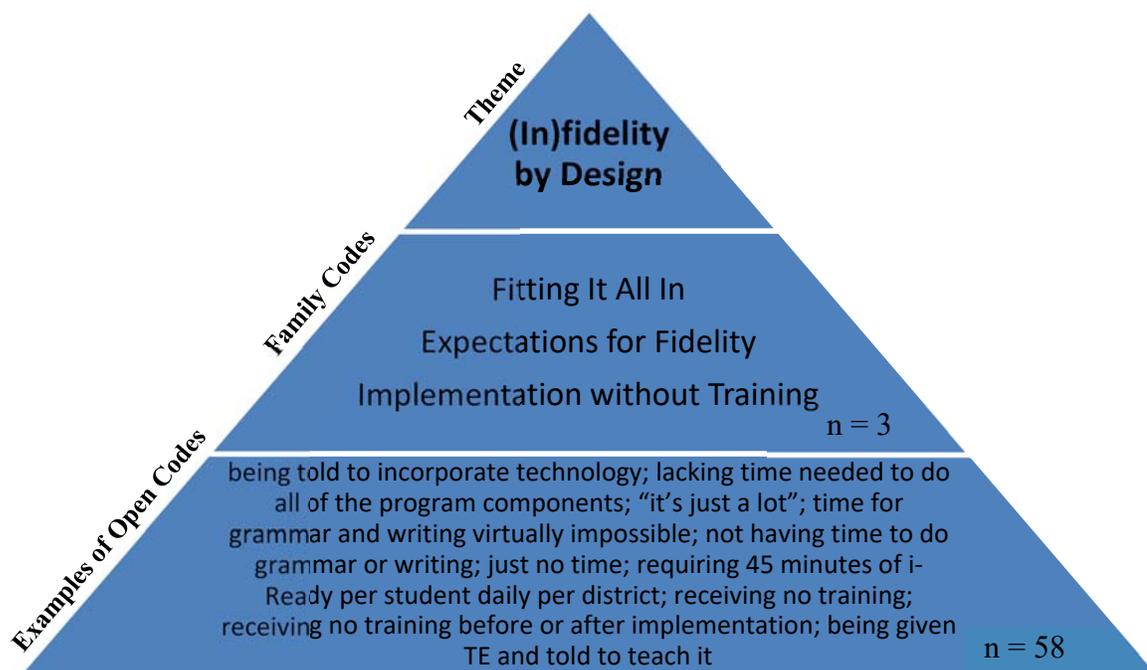


Figure 3. Coding map for Theme 1.

As one teacher explained, the sheer quantity of material prescribed by the Inside program on top of additional district mandates made fitting it all in seem unachievable: “one lesson would take a month.” Another teacher added, “if you’re talking about a person standing up there and keep in mind that time management is of the essence—so, how long could you go through that script and expect to be done and moved on to the next activity? It is impossible!” Describing the first component of the Inside program, another teacher similarly stated,

The initial launch was forever. The rest are kind of shorter, but initially, it takes a very long time because [the program] throw[s] a lot of strategies at the kids all at one time and when you’re dealing with struggling readers, [the program] tell[s]

you that this was going to take a week and it doesn't.

Expectations for “fidelity”. Despite the commonality in word use with regards to implementation with fidelity, there was not a common conceptualization of what exactly that means in relation to classroom practices. One veteran teacher dismissed the term fidelity along with other “district buzz words” like “rigor”. When asked what she thought fidelity meant, she replied, “Responding to the needs of students and modifying to do that”. Others weren’t entirely sure what fidelity meant, but knew that during their school’s instructional review and walkthroughs from district personnel, they were told to “follow the program with fidelity because it works”.

Fidelity, for some, appeared to be a moving target as expectations changed “at the whim of the administrator”. A teacher conveyed her frustration by saying, “They will tell you, ‘Oh, you can’t do it that way, you need to do it this way.’ It’s just that they change things every day”. Although the frequency of daily changes to implementation expectations was not mentioned by all teachers, several noted changes in implementation expectations over the course of the program’s adoption in the district. For example, midway through the current academic year, a mid-career teacher had received a memorandum that student placements for the Inside program would change. Rather than continuing to have students assigned to program levels by grade level (i.e., 6th graders use Level A), placement would be determined by a test that these teachers were told not to use in previous years. As a result, each intensive reading teacher “would be teaching three [different levels of] books within my class” at the same time for the remainder of the year.

Interestingly, several of the teachers equated the expectation for fidelity with the district pacing guides. Even for those who reported having higher levels of decision-making authority for instructional delivery, the pacing guide (rather than the Inside program and its associated materials) appeared to be the one non-negotiable. In fact, several teachers cited the pacing guide as a significant factor in how and why they adapt the curriculum. When asked if there were parts of the program she found herself frequently changing, a mid-career teacher responded, “It’s more that I’m taking things out” in order to stay “on pace”.

Teachers in schools in what they called the district’s “urban core” cited additional “sources” they were required to implement “with fidelity” that they believed their counterparts in schools in wealthier neighborhoods were not. As a fourth-year teacher in the district’s inner city described,

Most of us have data trackers on our walls. But the district is doing a big push now for trackers to be in students’ folders to show I’m using another source with fidelity. I have to have a tracker, have to have a folder, and have to show that you’re remediating whatever it is they’re not getting from [the Inside curriculum].

Her interpretation of requirements to have trackers and folders as a component of “fidelity” highlights the ambiguity associated with how this term is used and communicated to teachers. Further, the very fact that they are required to use multiple programs simultaneously “with fidelity” highlights what is actually *infidelity* to the Inside program that is being mandated by the district.

Implementation without training. When asked about the nature of training or professional learning opportunities provided to her before implementation, a first-year teacher in the study sarcastically replied, “What training?” while laughing and shaking her head. In fact, she was not the only teacher to report having received no formal

implementation support or training prior to or during implementation of the Inside program. If teachers don't know how to implement the program, it seems highly unlikely that they will instinctively do so "with fidelity". Instead, the result of the lack of training was accidental adaptations; several of the teachers were making adaptations to the curriculum unknowingly. For example, an early career teacher learned she was missing a component of the program only during an instructional review by the district occurring at her school. Prior to receiving feedback from the review, she did not know that she was adapting the program by deleting the assessment component. Indeed, she did not even know it existed.

For the few teachers who did receive training, there were still concerns related to its adequacy. Two of the teachers who showed up for the training were told they could leave because the teachers already knew the material being covered. One of these teachers, a thirty-seven year veteran who chose to attend the training three times, refused to leave and demanded an opportunity to learn and have her questions answered.

Reflecting on the experience, she said,

But I need you to tell me about different things inside the program...they taught us like bam, bam, bam. It was introduced too quick. So, the second year I was there to get more in depth. And then the last year I said I know I'm not getting [professional development] credit, but I'm going to sit here [in the training], and I'm going to see just what you're doing.

It is unclear why some teachers had access to district-sponsored initial training from the publishing company, but those who attended were left underwhelmed and still ill-equipped to meet district mandates for "fidelity". In fact, a mid-career teacher who attended the training recalled, "They said to us that there's so much that you can do within the program that you have to pick and choose". No guidance was provided

regarding the how, why, and what of this type of “picking and choosing” according to the teacher, though. Rather, this message from the publishing company representatives providing the training was in contrast to the messages being delivered to teachers by administrators and district personnel regarding how the program should be used.

Several teachers described a focus on accessing materials through the program’s online portal including the premade lesson plans that most of the teachers claimed “you would never use”. The session also covered a basic overview of the program, but only one of the teachers recalled the research base of the program ever being addressed. Many of the teachers implementing the Inside curriculum are also responsible for implementing other curricular programs. One veteran teacher could not recall the specifics of the research for this particular program though she did recall initially searching for the information on her own. She said, “It’s just I do other programs—I do the Read 180, System 44, so there’s so many programs are in my head so I’m just trying to think which one was the research for this”.

Overall, there was a strong consensus among teachers that teachers wanted more professional learning on how to maximize the effectiveness of the Inside program in their classrooms. This was true even of experienced intensive reading teachers: “If I’m good at my craft, I want to see how I could be better”. In contrast, the first-year teacher in the study desperately pleaded for instructional support. She described her building’s instructional coach as “hands off” and was unable to name the district support person assigned to her school for job-embedded professional learning: “I don’t even know what that lady looks like”.

Theme 2: Changing dynamics. An idea echoed by all ten participants was that the dynamics at the student, school, district, and community levels have changed. According to several of the veteran teachers interviewed, teaching is not the same as it once was, nor are the students. Figure 4 shows the coding map depicting the emergence of Theme 2: Changing Dynamics.

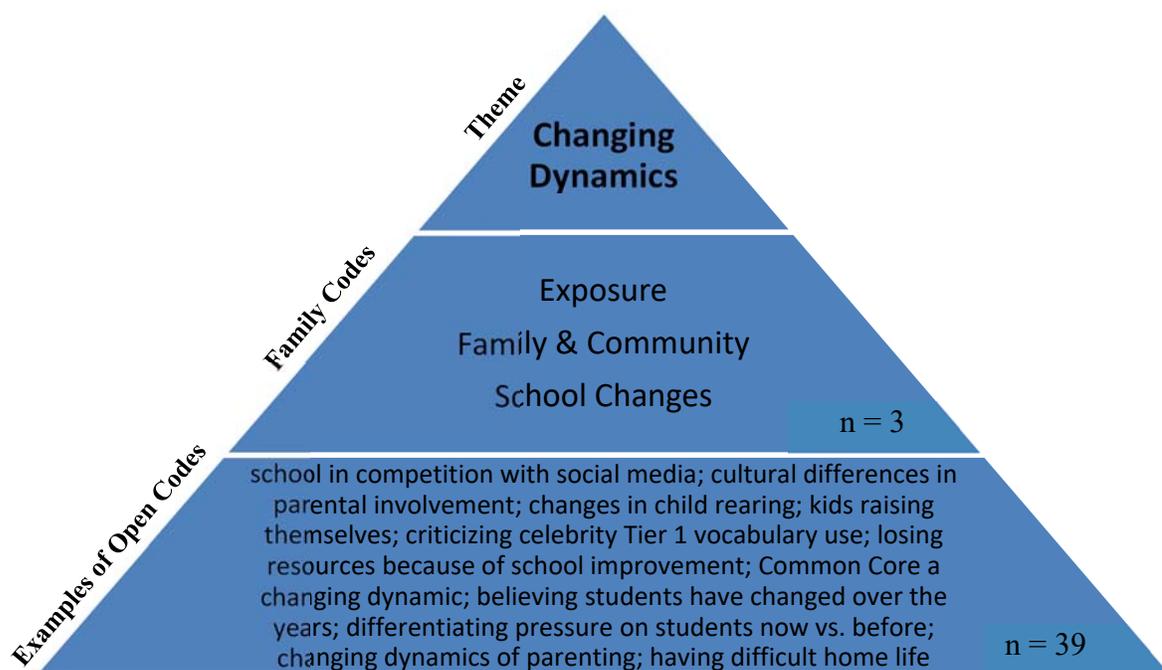


Figure 4. Coding map for Theme 2.

Exposure. Especially among the more seasoned veteran teachers working for decades in this role, there was a shared perception that today’s students are exposed to far more stimuli than ever before. Teachers felt that they were having to “compete with social media” to maintain student interest and attention during the span of the class period and to keep material relevant. She felt this type of exposure made it even more important to add higher level and domain-specific vocabulary not offered by the Inside program. She recalled a lesson she adapted in her class and how she made it relevant to her

students, their communities, and their social media influence by engaging them in critical dialogue:

It was the question [from Inside] asking [the students] how the economy in your community was impacted by cultural preferences. So, we started with something simple--we talked about social media and how that influences people. And then we talked about housing. You know if you have families living in your community that get subsidized housing and you have families that are paying rent, what are the balances good and bad? So, that was a perfect opportunity to have them respond.

Similarly, another veteran teacher cited social media and celebrity culture relative to the levels of vocabulary to which students were exposed as a dynamic to be considered in thinking about instruction. She felt students were learning the majority of their vocabulary through popular rap artists like Cardi B. In contrasting to her own experiences growing up, the teacher stated,

I used to read a lot, but back then we had five [TV] channels. Now, you [have] 1,000 channels, so, if [nobody is] there to limit the scope of what these kids are exposed to...then [the celebrities are the ones] teaching the vocabulary.

She described the vocabulary used by popular celebrities as lower level or “Tier 1 vocabulary” and even made a point to mention that the President of the United States, too, often spoke using only Tier 1 vocabulary.

Family and community. Findings from the study’s data indicated that teachers believed changing dynamics in students’ family and community impacted the ways in which they used the curriculum. The reality faced by some students in the district was attending class daily wondering, “Is there a home to go to? When I get [home], is there something to eat? Are the lights on? Or do I have my mother’s company in there?” This is an important factor with regards to how teachers engage students in the learning process during intensive reading; when students are worried about where their next meal

will come from or struggling with issues at home, it becomes even more difficult to maintain focus on a “tedious” task such as reading.

Teachers felt changing economic dynamics in students’ communities directly impacted the ways in which they needed to adapt the Inside program within their classrooms in other ways. Another teacher noted how the scarcity of resources in her school’s community contributed to her instructional decision-making related to computer programming. Related to meeting required weekly “minutes” logged in to the i-Ready program, she said, “mostly they don’t have computers at home, so if they don’t get it here, they probably won’t get it at home”. As a result, she felt she had to rotate students through the three computers of her classroom even if it was during direct instruction.

Another teacher working in a school that is traditionally viewed as serving a higher-income suburban community within the district surprisingly shared a similar perspective related to resources at home and its impact on her program use. In expressing what she perceived to be a challenge of the web-based components of the Inside program and her ability to utilize it for home-learning activities as suggested by the program, she said,

Not all the students have computer access, so when the students go home it would be beneficial for them to have the story instead of having to go online. A lot of my students...don’t have computer access at all. I get phone calls all the time from parents telling me [they] can’t get to the library.

For a number of the teachers, the demographics of the students in their classrooms was an additional changing dynamic. One teacher noted a changing population within her school as a result of recent waves of immigration from Latin America. She said, “We also have a lot of kids coming in from Cuba or other countries like that, so we do have a large [English Language Learner] population...which has been different for many teachers”.

Many of the teachers within the study's sample taught ELL students in their intensive reading classrooms and described the ways they adapted the program with these students specifically in mind, e.g., by translating program materials into the student's native language or adding supplemental text from other sources, despite a designated section of the Teacher's Edition providing guidance for ELL students.

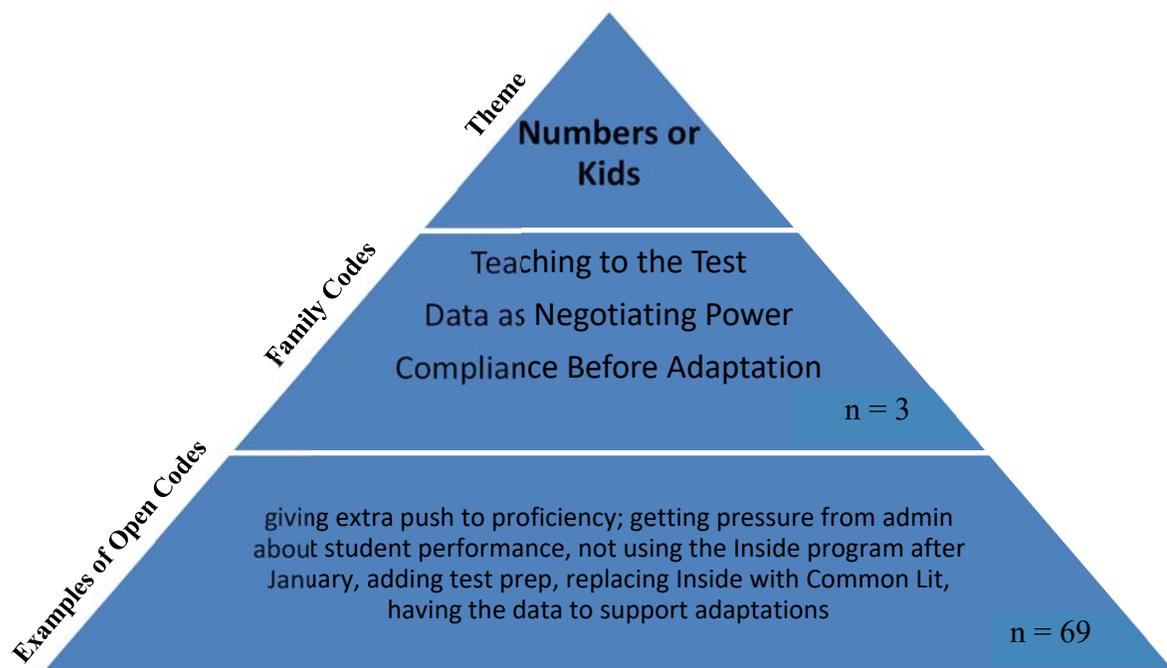


Figure 5. Coding map for Theme 3.

Theme 3: “It’s about the numbers or the kids”. Figure 5 shows the coding map for Theme 3. In determining whether “it was about the numbers or the kids,” the lines were inevitably blurred for these teachers. This idea is perhaps one of the most striking of the systems negotiations was teachers’ negotiation with accountability structures as they balanced the need to show higher levels of proficiency among students with the desire to support the “whole child”.

Teaching to the test. Evident across all ten interviews was the question of whether teaching intensive reading was “about the numbers or the kids”. As one teacher candidly

stated in reference to the role of high-stakes testing in her decision to adapt, “let’s be real about it” meaning that it played a heavy role in her decision-making process. The pressure to obtain increased scores on state tests was palpable and resulted in the perceived need to “teach to the test”. As passionately described by a veteran teacher in the district’s urban core,

You have an entity that is so driven by numbers [that] the very thing we said we weren’t going to leave behind, [the students], [they’re] still back there! So, are we teaching to read?...When you look at the [Florida Standards Assessment]... the first thing we say is, ‘[we’re going to] teach them how to pass the test.’

“Numbers” and “the test” came up frequently across all interviews. Almost all teachers reported adapting the Inside program by adding “test prep” to their instruction, especially during the late winter and early spring of the school year. This was carried out in different ways in different classrooms. While one teacher “stopped using the Inside [curriculum],” another “supplemented” by adding more rigorous texts alongside those offered by the program.

Data as negotiating power. One way several of the more experienced teachers reported negotiating their adaptation decisions was to use what they saw as strong student performance data as a means of defending their decisions to deviate from the program script and/or externally imposed curricular demands. In a sense, these teachers felt “having the scores” was a way to negotiate greater autonomy within a high-stakes accountability system.

Two of the teachers in particular justified their decision to no longer follow the Inside curriculum as it is prescribed based on state testing data from the previous year. “I feel like I tried that last year and I wasn’t as successful,” she said describing her overall student data last year in comparison to previous years. Another decided to supplement the

program more this year, “I would definitely have to really supplement because those kids regressed [on the state test] using the curriculum”. At the school level, this teacher, along with her administrators, developed a plan in response to students’ regression. They added data chats, more small-group differentiated instruction (as opposed to the more traditional, whole-group approach of Inside), and additional text-based resources from i-Ready.

Compliance before adaptation. In contrast, the novice and early-mid career teachers tended to focus on compliance before adaptation rather than attempting to use data to negotiate power in instructional decision-making. One of the teachers described this task as “hitting that compliance checklist” before making adaptations to the program. In other words, “I gotta get their work out [of] the way first ...it’s almost like, ‘OK, we’re done with all the jumping through hoops, now everybody, let’s learn!’”

For a few of the more inexperienced teachers, the decision to emphasize compliance over adaptation was driven in part by fear: “I think a lot of times we limit what we’re teaching based on our fear of...doing something that we feel that we’re going to be penalized for”. Another novice listed similar reasons such as “fear of job scrutiny and fear of job safety”. This same teacher described how she was “slowly but surely” reminded to not supplement the Inside program by adding other materials each time she tried something new in her class. She felt this resulted in compliance whereby “you’re just flipping pages and matching in a workbook and the kids are just doing it so they can do it”. For another teacher, the decision to comply before adapting was derived not from fear, but from a desire not to question what the district prescribes. This early-to-mid-

career teacher described herself by saying, “if you tell me to wear orange every day and the kids are going to learn that way, then I’m going to be wearing orange every day”.

Negotiation in Response to Inter- and Intrapersonal Beliefs

At a more local and personal level, themes three through six represent teachers’ negotiations in response to their beliefs about their own capabilities, their students’ needs, and the intensive reading context.

Theme 4: Confidence and competence. When asked how confident she felt in her ability to teach intensive reading, veteran teacher Lucky replied, “very confident” and then emphatically added, “and competent”. Her statement and its emphasis on both confidence and competence captured the ways in which teachers’ self-perception plays into their curricular decision-making. Figure 6 shows the analytic progression of codes for Theme 4.

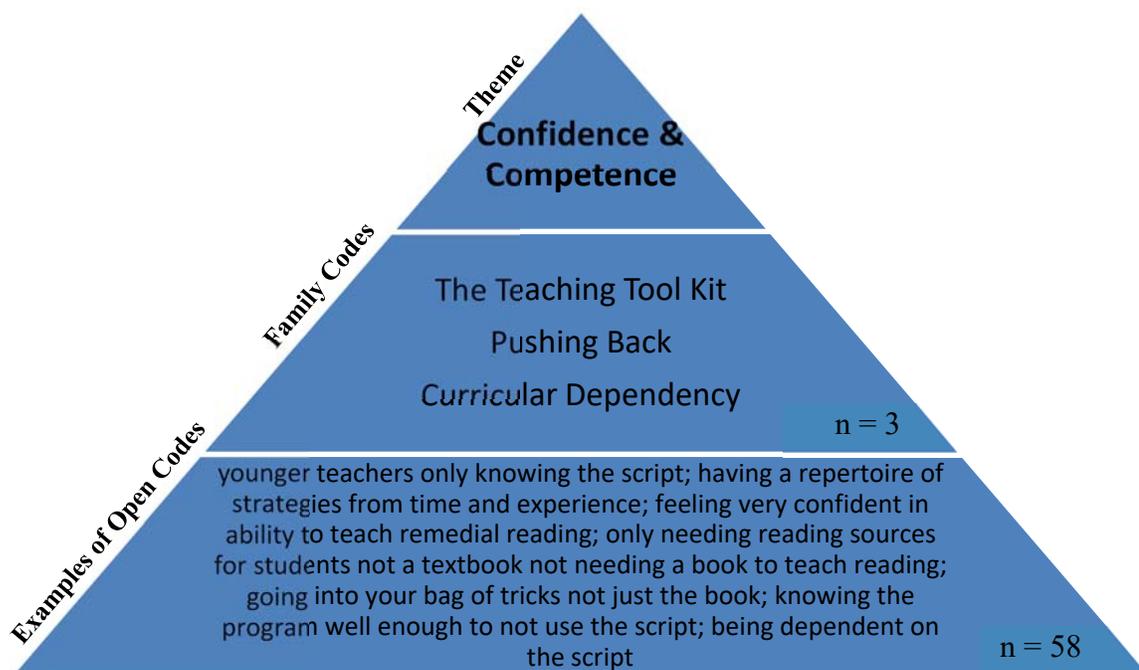


Figure 6. Coding map for Theme 4.

Teaching toolkit. Part of what drove the self-perceived confidence and competence to teach intensive reading came from having an extensive repertoire of strategies to pull from in determining how best to adapt the Inside program. For teachers who felt they had a sufficient “teaching toolkit,” the Inside curriculum was seen “as a reference” or a “scaffold” rather than as a script. Instead, teachers felt that in order to keep students engaged in the learning process, “You always have to go into a bag of tricks, and it can’t always be [the Inside curriculum]”.

It is worth noting how certification, in addition to experience, played into the perception of having a “teaching toolkit”. Intensive reading classes serve both general and special education students though only a few of the teachers in this study have state certification in special education. One of the teachers who is certified in special education described special education teachers as “strategists” and believed having this knowledge-base and ability to change plans “mid-stream” increased her ability to adapt the Inside program effectively. For example, she mentioned how she adapted the Inside program by incorporating a special education strategy to support students’ vocabulary development:

Any time we read a sentence and there’s a word that appears to be cumbersome, right behind that word, which is a [special education] strategy, you give them the definition. You tell them and you ask them to give you synonyms to that word.

Pushing back. Similar to negotiating power with data, as described earlier, teachers who felt confident and competent in their ability to teach intensive reading often pushed back when questioned about their instructional decision-making. When asked if she felt confident in her ability to teach intensive reading, a mid-career teacher responded, “Well, very confident in terms of my ability to teach Intensive Reading. I just don’t feel very confident about being told how to teach Intensive Reading”.

However, learning to push back comes from time and experience. Some of the more experienced teachers described learning how to articulate their decision-making process when “push[ing] the envelope”. As described by one of the teachers:

When you’re talking about having flexibility, I think a lot of times I pushed the envelope but again, I have the data to support it. So, you have to be mindful if someone says, ‘Well, why aren’t you using this?’ You have to be able to articulate... but that comes from experience.

In fact, with the greater autonomy granted from school administrators, two teachers in the study reported that they stopped using the Inside curriculum altogether mid-way through the year in favor of more complex resources that they felt would better prepare students for the test. The change they reported making—replacing the curriculum in its entirety—extends beyond merely an adaptation. Instead, their instructional decision was to *abandon* rather than adhere or adapt.

An experienced teacher described using an outside resource when an administrator came for an observation. “She kind of *caught me*,” she said, “I go—‘listen, I [have to] teach to the test,’ and she was like, ‘Do what you feel you have to do’”. Another teacher had a similar view about the need to abandon the curriculum: “I stopped using [the Inside program] in January. I stopped using it because remember, [with the state test], regardless of how low or how high you are, you still have to take that test”. When questioned, teachers who abandoned the curriculum used their experience and ability to engage students in complex text analysis and collaborative discussion to justify the instructional materials and strategies they used in place of Inside.

Curricular dependency. For teachers who lacked the confidence (and perhaps even the competence) to push back, the Inside program was less of a “scaffold” and more of a prescription for teaching. When asked about her process for instructional planning,

the first-year teacher interviewed said, “I just print [the premade lesson plans from the Inside program] out...and that’s pretty much what I follow”.

Interestingly, many of the more experienced teachers in the sample believed highly scripted programs are ideal for newer teachers and those “who aren’t comfortable with [differentiating instruction] like I am”. The debate about whether or not heavily scripted programs like Inside support or hinder teachers who aren’t confident or competent in their ability to teach intensive reading, however, leads to questions about curricular dependency. Despite the idea of the human tendency to “evolve”, a more experienced teacher said:

You cannot tell me that I’m going to be a better teacher by sticking to that script [in the Teacher’s Edition of Inside] because at some point I’m going to evolve. I’m going to find something better. I’m going to come across something different. I’m going to want to try something different. Because as humans, and its human nature. You evolve.

Yet, despite this idea of evolution as a part of human nature, implementation requirements related to the program scripts from district and school-site administrators may lead some early career teachers to believe their professional growth is stunted. Like the novice teachers in the study’s sample who felt they “weren’t being developed”, a mid-career teacher believed that in this district, “some of the younger teachers, all that they know [is to follow the script]”. A fourth-year teacher candidly shared her fear about being dependent on a curriculum. Rather than being competent and confident in her ability to develop her own materials and instructional techniques, over time the teacher felt the burden of having to follow a prescribed curriculum:

If you give me [instructional] freedom, I’ll probably freeze up and not know what to do. It makes me rely on a curriculum...I’m, like, freedom, what would I do with that?

Theme 5: Unmet student needs. While teachers reported many positives about the Inside program (i.e., the thematic structure and relevance of themes to students' lives, the introductory videos for each unit, and the audio recording provided for each text), Theme 5 represents the idea that the program as prescribed was unable to meet student needs. As a result, teachers reported a need to adapt the program to be responsive to what they perceived students needed but wouldn't otherwise get. The coding map for Theme 5 is displayed in Figure 7.

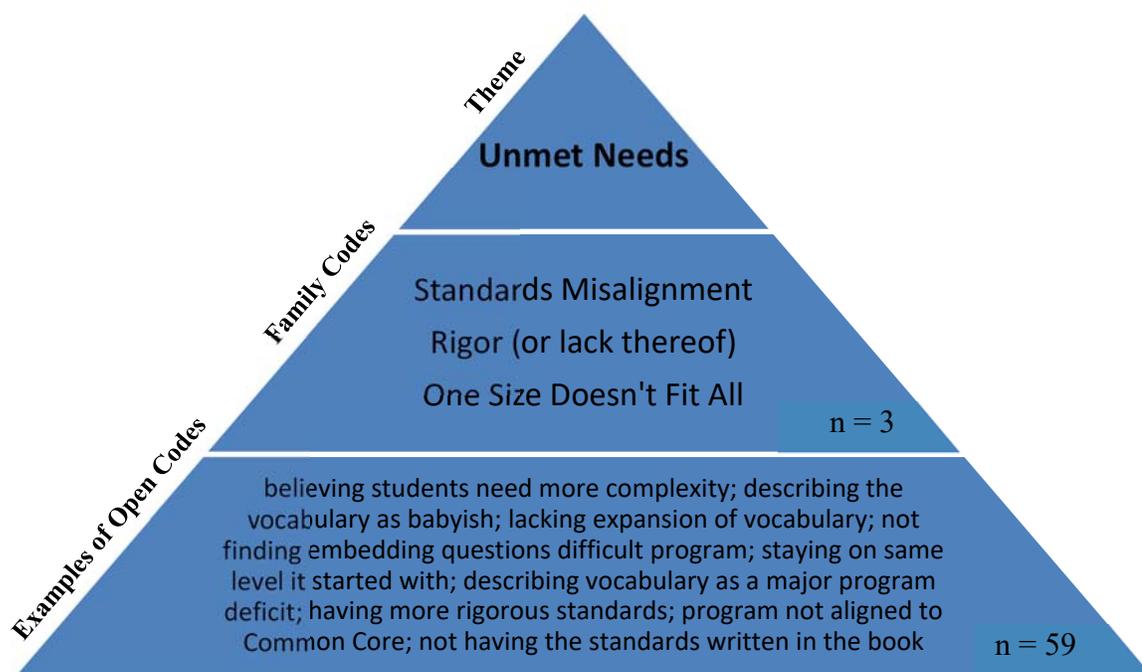


Figure 7. Coding map for Theme 5.

Standards misalignment. Multiple teachers discussed the need to adapt the program's questions to better align with state standards. One noted, "The book does not have the standards written in them. I have to mix and match skills so that it goes along with the standards. I have to add my own standard questions to make sure the students have heard those questions". Another teacher shared this view of the program, stating, "It

tells you exactly what to do although it does not lend to Common Core, the standards. So, you have to embed those questions that are the standards for the state”.

Rigor (or lack thereof). The largest area of unmet student need centered on teachers’ perception of the rigor (or lack thereof) of the Inside program. There was a common perception, especially given the range of ability within their classrooms, that many of the students “needed more”. Placement into intensive reading, and thus the Inside program, was determined by students’ performance on state assessment results from the previous year rather than a more holistic determination of the student’s reading ability. This means that it was not uncommon for teachers to have students identified as gifted in their intensive reading classes. One teacher mentioned a particular 7th grader who complained throughout the entire year about being in intensive reading. She was given the placement after dropping from a Level 5 (the highest level possible) to a Level 2 in the previous year. According to the teacher, the student said she felt ill during testing but proceeded to take the test regardless.

While the themes presented in the Inside curriculum were believed by most of the teachers to be relevant to the students (i.e., *How do your decisions affect your identity?* or *What happens when people come face to face with rivals?*), one teacher critically questioned the complexity of the texts selected by the program to be paired with the themes. “The story of Three Little Pigs for eighth graders?”, she questioned adding, “I can think of a number of literature-based eighth grade texts that would really allow students to see how they maneuver when they come face to face with a conflict other than Three Little Pigs”. With little autonomy, though, this teacher felt she was limited to these texts as the “anchors” of her weekly lessons. Emphasizing the potential of the themes, she

criticized the effectiveness of these texts “in terms of pushing the rigor” saying that, “What I know is on the FSA [Florida Standards Assessment], what I know they’re going to need for the future, [these texts] are not preparing them”.

While another teacher similarly just complained that the program was “babyish” because seventh grade students were reading texts like “Animal Farm”, others felt strongly that it didn’t provide enough of a push for intensive reading students, especially those who were close to reaching proficiency. This teacher made changes accordingly. When talking about how she adapted the program for this reason, one mid-career teacher said, “Some things I feel are too easy, so I just cut it out and keep moving. I pull something from the i-Ready toolbox kit for those kids who need a little bit more rigor”.

The aspect of the Inside program which teachers in the study most commonly felt lacked rigor was vocabulary. With each unit of the program, specific vocabulary is designated for explicit instruction. According to one teacher,

When it comes to the vocabulary, you have to teach the vocabulary even if you feel like you could enrich [it] a little more. If [the program says] the vocabulary word for eighth grade is ‘advice’, you have to teach ‘advice’ to the eighth graders.

The first-year teacher in the study didn’t adapt the actual words taught, but instead utilized a supplemental vocabulary strategy she learned about from a colleague called the “Freyer model” in an attempt to help extend students’ understanding of the words. This is one of the few adaptations she was aware that she was making to the program. Other teachers were perhaps more intentional in how they used “scaffolding” to build students’ vocabulary or applied “the vocabulary routines” taught through the program with more challenging words the students wouldn’t have otherwise been exposed to. One teacher chose to document her students’ application of these vocabulary routines through the use

of an interactive journal, rather than the corresponding Inside workbook pages, in addition to having students apply these strategies to supplemental texts she added on top of what was provided by Inside.

One size doesn't fit all. "I've been teaching for 14 years, and I feel like this [program] is not differentiated for every student. So, that's my biggest problem [with the program]," explained one teacher. She continued,

They've said, "OK, you need to use this program." But there are students on different levels within one classroom where they already know context clues, but I'm forced to go over context clues with them and it's ridiculous. Then I have other kids who do need the help with context clues because they don't get it. For me, this program is set for you to do it whole group. It's not really meant for you to do differentiated instruction.

The term "differentiated instruction" came up frequently across the ten interviews. Most agreed in its importance with this particular group of students but felt that the idea of differentiation was fundamentally different from the Inside program. Many didn't find the whole-group nature of the program's instructional delivery to be engaging for their students: "If you follow the Inside curriculum...for 110 minutes, the kids will stay in their seats the whole 110 minutes and do work off the board". Instead, to boost student engagement and interest, teachers reported making adaptations such as adding competition and "associate[ing] movement, music and whatever else is going on with them to a learning process [so that] they remember it as opposed to just sitting [there]".

In addition to feeling that the one-size-fits-all instructional delivery approach to instruction in Inside was ineffective, some teachers also adapted the skills taught despite the identified skill designated with the week's assigned Inside unit. "If I see that the kids don't need that [skill assigned to the unit], then I don't do it," said one teacher. Similarly,

another teacher's approach to identifying skills was that "If [the students] are not responsive, or let's say, less than 60 or 70 percent didn't get [the skill], then I'll re-teach it". Often, teachers found that the instructional delivery approach outlined in the Inside program Teacher's Guide was simply unable to meet the needs of their diverse groups of learners and as such, required frequent adaptation. In fact, the need to differentially respond to adolescent struggling readers in their intensive reading classrooms appeared to be the most frequently cited reason for adapting the curriculum.

Theme 6: "Be all in or get out." At several points during the interviews, teachers reflected back to their decisions to become teachers and more specifically, to work within the specialized context of intensive reading. Across all participants was agreement that their work was inherently difficult as they were tasked with remediating persistent deficiencies in reading. The study's final theme, Theme 6: "Be all in or get out", is shown in Figure 9.

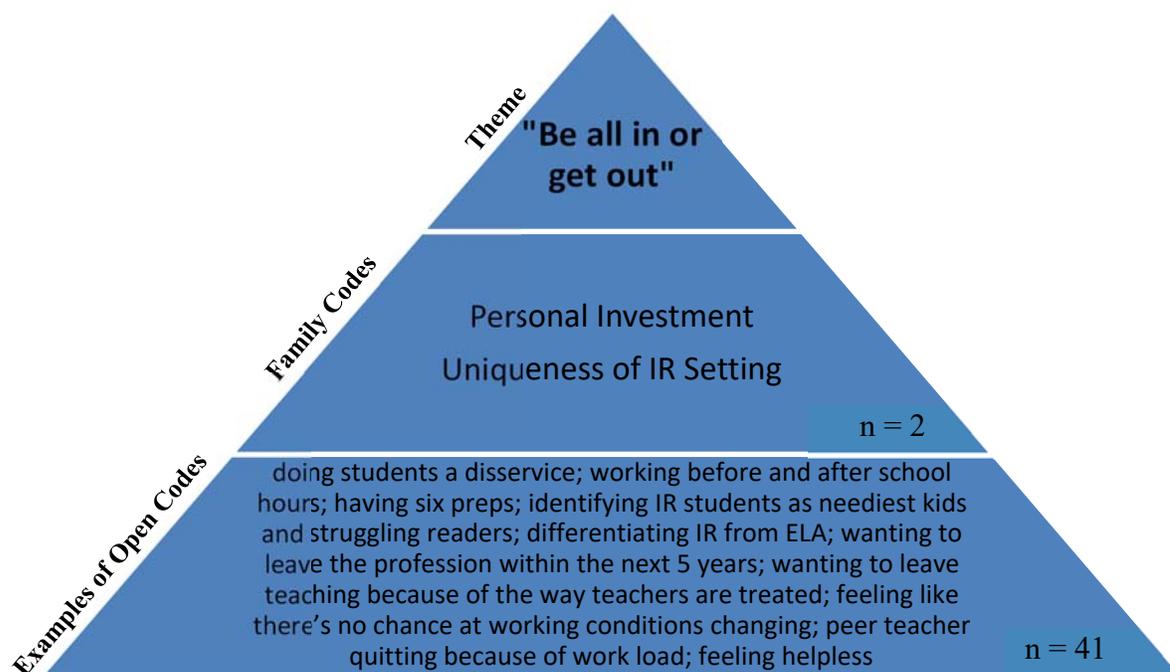


Figure 8. Coding map for Theme 6.

Personal investment. The reasons that led each of the ten teachers into their role as intensive reading teachers varied widely. Some ended up there by choice, others with little say. Yet regardless of how they got there, their personal investment in their role was evident. Teachers said things like, “My overall goal is for them is to want to read. To like to read. It’s not just forcing to read. I want you to like it”. They used their own passions to inspire their students as well. A suburban teacher with over thirty-five years of teaching experience in the district shared how she transferred her love of business education to her students in intensive reading. Another described being an “avid reader” herself and wanting to pass along this trait to her students. The desire to make a difference is what pushed these teachers to be “all in” despite working long hours, navigating numerous mandates, and being held accountable to student test scores.

However, several of the teachers described the difficulties they sometimes experienced while trying to maintain their personal investment to their students, especially with the perception among some that “the system is broken”. One outspoken early career teacher shared that she “used to be able to look at [her] kids and see the world,” but her perceived inability to truly effect change with her students has left her questioning if she should get out of the field. She added, “The fact that I’m starting to feel that way...is indicative of why intensive reading teachers just quit in this district.” In fact, an intensive reading teacher in her department had quit midway through the school year. She described the pressure they felt as being “evident” daily.

“Being heard is what keeps you in the classroom,” said another teacher. The contrast in autonomy across the teachers—despite working at schools with relatively similar performance on the state assessment—shows the differential levels in which these

teachers feel they can exercise their voice. While some teachers use their voice to stay “all in” and try to make a difference in the lives of their students, others feel they are often silenced and as a result “doing a disservice” to themselves and to their students.

This same teacher said:

You're telling me I don't know what's best for the kids when I'm with them all. Some of them I've been with for three years, and I've seen the same deficiencies [every year] and [have not been] able to remediate...it's frustrating.

Uniqueness of the intensive reading setting. Unlike their peers in other subject areas, almost all of the teachers in the study had “multiple preps”, meaning more than one grade level and/or course (e.g., IR, IR+, IR-EN, or English Language Arts) to plan for. Teachers had as many as six preps despite their district contract stipulating that middle school teachers should not be assigned more than two.

The uniqueness of the intensive reading setting, according to these teachers, also has to do with the student composition of their classrooms. Teachers had as many as 32 students in their intensive reading classes at one time which intensified the challenges associated with their job. Further, several noted a deficit-laden view of intensive reading students equating students with historically poor academic performance as “behavior problems”. In addition to needing to master curriculum and instruction, they felt it was essential in this setting to “have classroom management on point”. This deficit view was evident also in how some of the teachers responded to instructional mandates from the district. When told that she needed to have students ask each other more higher-order questions, she quipped, “If they knew how to ask each other questions, they wouldn't be in my class!”

As a result, they had to successfully master the planning and implementation of multiple curricular programs while facing the pressure of teaching “bubble kids” in a high-stakes subject area. The term “bubble kids” was used by a number of the teachers to describe the students in their classes on the cusp of proficiency. These are the students they were told to “target” in order to ensure they receive a passing score and thus, help increase the school’s overall percentage of students at proficiency and making learning gains. Related to the expectations placed on intensive reading teachers in particular, a veteran teacher said, “We went to a [district intensive reading] training, and you talk about veteran teachers, we were treading water. So I know those [novice teachers] were drowning. That was overwhelming what [the district] asks us to do”. Yet, despite being overwhelmed, they continued to stay “all in” to their role as intensive reading teachers.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored intensive reading teachers' experiences implementing a district-mandated and highly scripted curricular program in order to better understand how and why these teachers make adaptations. The six themes described earlier emphasized the study's core concept of negotiation to reflect the "give and take" that characterized the teachers' instructional decision-making and patterns of curricular adaptations. As expected, many of the features of the study's foundational framework were born out. The findings also suggest that reasons these teachers adapted the curriculum differed in a few critical ways than what is currently reported in the literature.

Responding to Systems Pressure

Existing literature reinforces the notion that implementation is never solely dependent on the individual teacher implementer, but instead, reflective of the climate of the school, district, and larger institutional systems (Porter et al., 2015). The findings from this study indicated that district-level mandates play a critical role in determining how and why teachers adapt their curricular program. These mandates were sent with mixed expectations related to implementation fidelity. For example, teachers in this study were expected to adhere not just to the program, but to additional programs like i-Ready during their intensive reading classes. It appeared that teachers were more likely to prioritize completion of i-Ready and the Inside program workbook. To fit it all in, parts of the program like grammar and writing were dropped and other instruction was rushed through or replaced altogether.

Additionally, the centrality of accountability provisions to teachers' decision-making was not seen in Leko et al.'s (2015) theory of adaptations. The present study thus

extends our understanding of the significance of the organizational context as it relates to high-stakes testing and accountability. While Leko et al.'s (2015) theory of secondary teacher adaptations posited that some teachers reconcile their concerns by making adaptations to curriculum, the findings from this study suggest that the extent to which this reconciliation can occur is contingent upon the autonomy teachers feel they have in making these types of decisions. For example, pacing for these teachers was dictated not by Inside, but instead by the district pacing guide. This appeared to be a “non-negotiable” for teachers given that it was frequently monitored by administrators and instructional coaches.

Several of the teachers in this study were more limited in how and why they could change the program than those in other studies (i.e., Boardman et al., 2005; Leko et al., 2015). For example, teachers generally agreed that they were not able to extend a lesson beyond the allotted timeframe dictated by the district. This supports recent literature that suggests teachers' autonomy is increasingly “being systematically stripped away” (Zeichner & Hollar, 2016). These teachers' experiences reflected the heavy involvement of district and school site administrators in terms of the program being adopted and the manner in which it was to be implemented. This finding is more consistent with the experiences of teachers described by Datnow (2012) working in a district that provided the most significant direction about “what to teach and even how to teach it” (Datnow, 2012, p. 194). This suggests that the existence of local priorities at the school and district levels has a significant influence on teachers' implementation.

Similarly, accountability and high-stakes testing played a large role in the decision-making process. Teachers who experienced greater autonomy used test scores as

a negotiating point. Even the way “student needs” were in part conceptualized by these teachers as a reason for adapting the program was driven by a need for students to score higher on the state test. This resulted in adaptations focused on increasing the complexity of texts and embedding test preparation activities. This introduced an interesting paradox related to the intended purpose of the intensive reading course. The goal of remediating students’ reading deficiencies appears to have been overshadowed by the administrative goal of stronger test performance.

Implications Related to Systems Pressures

Reevaluating adoption of packaged curricular programs. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2012) dismissed the likelihood that “off-the-shelf” instructional programs will be successful in effectively remediating significant reading difficulties. Several of the teachers in this study shared this perspective. Regardless, schools continue to adopt these types of programs to meet this purpose and most alarmingly, with little input from the teachers asked to implement them. In many large districts like the one in this study, packaged curricular programs are being adopted and disseminated to teachers under the guise of “evidence-based practice”. However, it is important to remember that “all evidence is *not* created equal” (Smith, 2003, p. 127).

Scholars have pointed out that claims about the evidence-base of packaged curricular programs are sometimes misleading, especially with regards to whether or not the program itself was empirically tested (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). This is because skills and strategies in the program, rather than the instructional methods and intensity of instruction provided, tend to be what is based on research (Dewitz et al., 2009). In other

words, the program as a complete package (like Inside) may never have been empirically vetted at all despite being marketed in this way.

All of the teachers recalled hearing that the Inside program was “research-based”, “evidence-based”, or both. Not all teachers trusted in these “buzz words”, though. Teachers in this study expressed skepticism that the program being grounded in research meant that following it as prescribed would be most effective to meet the needs of their students. This distrust on the part of teachers regarding the relevance of research to their practice is documented elsewhere in the literature (Boardman et al., 2005; Carnine, 1997; Greenwood, 2001). One teacher in the study articulated her belief that the students were being used merely as “test dummies” during implementation of Inside while the district waited years “to see if it will work”. Two other teachers believed that implementation of the Inside program “with fidelity” during the previous academic year was the cause of decreased test scores. This lack of trust in the effectiveness of the program was an important factor in teachers’ perceived need to make adaptations.

These teachers’ criticisms related to the effectiveness of the Inside program for their students may be warranted. The Inside intensive reading program used by the teachers in this study was empirically tested in just one quasi-experimental study by a research company contracted by the publisher (SEG Research, n.d). Results reported by an outside consulting agency described “large” effect sizes of .18 and .22. For comparison, by Cohen’s criteria for effect size calculation, an effect size of .18 would be classified as a small effect (Cohen, 1988). While even small effect sizes are promising for secondary students struggling in reading (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015), statements made to teachers about the effectiveness of the Inside program appear misrepresentative. Districts

choosing to adopt either of these programs do so with the belief that they are “what works”, but critical questions need to be answered in both research and practice about who they work for and how.

Addressing issues of “fidelity”. Almost all of the teachers received explicit messages that they were to implement the program (or in some cases, multiple programs simultaneously) “with fidelity”. Yet, there was little consensus as to what exactly that meant. Applying an implementation science perspective would clarify the expectation passed to teachers. This approach prioritizes adherence only to a program’s core components rather than to a program’s complete package. However, these core components must be sufficiently identified by researchers and then shared with teachers, school administrators, and district leaders. Teachers and other stakeholders should understand not just what these core components are, but also, why they are shown to work, and how. By establishing core components that should be implemented with fidelity, teachers would then have autonomy to determine how to adapt peripheral (non-core) program elements to fit the local contexts of their classrooms.

A shift to this type of implementation science approach would also necessitate changes to the type and availability of professional development systems designed to support these teachers. Currently, only a few of the teachers had access to professional development specific to intensive reading. This training was technical in nature and provided teachers with instructions for things such as logging in to the program’s online resources. Teachers would benefit from ongoing professional learning opportunities to promote implementation that balances fidelity and fit.

Responding to Inter- and Intrapersonal Beliefs

At a more personal level, teachers made negotiations in response to their inter- and intrapersonal beliefs. More specifically, this study's themes related to this idea highlight how teachers make decisions based on their beliefs about themselves, their students, and their purpose as intensive reading teachers.

Not seen in Leko et al.'s (2015) findings but consistent with other studies (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 2012; Crocco & Costigan, 2007), the three themes associated with this grouping highlighted the presence of internalized tensions for teachers who questioned whether or not they were capable of meeting students' needs and truly making a difference. As in other literature addressing curricular implementation (e.g., Craig, 2012; Eisenbach, 2012; Joseph, 2006), teachers believed that the mere fact that they were asked to implement a scripted curriculum sent a mixed message about their capacity to teach. Many appeared both angry and frustrated that they are so frequently told what to do and how to do it despite having previous teaching experience, graduate degrees, and advanced certifications. While some used their "confidence and competence" as fuel to assert their capability to make decisions and push back, others did not. One teacher went so far as to say that she had a Master's degree in Education, but "couldn't use any of it" in her classroom because it conflicted with what she was told she should be doing. It's clear she internalized the message that she did not know what was best for her students. This experience was similar to that demonstrated in existing research related to curricular reform (Crocco & Costigan, 2007)

Teachers in this study also expressed a strong desire to have a say in decision-making that impacts their instructional practice. Despite identifying positive aspects of

the program and appreciating having it as a resource, most of the teachers in the sample criticized the program's ability to meet the needs of their students. Their criticisms were not unlike those offered in existing literature that examined similar packaged curriculum (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011), especially with regards to the quality of the texts offered by the program (McGill, Franzen, Zmack, Solic, & Zeiger, 2006) and the scaffolding of instruction (Brenner, Hiebert, & Tompkins, 2009).

As shown in in this study's findings and throughout the existing literature on teacher autonomy (Ingersol, 2007), feeling unable to make decisions as they see fit was a particular source of frustration for the two novice teachers in the sample. Joseph (2006) noted that educators frequently choose to leave a field when they are unable to make decisions in their own classrooms. Notably, both teachers had plans to leave teaching within the next three years. This demonstrates that while more experienced teachers may be able to reconcile their concerns and frustrations through adaptations as suggested by Leko et al.'s (2015) theory, novice teachers may lack the confidence and competence to do so and thus, are even more vulnerable to attrition.

Implications Related to Inter- and Intrapersonal Beliefs

Teacher development. Findings from this study revealed a dearth of appropriate and relevant professional learning opportunities related to the Inside program and/or intensive reading more generally. Without sufficient professional development, it seems unlikely that teachers would be able to effectively implement (or adapt) any curricular program. Intensive reading teachers must be provided with specialized professional development before and during implementation not just on the core components of the program, but the ways in which the peripheral components could potentially be adapted.

Especially given the unique demands and high-stakes associated with intensive reading, teachers should be supported in developing *adaptive expertise* by expanding their repertoire of strategies to differentiate for such a diverse group of learners and truly remediate persistent reading deficiencies. The fact that many of the teachers did not receive any training and that none received ongoing, job-embedded support is highly problematic not just in terms of its potential impact on students, but also for the undue frustration caused on the part of teachers, especially for those new to the field.

Addressing issues of teacher assignment and student placement. The state of Florida requires specialized certification and/or advanced study in reading in order to teach intensive reading. Therefore, requiring teachers who meet these advanced qualifications to implement a scripted curricular program seems contradictory. However, not all teachers assigned to teach intensive reading actually meet the state's qualifications. On the contrary, the first year teacher in the study was "given the book and told to teach" despite verbalizing that she felt she did not know how and having little pedagogical and content knowledge from her alternative certification program.

When teachers who by the state's own criteria are unqualified for the intensive reading position but are placed there regardless, it is perhaps no wonder that the specialized knowledge and skills of teachers in this role may be called into question. While majority of the veteran teachers in the sample have developed expertise through experience and advanced degrees, adoption of a scripted curriculum appeared to be justified by the district as a means of supporting teachers who are otherwise "not as comfortable" teaching intensive reading. Rather than providing teachers who aren't

competent (or confident) enough to teach intensive reading with a script, more careful attention should be given to who is assigned to these classrooms.

The theme of unmet student needs sheds light on the need to reevaluate which students are placed into intensive reading courses. Several contradictions seemed to arise related to teachers' adaptations of the curriculum as a result of the program lacking sufficient "rigor" to meet grade level standards and challenge the students. Intensive reading courses, and the curricular programs designed for them, are intended to address reading deficiencies for older students who struggle with reading. It appears questionable, though, if all of the students placed into these classes are in fact struggling readers, or if they were placed into the appropriate level of the program. As noted in the study's findings, the district did not utilize the placement test that corresponds to the program's three levels initially. Instead, students who did not meet proficiency on the state assessment were automatically placed into the course by grade level. Discrepancies in the appropriateness of student placement illustrates one possible explanation for why so many of the teachers felt the need to adapt the program by enhancing the complexity of the vocabulary and texts associated with the Inside program.

Giving teachers a voice. Findings from this study shed light on the importance of including teachers in decision-making about curricula and implementation. Teachers bring to their classrooms their own instructional preferences, varied experience, and differing levels of pedagogical and content expertise. Given that they interact both with the curriculum and with the students on a daily basis, they hold important insight related to implementation that is often neglected both in decision-making at the school and district level as well as in research. As one teacher in the study expressed, some of the

best research is happening “right here in this building”, however, teachers need the opportunities to have their concerns validated, ideas considered, and perspectives heard in research and practice.

Limitations and Future Research

There are two important limitations to bear in mind when examining this study’s findings. First, the study was limited to one curricular program being implemented within one school district. Especially in light of the fact that organizational context (at the school, district, and state levels) plays such a large part in teachers’ adaptation decisions, the findings of this study are not generalizable to larger populations of intensive reading teachers in other contexts. Additional research might examine the experiences of intensive reading teachers in other large districts within the state who are also mandated to use the Inside program to determine the transferability of this study’s findings to other contexts while also extending the emergent literature base on curricular adaptations within intensive reading settings.

Second, the data collection was limited to teacher interviews. While the participants offered insight into their decision-making processes, the study would have been strengthened by the addition of classroom observations. Observations of teachers’ implementation of the Inside program would allow the researcher to identify potential discrepancies between what teachers say they do and what they actually do in their classroom. Future research that triangulates multiple data sources could help establish a more comprehensive view of how and why MDCPS teachers adapt this particular program. Similarly, the development and administration of a teacher survey using the

findings of this study would help paint a picture of the extent to which the experiences of the teachers interviewed is reflected across the district.

Conclusion

The collective voices of teachers, while often ignored, are a valuable yet underutilized educational resource (Eisner, 1991). Indeed, one of the key contributions of implementation science to an understanding of intervention effects has been to underscore the critical role of the implementers' perspectives (Fixsen et al., 2005) and the inevitability of curricular adaptations when programs are implemented in practice. This idea represents the beginnings of a shift in perspective among the research community that it is in fact possible to combine “‘top-down,’ researcher-developed instruction with “‘bottom-up,’ practitioner-inspired contributions” (Lemons et al., 2014, p. 250).

However, it is not enough to simply know that these adaptations occur or even if they are effective or ineffective to students' learning outcomes. Instead, it is essential to garner a comprehensive understanding of the implementation processes that reflect the *how* and *why* of adaptations to packaged curricular programs, especially in high-stakes subject areas such as intensive reading. It is essential to consider the ways in which teachers interpret this expectation and how they negotiate external demands with their own beliefs about best practice and their desire for autonomy in decision-making. This study resulted in six themes that underscore how and why teachers adapt a middle school intensive reading program. Findings from the study suggest that teachers actively negotiate with both external systems beyond their control and among people (including themselves). This study begins to shed further light on the complexities underlying teachers' instructional decision-making.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This interview is about the implementation of the district reading curriculum in intensive reading classrooms. I am interested in understanding how you implement the program as well as your perceptions of the factors that affect your classroom practice while using this program. I appreciate your opinions and hope that you will share your views. Your responses will be confidential and will not be shared with school or district administrators.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to stop the interview at any time. I will be recording this interview and if you need to, you may stop the recording at any time. Our discussion will remain completely confidential. This discussion will last about 30-45 minutes. Do you have any questions?

1. Please tell me about your background as a teacher. (Probes: years teaching, previous placements, certification, etc.)
2. How would you describe your school? Your classroom? (Probes: collaboration, administrative support, district support/influence)
3. How confident are you in your ability to teach intensive reading to adolescent struggling readers?
4. Which reading curriculum is used at your school to teach intensive reading? Tell me about the program. (Probes: adoption, core components, previous programs)
5. Describe your teaching style prior to adoption of this program (if applicable).
6. Describe the training you received prior to and during implementation of the program. (Probes: frequency, emphasis, who provides training)
7. What were your initial thoughts/feelings about the program? Have they changed since beginning implementation? Why/why not? (Probe: changes in practice associated with the program)
8. What are the benefits and challenges of using this program?
9. As designed, how effective do you feel the program is in meeting the needs of your students generally? What about for students with disabilities? Explain. (Probes: most/least effective parts, parts frequently changed/why, what other approaches are more effective)

10. Are there any parts of the program that you feel you need to change? Why or why not?

11. Tell me about your process for designing instructional lessons with this program. What influences your lesson planning with the program? (Probes: script use, sequential use of the book, responding to students, importance of fidelity to the program, forced adaptation)

12. To what extent do you feel you have flexibility to change the program? (Probes: material selection, implementation monitoring, other requirements, consequences)

13. What do you wish you could change about your classroom practice? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your reading program? Any questions?

Thank you for your time and participation. Have a great day.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Consent Form

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand secondary intensive reading teachers' beliefs about district-adopted curricular programs and the manner in which they are asked to implement them.

Procedures: You are asked to participate in one interview (approximately 45 minutes). The interview will consist of open-ended questions that ask your opinion regarding your perceptions and decision-making process for your intensive reading curriculum. The interview will be audio taped with your permission to ensure all information is captured. Your name will not be attached to any of this information.

Risks: No risks are anticipated related to participation in this study.

Benefits: No direct benefit can be promised to you for participation in the study. Insight into your beliefs about the curricular programs may help inform more effective implementation efforts that consider teachers' beliefs and perspectives in the process.

Alternatives/Right to Withdraw: You have the right to choose to not participate in the interview. While the interview is taking place, you may leave the meeting or stop the interview at any time. Your decision not to participate will not affect your professional status in any way.

Costs/Payment: There are no costs or payments with participation in the research study.

Confidentiality: No names will be attached to any information collected. In the reported results, there will be no way to link the information collected to you. The investigators and their assistants will consider all information confidential to the extent permitted by law. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) may request to review and obtain copies of school records. Those records may also be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University employees or other agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in publication. Your name will not be used in those presentations. Only pseudonyms will be used.

Other Pertinent Information: The researchers will answer any questions you may have regarding the study [contact information: Ms. Lindsey Chapman, (786) 301-1170], under the supervision of Dr. Batya Elbaum]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, (305) 243-3195.

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions.

CONSENT

I have read the information in this consent (or it has been read to me). All my questions about the study and my participation in it have been answered. By you answering the survey/interview questions that I will ask, this means you consent to participate and be audio taped in this research project. Do you have any questions? A copy of this form may be given to you for your personal records.

Appendix C: University of Miami IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY
OF MIAMI



University of Miami
Human Subject Research Office (HSRO)
1100 NW 10th Avenue, Suite 1100A
Miami, FL 33136

Ph: 305-243-3495
Fax: 305-243-3318
www.hsro.med.miami.edu

APPROVAL

July 7, 2017

Mary Calhoon
School of Education, Orovitz Bldg., Room 230K
University of Miami, 1507 Levante Ave.
Coral Gables, FL 33124
305-284-4199
mxc568@miami.edu

Dear Dr. Mary Calhoon:

On 7/7/2017, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to Implementation Processes
Investigator:	Mary Calhoon
IRB ID:	20170574
Funding:	None
Documents Reviewed:	Survey Items TAS SoC 6 19 17.docx Chapman Informed Consent_Survey.pdf Teachers Semi-Structured Interview Guide.docx Recruitment Email Draft to Principals 7 6 17.pdf Chapman IRB Protocol 7 6 17.docx Recruitment Flyer 7 6 17.pdf Chapman Informed Consent_Interview.pdf

The IRB approved the study from 7/7/2017 to 7/6/2020 inclusive with a waiver of documentation of consent. Before 7/6/2020 or within 45 days of the approval end date, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a completed Continuing Review to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 7/6/2020 approval of this study expires on that date.

Appendix D: Miami-Dade County Public Schools Research Review Committee Approval



Miami-Dade County Public Schools
giving our students the world

Miami-Dade County School Board
Dr. Lawrence S. Falkman, Chair
Dr. Maria Ponce, Vice Chair
Dr. Dorothy Mendez-Monreal
Susan V. Castillo
Dr. Steve Geller, III
Pete Tabares-Hardman
Dr. Martin Karp
Lobby Navarro
Marl Rene Rojas

Superintendent of Schools
Alberto M. Carvalho

Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis

August 16, 2017

Ms. Lindsey Chapman
1092 NE 42 Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33303

Dear Ms. Chapman:

I am pleased to inform you that the Research Review Committee (RRC) of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) has granted you approval for your request to conduct the study: "Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to Implementation Processes" in order to fulfill the requirements of your dissertation at the University of Miami.

The approval is granted with the following conditions:

- Participation in this study is at the discretion of the principal of each targeted school.**
Please note that even with the approval of the RRC, it is still the responsibility of the Principal as the gatekeeper of the school to decide whether to participate or not. As stated in the Board rule: "... the principal of the individual school has the privilege of deciding if RRC-approved research will be conducted within his/her school."
A copy of this approval letter must be presented/and or shared with the Principal of each targeted school.
- Before conducting any research and/or collecting any data in any M-DCPS site, a researcher who does not have a valid Level 2 security clearance from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, must obtain a level 2 background security clearance from the M-DCPS Fingerprinting Office. The application for District security clearance can be found at: <http://www.dadeschools.net/ResearchReviewRequest/ResearchReviewRequest.asp>
- The participation of all subjects (such as students, faculty, or staff) is **voluntary**. The Principal's authorization must be secured for each targeted schools.
- All necessary and applicable Teachers' consent forms must be signed before they can take part in the study.
- The purpose of the study is to examine teachers' perceptions of and responses to curricular implementation processes. This includes an examination of the contextual influences underlying the curricular implementation of a district-adopted curriculum for secondary educators.
- The study will not involve students. It will involve only teachers who voluntarily agree to take part in a semi-structured interviews. These interviews have to be done OUTSIDE teacher's regular instructional/teaching time.

- ALL student data must be handled by strictly following the guidelines and procedures of FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). This includes the secure transmission and handling of students' data.
- In order to facilitate a smooth, un-interrupted start to the new academic year, researchers are asked NOT to contact schools during the first two weeks of school.

It should be emphasized that the approval of the Research Review Committee does not constitute an endorsement of the study. It is simply a permission to request the voluntary cooperation in the study of individuals associated with M-DCPS.

It is your responsibility to ensure that appropriate procedures are followed in requesting an individual's cooperation, and that all aspects of the study are conducted in a professional manner. With regard to the letter, make certain that all documents and instruments distributed within MDCPS as a part of the study are carefully edited.

The approval number for your study is **2241**. This number should be used in all communications to clearly identify the study as approved by the Research Review Committee. The approval expires on **06/30/2018**. During the approval period, the study must adhere to the design, procedures and instruments which were submitted to the Research Review Committee.

Finally, please submit to the RRC an abstract of the research findings and/or preliminary finding by **July 2018**.

If there are any changes in the study as it relates to M-DCPS, the RRC must be notified in writing. Substantial changes may necessitate resubmission of the request. Failure to notify me of such a change may result in the cancellation of the approval.

If you have any questions, please call me at 305-995-7090. On behalf of the Research Review Committee, I want to wish you every success with your study.

Sincerely,

Tarek Chebbi, Ed. D.
Chairperson
Research Review Committee

Dr. Mary Calhoun, School of Education, University of Miami

APPROVAL NUMBER: 2241	APPROVAL EXPIRES: 06/30/2018 (*)
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(*) UM IRB 2017-00874 approved July 7, 2017

Note: The researcher named in this letter of approval will be solely responsible and strictly accountable for any deviation from or failure to follow the research study as approved by the RRC. M-DCPS will NOT be held responsible for any claim and/or damage resulting from conducting this study.

Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis • School Board Administration Building • 1430 N.E. 2nd Ave. • Suite 222 • Miami, FL 33132
305-995-7091 • 305-995-7912 • 305-995-1960 (FAX) • www.dadeschools.net