

HEARING THEIR VOICES: EXAMINING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS  
DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL POLICY

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## **ABSTRACT**

KATHRYN A. OHLE: Hearing Their Voices: Examining Teacher Perceptions  
During the Implementation of an Instructional Policy  
(Under the direction of Dr. Lynne Vernon-Feagans)

The purpose of this study is to share teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy, the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI), and its success. The TRI is a professional development (PD) program that uses a diagnostic reading model, a suggested set of reading activities, and web-based coaching to help classroom teachers deliver one-on-one instruction to struggling readers in rural, low-wealth schools in kindergarten through second grade. The desired outcome for the TRI is that it will improve teacher classroom practices and in turn, positively affect student achievement. However, in order for a change to occur, consideration must also be directed towards those involved in the implementation for, "What is actually delivered or provided under the aegis of a policy depends finally on the individual at the end of the line..." (McLaughlin, 1987, p.174). Using data collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study drew from both traditional and critical policy theories and analysis to determine the teachers' perceptions of their role in policy implementation, what influence they believed they and other stakeholders may have had during implementation, and if and how they perceived the instructional policy to be successful. Results indicated teachers felt they had no voice in the creation of much policy and were often overburdened with implementing an enormous number of new instructional policies at once. However,

when it came to implementing the TRI instructional policy, teachers felt differently, citing the high level of support, immediate student-centered results, and opportunities to make their own instructional decisions. Teachers' perceptions of success revolved primarily around students' achievement scores and their levels of motivation, confidence, and independence; they also cited growth in their own practice as a sign of the TRI's success. These results serve as a reminder to policy-makers that in order for an instructional policy to be successful, it should include capacity-building and relationship-building efforts that lead to change, empower teachers, and validate their influence.

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committee of five has made me a better teacher, a better researcher, a better writer, and a much more humble person.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CTOPP	Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing
DIBELS	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
DRA2	Developmental Reading Assessment – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition
ECLS-K	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Programs
IES	Institute of Education Sciences
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NRP	National Reading Panel
PD	Professional Development
PEP	Personalized Education Plans
PPVT-III	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition
RTI	Response to Intervention
TOPEL	Test of Preschool Early Learning
TRC	Text Reading Comprehension
TRI	Targeted Reading Intervention
WJIII	Woodcock-Johnson III

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

“What’s more important than a child learning how to read? By the end of first grade, there is no skill more essential for later school success than knowing how to read.”

- Intervention Director of the TRI

Learning to read is essential to later academic success (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Research has shown children who obtain early literacy skills have higher levels of academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher graduation rates, and enhanced productivity in adult life (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). They acquire more content knowledge and develop a more comprehensive vocabulary (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998, cited in Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). For children who do not develop early literacy skills, the consequences are severe. Nine out of ten children who are not meeting standards by the end of first grade are still struggling at the end of fourth grade (Juel, 1988). They are at higher risk of dropping behind in other academic areas (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990), as most learning in school depends on the ability to read and understand informational text (Armbruster, Anderson, & Meyer, 1991). And, one in six children who are not reading well in third grade will not graduate from high school on time (Hernandez, 2011), nor will they be able to participate in a society that is technically advanced with informative text if they do not possess expository reading skills and strategies (Gambrell, 2005). It seems those who fall behind, stay behind (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

To prevent children from falling behind, the U.S. federal government allocated significant funding into early literacy implementation and research through No Child Left Behind, directing over \$1 billion per year towards Reading First (K-3 comprehensive reading

instruction) and an additional \$100 million per year for Early Reading First (pre-reading development of preschool-aged children) (Teale, Hoffman, Paciga, K., Lisy, Richardson, & Berkel, 2009). While the intentions of these two policies were to raise student achievement while imposing accountability standards, as measured through the yearly progress of school's standardized achievement scores using disaggregated data (Edmondson, 2004), and train teachers to adopt a particular set of skills, it also reaped criticism. Amongst the complaints were that it had minimal impact on student achievement for poor and minority children (McGill-Franzen, 2010); it promoted an image of a reader as being one who could orally decode at least 120 words per minute without promoting the need for proficient readers to draw upon resources and context to understand and question what they are reading (Stevens, 2003); and it encouraged classroom teachers to use "comprehensive research-based reading programs" that essentially relied on a scripted and synthetic phonics-based approach with direct and explicit instruction that did little to encourage differentiation and/or data-based decision-making.

Compelled to create a reading program that truly helped struggling readers while also empowering classroom teachers, Dr. Lynne Vernon-Feagans and Dr. Tom Farmer received a combination goal two (development) and goal three (efficacy) grant (#R305A100654), through the National Research Center on Rural Education Support, which Dr. Vernon-Feagans used to create the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) with Dr. Marnie Ginsberg and Dr. Steve Amendum. The TRI taught classroom teachers to use diagnostic reading information with individual learners on a daily basis to prevent reading failure and it supported their professional development with workshops, coaching sessions, and team meetings. Results from a series of small, randomized clinical trials were positive, with effect

sizes ranging from .4 to .7 on student reading gains for struggling readers, as well as reading gains for non-struggling readers with effect sizes of .3 to .4 over one year (Vernon-Feagans, L., Kainz, K., Hedrick, A., Ginsberg, M., & Amendum, S. 2012, in press). These preliminary results then led to a goal three (efficacy) grant to continue to support research, specifically looking at understanding whether or not with two years of teacher support and coaching, the TRI could improve teacher classroom practices in the teaching of reading, which would be linked to reading gains for struggling and non-struggling readers and help the struggling reader actually catch up to their non-struggling peers (Vernon-Feagans, 2010). For as Joyce and Showers (1995) assert, “The key to student growth is educator growth. They happen together; each enhances the other. Altogether, a ‘win, win’ proposition” (p.xv).

This dissertation was inspired by the most recent study of the TRI and uses elements from traditional and critical policy analysis to focus on sharing teachers’ voices as they implemented the intervention. In addition, this dissertation investigates the teachers’ perceptions of their role, influence, and understandings of success during the implementation of the instructional policy, the TRI.

### **Approaching the Question**

To answer the question, “What perceptions do teachers have of their role in policy implementation?” the TRI was examined as an instructional policy. This was, in part, because

*In the domain of education, when we perceive that children or schools are not performing as we imagine they should, we seek or construct stories to explain why, and to orient our efforts at addressing perceived problems. Education policy is implicated in the myth-making processes: any plan of action, recommendation for change, or statement of goals involves (either explicitly or implicitly) an account of purported conditions and a set of recommendations for addressing them. (Rosen, 2001, p.299)*

Thus, examining the TRI as a policy sheds light on the broader question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of their and other stakeholders’ roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy?” as they too, are involved in what Rosen refers to as “the myth-making process”.

While a policy is often regarded as a plan of action or something the government does (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997), it may also be defined and regarded as an unofficial, nongovernmental, or informal practice that shapes behaviors and outcomes (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). The TRI shapes teaching behaviors and student outcomes and does so using traditional policy instruments. Mandates are put forth so that all teachers are following the same basic sequence with the same activities; inducements are used by supplying the teachers with the materials and technology they need to put the policy into action; capacity building occurs by providing professional development and showing tangible benefits quickly; and system changing occurs, as teachers are unable to produce the same desired results without engaging in the TRI practices. Hence, the TRI is a policy.

This is not to say that teachers immediately recognize the TRI as an instructional policy. Historically speaking, teachers are often unsure of what policies are, what they are really saying and consequently, how they should affect their teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1990). They may unknowingly subscribe to programs/methods/policies that are counter to their own values and beliefs about what is best for children without even knowing it (Edmondson, 2001). As Cohen & Ball (1990) have found in their interviews with teachers about policy issues, they can be untroubled by the juxtapositions often found in policies. They state, “Many of the teachers whom we observed did change their practice in response to

the new policy, but the frame for those changes was the pedagogy that had been pressed by the older policies” (p.334)

This dissertation is also changing the frame for research on the TRI. Since the larger TRI study is already using traditional quantitative measures to measure teacher and student growth, this study is a deliberate attempt to examine the implementation of the TRI with a different perspective, working under the auspices that “Policy is largely what practitioners perceive it to be rather than some external document or legislation” (Jennings, 1996, p.15). It will use elements of policy analysis, which will provide a better understanding of how policy works, how it leads to change, and will also bring stakeholders other than “traditional policymakers” into the conversation.

### **Traditional Policy Analysis**

To evaluate if there has been a change in behavior and/or outcomes, traditional policy implementation studies are often called upon because of its assumptions that planning, implementation, examination, and evaluation can occur; that goals drive action; that the knowledge needed for implementation and evaluation is obtainable; and in the end, problems can be identified and improved (Young, 1999). Policy researchers examine whether and how policies have succeeded in ordering and reordering behavior as prescribed (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009), or if a found problem has been targeted and solved (Bacchi, 2000). Traditional policy studies, which are often also referred to as having a “functionalist” approach are based on the assumption that decisions can be made in a value-neutral manner and that this approach will determine the “technically best course of action to implement a decision” (Taylor et al., 1997, p.18). It is the way in which formal public policy analysis was promoted in the 1960s by the government, where “knowledge must be scrupulously

value-neutral, grounded in the essential facts provided by the most systematic observation possible” (1997, p.18), and is reflected in the questions of literacy educators when they ask “What works?” (Edmondson, 2001).

However, while a traditional perspective may provide what appears to be straightforward and objective answers, it does not acknowledge the policy’s origins, social and historical contexts, values and ideologies, power and prestige, and its reasons to be (Edmondson, 2004). This is problematic, as it then fails to acknowledge what led to the creation of the policy, how it was created, and the reasons for why it contains certain components that at the time of creation and implementation, made it quite unique. In more simple terms, one will not be able to fully understand the policy without further explanation.

It is also problematic to rely solely on traditional policy analysis because symbolically, it does not acknowledge or take into account the various stakeholders’ voices, leaving assumptions of power unexplored. From a pragmatic angle, not taking into account the subjective values and beliefs of those involved in the implementation ignores the process in which inputs are then transmitted into outputs - which is the crux of the TRI. The existing beliefs and capacities of its implementers shape the way they interpret, adapt, and transform reforms as they put them into place (Cohen & Ball, 1990, Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As such, “Any examination of policy implementation must include an analysis of the value system of the people entrusted with administering the implementation, because their values affect the level of resource allocation, political support, and monitoring that occurs” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 46).

### **Critical Policy Analysis**

To understand how the TRI works and came to be, an additional approach is needed, as the focus shifts from “What works?” to “The policy works for what or for whom?” (Edmondson, 2001, p. 620). In contrast to functionalist/traditional policy analysis, critical policy analysis observes politics in action, traces economic and social forces, and the interactions between people, events, and interests; it notices who is making the policies, whose interests are served, and how power is removed from others (Taylor et al., 1997). It also looks at “what has been, why, and what might be” (Edmondson, 2000, p.114) and is at once historical and at the same time anchored in the subjective experiences of the moment (Prunty, 1984). Given that this study will focus primarily on the perceptions of the teachers, a marginalized group whose voices have historically not been heard nor acknowledged, elements of critical policy analysis will be called upon to help explain the process in which the TRI was implemented as well.

This is not to say that critical policy analysis replaces traditional policy analysis. For this study, elements from both traditional and critical policy analyses will be used, as they allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the policy being researched. According to Michelle Young (1999),

*This practice [using two approaches] may help us better understand the policy problems we study; the relationships among policy discourse, planning, implementation, and practice; the dynamics of policy contexts; and the impact of policy and practice on individuals... using more than one frame will increase the trustworthiness of research findings because each frame serves as a check on the other. Thus, inaccurate assumptions and problematic interpretations should be more easily revealed, and tenets formerly accepted as given are more likely to be questioned. As a result, policy discourse should be moved to a level of deeper understanding. (p.679)*

Using both approaches will also acknowledge that stakeholders – those involved in the implementation of the TRI - may perceive and define success in terms more typical to those within a functionalist/traditional perspective or those that operate within a critical view.

### **Study Design and Overview**

This study used qualitative methods and data collected by myself, a University-based literacy coach employed by the TRI research grant, who worked with thirteen 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers (ten of whom participated), five principals, and the TRI research team (n=5) during the 2011-2012 school year. The teachers and principals came from five schools in three counties in the southeastern United States that participated in the larger Targeted Reading Intervention, all of which were considered rural, low-wealth schools. The research team and I are located at an Institute of Child Development with strong connections to a large university in the southeastern United States. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews but was also triangulated with focus groups, school climate survey responses, correspondences between myself and the teachers, and field notes/preliminary analyses. The data was then analyzed using elements from both traditional and critical perspectives to examine teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy. Particular attention was paid to what might have impacted the teachers' perceptions, answering the research questions:

- 1) What perceptions do teachers have of their role in policy implementation?
  - a. What impacts teachers' perceptions of their role in policy implementation?
- 2) What influence (real and perceived) do various stakeholders (e.g. PIs, principals, coaches, teachers), have on policy implementation and on its success?
  - a. How do other stakeholders' perceptions complement or contrast with the teachers?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The policy analysis framework suggested by critical policy analyst Sandra Taylor and colleagues (1997) recommended one consider 1.) the **context** of the policy, meaning the economic, social, and political factors leading to the release of the policy and the initiatives it was built on; 2.) the **text**, looking at word level, text features, and what is not included; and 3.) the **consequences** or the multiple interpretations or ongoing character of the policy implementation. Following Taylor's suggestions, this literature review will address all three components, the context, text, and consequences, as they pertain to the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI).

These components will be addressed while situating the current study amongst past policy and research efforts that address the areas of 1) quality literacy instruction, 2) early intervention, 3) professional development, 4) teacher change, 5) teacher perceptions, and 6) policy implementation. The literature will help answer the research question, "What are teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy?"

### **The Context in Which the TRI Was Developed and Implemented**

“The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.” (Gardner, 1983, p.1)

In the early 1980s, the federal government began to look at standards and accountability measures in education. To assist the process, President Reagan created the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which culminated in the report, “A Nation at Risk” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). The report revealed a decline in achievement scores, literacy and graduation rates in schools, and that soon, the U.S. would not have the capacity to fulfill the competitive workforce because of the poor quality of education its citizens were receiving. Amongst the most astonishing of statistics was the finding that some 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate and that among minority youth, functional illiteracy ran as high as 40% (1983). To address the problematic findings, the Commission outlined recommendations for change in five areas: curriculum content, standards and expectations of students, time devoted to education, teacher quality, and educational leadership and the financial support of education ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)).

As a result, the education system has seen a variety of maneuvers that hail back to those recommendations, including the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 and the more recent adoption of the Common Core Standards (CCSSO, 2009), which standardize curriculum content across the country in literacy and math; the adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001), a policy intent on making sure every child hits benchmarks while holding schools accountable by making scores and approaches transparent to the public; a range of experiments around the number of days or hours students spend in school; an interest in tying performance quality to student achievement scores for teachers; and the Race to the Top program (2009), which provides additional funding to states willing to make changes that might increase student achievement scores.

While a Nation At Risk heightened peoples' awareness and "sounded the alarm," (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005) change has not come about in educational outcomes. The 2011 Nation's Report Card reported that only 34% of fourth graders scored at or above proficiency in reading, a rate that has not changed since 2009 (Harris, 2011). This means two thirds of students did not finish fourth grade with essential reading skills (Hernandez, 2011). Among those reading at a basic or below basic level were children whose families have more risk factors, which include those living below the federal poverty line (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). According to the U.S. Census data, this includes 16.4 million children under the age of 18 (2010). Adding to this onslaught, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that overall, 22% of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6% that have never been poor (Hernandez, 2011). This rate is highest for poor Black and Hispanic students, with dropout rates nearing 31% and 33% (2011). As the follow-up report, "A Nation Accountable, 25 Years After A Nation At Risk" proclaimed, "If we were 'at risk' in 1983, we are at even greater risk now" (2008, p.1).

**Research as a policy lever.** Despite the solemn statistics, efforts have been made to change the public education system. One important sign of progress is the assemblage of rigorous research on what practices work in the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Since the 1960s, educational researchers have been suggesting that a lack of teachable literacy skills, not cognitive skills, are to blame for the poor literacy outcomes typically associated with children from low-income families and that those outcomes can be changed. Initial recommendations came from Jeanne Chall (1967) in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* where a return to decoding was amongst the most notable suggestions (Pearson & Hiebert, 2010). Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) later identified vocabulary as being the

biggest problem for low-income children while Moats (1998) concluded several years later that if children receive instruction in phonological and alphabetic skills within the context of decoding words, they are more likely to learn how to read. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) suggested children who have a better grasp of the foundational skills of phonological processing, print awareness, and oral language learn to read sooner and better than those who do not.

Findings such as these were synthesized and released in a report by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in 2000. The report identified five critical domains of reading instruction and made recommendations toward implementation: teach *phonemic awareness* in kindergarten and first grade, focus early on *phonics*, promote *fluency* through oral reading practices, attack *vocabulary* development through a variety of approaches, and teach reading *comprehension* through explicit instruction (Pearson & Hiebert, 2010). These recommendations were then promoted by Reading First, part of NCLB federal accountability legislation that emerged with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001. Thus, research was turned into a policy advocacy tool.

How did this occur? The elements of quality reading instruction, as recognized by the NRP, made their way into an instructional policy through the opening of a policy window by the federal government. A policy window is an opening in which a problem is recognized and a policy solution is seen as viable, making the political climate ripe for change (Kingdon, 1984 as cited in Marshall et al., 2005, p.12). It benefits the researchers, as their reputations are enhanced when their ideas spur legislation, and in return, policymakers are able to claim their initiatives reflect what the research says (Loveless, 1998 as cited in Allington & Woodside Jirons, 1999).

Early literacy intervention efforts also made their way through this particular policy window. Some of the programmatic elements of early interventions identified during this time were research-based as well, including training in phonological awareness and the alphabetic principal (Scarborough, 2001), early, intensive, and individualized remediation through daily one-to-one tutoring (Vellutino & Scanlon, 2001), and a focus on developing teachers' knowledge of appropriate levels of task and text difficulty (Pikulski, 1994). Additionally, after evaluating five school-based early intervention programs designed for the early elementary years, it was recommended that students receive supplementary quality and coordinated instruction in individual or very small group settings; that students read texts selected to be simple enough so they were successful reading them and that students read the texts several times to develop fluency. It was also recommended that the new reading programs include phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and writing activities; that ongoing assessment monitor student progress; that the programs encourage communication between home and school; and that the reading programs provide continuous professional support to teachers (Pikulski, 1994).

The federal government opened this policy window even further with the use of federal grants, which were given through the creation of the independent research entity in the Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Requests for proposals through 2005 were centered on targeting low-performing schools with the goal of changing them into high performing learning communities (Hamann & Meltzer, 2005). The federal request also mandated that research efforts direct a portion of their activities to rural areas, as there were a number of challenges unique to this population, including limited resources, less competitive teacher salaries, pressure to consolidate, long distances between

schools and homes, and a scarcity of credentialed teachers (2005). The Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) answered the call, securing funds through IES to develop a program designed to help classroom teachers in rural communities work with their struggling readers - providing one solution for two problems by delivering specially designed instruction for struggling readers that was enhanced by giving the teachers of these students located in rural settings access to high quality professional development and sustained support as they delivered the reading intervention.

### **The Text of the TRI**

Continuing to use the framework recommended by Taylor, this section will examine the text of the instructional policy, the TRI, paying particular attention to text features and what is not included. As such, it will examine the main parts of the TRI including the emphasis on the key components of the instruction provided to struggling readers, the professional development provided to the teachers, the theory of teacher change it was built upon, and the role coaching plays during implementation. Just as important, the missing elements of the larger TRI study also will be discussed, mainly the importance of capturing the teachers' perceptions.

**Key instructional components.** Built upon research that the development of supportive teacher/child relationships will help facilitate instruction (Pianta, 2001), the TRI uses a diagnostic reading model where teachers adjust their instruction to help the individual child make rapid gains. This approach is supported by Valencia and Buly (2004), who recommended at the end of their empirical study of students who failed a fourth-grade reading assessment that teachers must work diagnostically with students who have demonstrated difficulty on assessments.

The TRI also utilizes a suggested set of evidence-based reading activities that reflect the five areas deemed critical by the NRP (Vernon-Feagans, Gallagher, & Kainz, 2010, Vernon-Feagans & Ginsberg, 2011). These activities are delivered on a daily basis in fifteen-minute one-on-one sessions performed within the classroom with the struggling reader. They include *Re-Reading for Fluency*, where the child re-reads a book she/he read at least once the previous day, sometimes with the teacher modeling fluent, expressive reading; *Word Work*, which typically includes activities that reinforce skills needed for decoding like letter-sound knowledge, segmenting and blending words, and sight word recognition, all in the context of words and text; *Guided Oral Reading*, where the teacher matches a text to the student based on her/his word identification, motivation, comprehension, or fluency needs and provides moment-by-moment coaching; and *Extensions*, which increase the child's exposure to print through activities performed independently (Amendum, Vernon-Feagans, & Ginsberg, 2011). Furthermore, because research recommends that literacy interventions provide more authentic opportunities to read and write and that children receive explicit reading and writing instruction within the context of content area teaching and learning, the strategies are presented within the context of the word and text to maximize learning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004, as documented in Hamann & Meltzer, 2005). The TRI also uses web-based coaching to provide real time feedback and problem solving for the classroom teacher during live sessions with the children (Ginsberg, Vernon-Feagans, & Amendum, 2010, Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick, Ginsberg, & Amendum, 2009). The goal of this live-time coaching is to develop high-level specialist knowledge in teachers - which is what the TRI team believes will lead to student achievement.

The literature base on what components lead to student achievement appear to concur with the strategies utilized by the TRI team. In the book, *Visible Learning* (2009), a synthesis of 800 meta-analyses of 50,000 studies related to student achievement, author and researcher John Hattie identifies these teaching approaches as being the most successful at increasing student achievement scores: paying deliberate attention to learning intentions and success criteria; setting challenging tasks; providing multiple opportunities for deliberate practice; knowing when one (teacher and student) is successful in attaining these goals; understanding the critical role of teaching appropriate learning strategies; planning and talking about teaching; and ensuring the teacher constantly seeks feedback information as to the success of his or her teaching on the students. Given that the TRI contains many of these features -- high expectations for students, daily opportunities for practice, weekly consultations with a coach followed up with written feedback via e-mail -- the expectation is that the TRI will improve literacy growth, as measured by student achievement scores.

In addition to looking at teaching approaches, Hattie (2009) also identifies other influences on student achievement that are associated with successful gains in student learning by measuring effect sizes. He maintains that an effect size must be at least .40, as this effect size summarizes the typical effect of all possible influences in education. His analysis looks at 137 different influences, of which a number of them directly address issues the TRI has incorporated into its intervention that go beyond what the teacher does during a lesson: Teacher subject matter knowledge (.09), teacher-student relationships (.72), professional development (.62), teacher clarity (.75), phonics instruction (.60), second/third chance reading programs (.50), and feedback (.73). While it does not appear that efforts made to increase teacher subject matter knowledge help increase student achievement, the

number of items contained within the larger study that are associated with high effects sizes are numerous. Of particular notice are the high effect sizes for teacher clarity and feedback, which are cultivated through professional development and coaching sessions, which are also a key component of the TRI.

**Professional development.** The specialized knowledge development that is cultivated in teachers is a feature that sets the TRI apart from other literacy interventions. This kind of pedagogical content knowledge is developed through professional development (PD), which IES refers to as “in-service training of or tools for current instructional personnel” (IES, 2009). “Recognizing that schools can be no better than the teachers and administrators who work within them, policymakers emphasize professional developments as a key component in nearly every education improvement plan” (Guskey & Sparks, 2004, p.12 as cited in Morewood & Bean, 2009). Professional development is administered and promoted through several different mechanisms during the implementation of the TRI. First, a three-day Summer Institute is held (previous to the start of implementation within the classroom), where the teachers learn the diagnostic strategies for working with struggling readers through videos, modeling, and role-playing. In addition, teacher guides, word work materials, leveled books, laptops, and videos are given to the teachers to use throughout the year. A two-day follow-up Summer Institute is held between the first and second years of implementation as well.

Follow-up training comes in three different forms. Most important are the weekly coaching sessions. Teachers meet with an assigned literacy coach once a week in which the coach observes via web-cam a fifteen-minute TRI session with one of the identified struggling readers. Afterwards, the teacher and coach discuss the lesson, identify the

student's most pressing need, and then make a plan for how to address that need. During this time, the literacy coach helps the teachers learn to think diagnostically so they internalize a more thorough understanding of reading development and instruction (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2009). A follow-up e-mail with specific positive feedback is also sent after the coaching sessions end. These two practices are key, for "Without companionship, help in reflecting on practice, and instruction on fresh teaching strategies, most people can make very few changes in their behavior, however well-intentioned they are" (Joyce & Showers, 1996, p.6).

Weekly team meetings, where all of the teachers at the school meet with the coach via web-cam for a 30-minute check-in, and twice a semester online workshops provide the last two forms of professional development (PD). The team meetings provide a time for the teachers to collaborate, problem-solve, and report on how the implementation of the TRI is going. In addition, the coach helps facilitate conversations that help the teachers understand how the students' daily performances and their informal assessments drive their instruction and identify which activities might be most helpful in meeting their students' needs.

The workshops, the last form of PD, allow for more in-depth conversations and demonstrations around needs identified by the teachers. During these workshops, the coaches might do an abbreviated version of a lesson or activity, provide clarification on how to approach or understand a frequently discussed issue or behavior encountered by the teachers during their TRI sessions with their struggling readers, or show videos of teachers demonstrating particularly strong practices. The intention is to provide an opportunity for the teachers to access additional instruction and assistance on how to implement the TRI so the Summer Institute is not the only time in which formal instruction takes place. The approach used here is based on the belief that professional development should be used to train

teachers to use diagnostic reading information to individualize instruction; to provide a place where teachers can learn by doing; to highlight the importance in using one-on-one teaching sessions on a daily basis to help change the teachers' practice and knowledge; and to give teachers an extended experience over the year (Vernon-Feagans et al, 2009). The professional development activities reflect and facilitate six characteristics of teachers' professional lives and workplaces that Langer (2000) identified to be associated with improved student achievement in reading, writing, and English, including orchestrated, coordinated efforts to improve student achievement; teacher participation in a variety of professional communities; structured improvement opportunities that offer teachers a strong sense of agency; valued commitment to the profession of teaching; a caring attitude toward colleagues and students; and a deep respect for lifelong learning (as cited in Hamann & Meltzer, 2005).

These characteristics are what the research team believe set the TRI apart from similar research-based professional development programs, including the Garet, Cronen, Eaton, Kurki, Ludwig, Jones, Uekawa, Falk, Bloom, Doolittle, Zhu, & Sztejnberg (2008) study, *The Impact of Two Professional Development Interventions on Early Reading Instruction and Achievement*. This study, which is the largest randomized control trial to date of early reading interventions, tested the efficacy of professional development in early literacy instruction. Also funded by IES, the Garet et. al study examined the results of the implementation of two research-based professional development models. The first model used a content-focused teacher institute series that began in the summer and continued through the school year. The second used the same institute and provided in-school coaching. Both lasted for a year and were implemented in second grade classrooms that were randomly

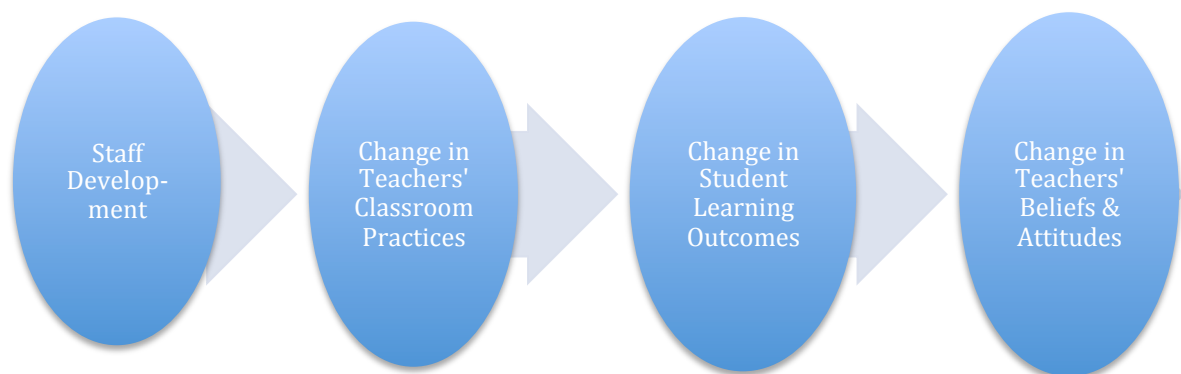
selected in 90 high-poverty schools and six school districts. At the end of the year, positive impacts were noted in teacher's knowledge of scientifically based reading instruction in both groups but neither intervention resulted in significantly higher student test scores at the end of the year or the year following the treatment.

A review of the research completed by Anders et al. (2000) found similar findings. While professional development affects teacher beliefs and teacher knowledge, it does not necessarily impact teacher improved instruction and student achievement scores (Morewood & Bean, 2009). This review also indicated that teacher beliefs about professional development are impacted by the amount of choice they have in deciding what to attend and if they see a positive change in student achievement. While this may not directly lead to a change in achievement scores, it is important in creating teacher change. For, "it is not sufficient to establish policies...unless there is a parallel and consistent effort with effective professional development designed to alter, modify, or transform the practices, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers" (Fullan, 1982 as cited in Gatt, 2009).

**Teacher change.** Given that the TRI is trying to create change in teachers' practices, teacher change must be addressed during policy implementation, for "All innovations worth their salt call upon people to question and in some respect to change their behavior and their beliefs" (Fullan, 2001, p.40 as cited in McGee, 2006). Literature has shown that instructional change seems to be best supported when increases in teachers' pedagogical and foundational knowledge about reading is coupled with teacher practice in individualizing instruction for particular children in the classroom (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2009). This is typically promoted during professional development. "All the reported successful school improvement efforts -- successful in that there has been better learning by students -- have made changes in

curriculum, instruction, or technology, changes supported by intensive staff development” (Joyce & Showers, 1995, xiv). Guskey (1986, 2002) recommends using professional development programs to systematically bring about change within the classroom practices of teachers, their beliefs and attitudes, and in student learning outcomes by keeping in mind what motivates teachers to engage in staff development and the process in which teacher change typically occurs.

Guskey (1986) proposes that this process of change starts with staff development, which then affects the teachers’ classroom practice. If and when the teachers’ practice changes student-learning outcomes, only then will there be a change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, leading to long-term teacher change.



**Figure 1: Guskey's Model of the Process of Teacher Change (1986)**

To help facilitate the change process in teachers, Guskey recommends accepting that change is a gradual and difficult process for teachers, that teachers need to receive regular feedback on student learning progress, and that continued support and follow-up after the initial professional development is key (1986). Keeping this in mind, the implementation plan of the TRI extends over the course of two years. Its structure provides teachers with effective strategies and the support of a coach to help them recognize what the students’ needs are so teachers choose and implement activities that satisfy those needs. The coach

also helps the teachers recognize student change as it occurs. The expectation then is that once the teachers see change, they will feel successful and motivated to continue implementing the TRI on a regular basis, as activities that are successful are more likely to be repeated than those that are not (1986). If the teachers do not see a change, especially in student outcomes, there is less inducement for them to change their beliefs, attitudes, or teaching practices (Lamb, Cooper, & Warren, 2007).

While Guskey's model provides a model in which to consider the process of teacher change, he also recommends looking at teacher motivation, the second of two crucial factors he suggests most instructional policies ignore to their detriment. Supporting this notion, McLaughlin (1987) surmised, "Individuals responsible for carrying out a policy act not only from institutional incentives, but also from professional and personal motivation" (p.174). Achievement Attribution Theory helps demonstrate how motivation makes an impact by examining how one reacts to a success or failure as a function of causal attributes (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, and Rosenbaum, 1971 as cited in Frieze, Francis, & Hanusa, 1983). Causal attributes fall into two categories, performance or personal data, which take into account student success and evaluation of one's teaching, and situational aids or constraints, like class size and goal structure (Ames, 1983). These causal attributes may act as a mediator of future performance by determining which values are most prominent, which then influence achievement-related affect, behaviors, and cognitions (Ames & Ames, 1984). "If students, teachers, or administrators believe that the results of an examination are important, the effect is produced by what individuals perceive to be the case" (Madaus, 1999, p.78 as cited in McGee, 2006). This theory argues that perceptions, as reflected through the teacher, affect the interpretation of success.

**Coaching.** While causal attributes may act as a mediator of future performance, the TRI contains another potential mediator or motivator – a literacy coach. A literacy coach is someone who focuses on providing staff development in reading and/or language arts to teachers, usually by modeling appropriate strategies, observing lessons in classrooms, discussing various strategies with teachers, and providing additional PD (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2007). They are often charged with figuring out how to draw out the best in teachers while also helping them make changes in their thinking and teaching (Rainville & Jones, 2008). In the TRI, teachers and coaches begin working together during the Summer Institute and continue to work together for up to two years. The teacher and coach meet on a weekly basis for one-on-one coaching sessions, in which the coach observes the teacher work with her struggling student via web-cam and then debriefs the lesson with her. The teacher and coach meet during site-based team meetings as well. This relationship differs from most other reading interventions, as several other studies report that many literacy coaches are only able to spend a fraction of the time recommended actually working with teachers. Sometimes the fraction is as low as 15% of their total time, as opposed to the recommended 60-80% (Moss, Jacob, Boulay, Horst, & Poulos, 2006) because of other obligations, like spending more time in meetings with others and managing data (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007).

Though a number of anecdotal notes support the idea that the immediate feedback, reflection, and planning that occur between teacher and coach makes a difference in teachers' implementation practices, very little empirical evidence exists regarding the impact of the coach (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2011). However, results from Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney (2008) suggest that classroom teachers who receive coaching are able to significantly reduce the number of children at risk for reading failure.

For not only are they receiving professional development on a weekly basis, which allows them to reflect on practice, collaboration, and active learning (Marsh et al., 2011), they also have the opportunity to interact with their coaches in a type of collaborative consultation model, which evidence suggests can have positive effects on both teacher and student outcomes (Evans, 1991 as cited in Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007). In the TRI, these interactions are built around a structure that delivers performance feedback to teachers, including praise for facilitating activities with high fidelity and “responding to the response”, information about the students’ behaviors or skills, information about their teacher behaviors, identification of implementation errors or activities that might need tweaking, and problem-solving for future lessons. This format is similar to several studies that examined the implementation of a reinforcement-based treatment by the classroom teacher where the use of process and outcome feedback from a consultant resulted in substantial increases in implementation (Noell, Witt, LaFleur, Mortenson, Ranier, & LaVelle, 2000). So, even though there is little empirical evidence on the actual student and teacher outcomes, research does support the fact that using a coach/consultant may have an impact on implementation itself.

**Missing elements.** The TRI has set itself up for success by creating a thorough and research-based model that focuses on key processes that help struggling readers learn to decode and comprehend what they read and a model of professional development that is comprehensive and on-going, due in part to the use of supportive coaches. However, at present time the larger TRI study does not have a systematic plan as to how to measure or acknowledge the many factors that affect implementation, still working from a top-down model. This is fairly typical, as policy makers often provide support for development but

none for implementation (Hall, 1992). The missing factors that affect implementation include, among others, the policy context in which the TRI must be implemented, differences within individual teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and capacities, what teachers perceive to be their role during implementation, and the teachers' perceptions of success. This is problematic since, "Implementers at all levels of the system effectively negotiate their response, fitting their action to the multiple demands, priorities, and values operating in their environment and the effective authority of the policy itself" (McLaughlin, 1987, p.175).

The first big issue is that the current research study on the TRI does not have the resources needed to properly acknowledge the policy context in which implementation occurs, even though researchers like Marzano state that the implementation process is "a highly contextualized phenomenon" (2003, p.158). In their work looking at successful school improvement initiatives, Louis and Miles (1990) identified contextual factors that influenced the implementation of improvement initiatives. Externally, they recognized the district level context, the role of the state, and community factors; when examining the internal context factors, they described school factors such as staff cohesiveness, preexisting attitudes and beliefs, and elements of school leadership (1990). While attempts may be made to capture individuals' attitudes and beliefs through surveys or questionnaires, those attitudes and beliefs are affected by additional interactions with the school ecology and school culture (Boyd, 1992). How can those be adequately captured in a quantitative fashion when they are constantly changing?

Research on contextual factors also indicates that the implementation of one policy may be affected by other implementation efforts. At present time, there are an abundance of additional official policies that teachers must negotiate around, including state and district

policies and guidelines and recommendations from professional organizations, all of which will have an effect on how the TRI is implemented (Goldstein, 2008). As educational change expert Gene Hall stated,

*More and more curriculum innovations, rules, regulations, policies, and prescriptions are being laid upon teachers, principals, and schools. At the same time, the demographic changes in the student population have increased complexity geometrically. Multiple innovations are being adopted at the same time. There has been a complete failure of the top, middle, and bottom to accept the fact that new things, when added to an already full vessel, have little lasting effect. Until we start understanding that there is a finite amount of activity that can be accomplished at any one time, we are going to continue to have system overload. System overload brings with it a whole new round of symptoms in addition to implementation failure... (1992, p.894)*

This could have particularly negative implications for the TRI, as school-based practitioners that are overwhelmed and undersupported are often resistant towards new ventures as they wonder, “What will it be this year?” (Hall, 1992, p.879).

Teachers must also negotiate the implementation of the policy around the expectations of other stakeholders like principals and families (Goldstein, 2008). It is well documented that principal’s leadership styles affect teachers’ success in implementation; that their ongoing active support is essential; and that as leaders, the principals must have an understanding of the systemic nature of the change process (Hall, 1992). As Hargreaves stated, “Significant school wide change is impossible without effective school leadership” (2001, p.175). However, in the current study of the TRI, there is no systematic way in which the teachers’ perceptions of the principals’ influence is recognized or measured.

Beyond the contextual differences that are not accounted for, there are also unaccounted for differences within individual teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, personal values, predispositions, and capacities that may have an impact on implementation efforts (Elmore, 2000), which is significant given that the individual implementers will construct their own

definition of the policy and its implications (Hall, 1992). The self-constructed definitions will later have an impact on how the policy is played out (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005) for “beliefs serve as a filter for what is perceived” (Pajares, 1992 as cited in Gregoire, 2003, p. 150). In a qualitative study conducted by Fairman & Firestone (2001) on changes in teachers’ classroom practices as a result of a state-mandated math curriculum reform, results indicated that the teachers’ individualized beliefs about the subject matter and student learning had more of an effect on their choices of instructional strategies than the curriculum or lessons. The result? Variance in implementation, which is problematic given that mandates are meant to create uniformity and reduce variation (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005).

In addition, variance within the context may lead to variance in teachers’ sense of efficacy, as research suggests efficacy is affected by the support, structure, and efficiency within their environment (Nunn & Jantz, 2009). This will also have an impact on implementation, for as teacher efficacy increases, the perception of responsibility for and capacity to create change in outcomes also increases (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). However, if teachers fail to understand what role they might play in relation to the outcomes, a variety of issues may arise during implementation. Behavior may not be monitored effectively or efficiently (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002); implementers may find policy signals unclear and thus not attend to them; and if participants do not understand how the policy is meant to change their behavior, there may or may not be a change in practice (2002). This is because “people generate what they interpret” and they create the environment and select the cause and symbols they interpret (Weick, 1995, p.34).

Lastly, the current research on TRI does not take into account if the teachers perceive the TRI to be successful. Like most policies whose main purpose is to create change or

reform (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005), the TRI is trying to change teachers' classroom practices and knowing how the implementation is being perceived by those at the ground level is essential for "What is actually delivered or provided under the aegis of a policy depends on the individual at the end of the line" (McLaughlin, 1987, p.171) and "essentially, how a policy is viewed, understood, and experienced only becomes real when teachers attempt to implement the policy" (Smit, 2005, p.298). It is particularly problematic that this issue is currently not taken into account by the larger study when applying Guskey's theory, which hangs on the premise that teachers' beliefs will change when they feel their students' outcomes have successfully been changed.

All of these problems – not having the resources to take into account the teachers' contexts, the differences in the teachers' beliefs and capacities, the variance in their understandings of their role, and not knowing what the teachers' perceptions of what success look like– demonstrate a final issue. The current research on the TRI is a highly quantitative randomized control trial that cannot explicitly take into account teachers' voices. "When teacher perceptions of the world of schools are left unquestioned, the effects of power are left invisible" (Kincheloe, 1995, p.83). Teachers' voices need to be heard during the implementation and evaluation of the TRI. Not only will sharing their voices promote a sense of ownership of the TRI that will hopefully affirm their commitment to using the TRI with their struggling readers once the research study is completed (Lamb et al., 2007), but it provides validation that their voices and their influence are important. And they are important, for as Linda Darling-Hammond (1990) put it,

*[we should lead the way towards the] next generation of policy analysis, one which recognizes the importance of understanding the transformation of policy into teacher actions from the vantage point of the teachers, themselves, as well as from that of the policy system. This next stop will not only improve policy analysis, by providing*

*better information about the outcomes of policy initiatives, but it may also help improve policymaking itself, by providing us deeper insights into those aspects of teaching and schooling with which new policies must come to terms. (p.341)*

When asked about the critical issues facing this nation, researchers Green and Dixon (1996) point out that as the ones implementing policies, teachers are directly responsible for shaping and responding to present and future demands. Thus their voices should be an important part of the decision making, as they are the policy-makers within their classrooms, the real central change agents with a consistent presence in the classroom environment (Han & Weiss, 2005). This is at the crux of what the creators of the TRI believe -- that the teachers have the power to make change; by giving them voice through this complementary study, hopefully the teachers will believe it as well.

### **The Consequences**

Successful change processes occur not with the development of the policy or the creation of new curriculum, but with a strong implementation plan (Hall, 1992). Thus to examine results, effectiveness, compliance and resistance, and the outcomes or consequences of a given program or policy, studying the implementation plan works best (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, Hall, 1992).

**Policy instruments.** When using an implementation approach, there are a variety of angles one may adopt to aide in analysis. One that is particularly relevant to the TRI addresses policy instruments. Policy instruments traditionally refer to mandates (rules governing individuals, intended to produce compliance), inducements (money goes to individuals in return for certain actions), capacity building (money for investment in resources), and/or system changing (transfers authority among individuals to alter the system in delivery of goods and services) (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The TRI has used all of

these during implementation. Because it is a randomized control trial, teachers are not given a choice if they want to do it. If teachers are chosen, they are subject to the mandate. Inducements are provided to the teachers through cash rewards for completing various surveys and assessments. Capacity building is promoted through the coaches, who are responsible for helping the teachers learn how to use diagnostic information to make decisions so that they continue to carry out the activities once the coaches are gone. And, system building occurs as the teachers start making more of the decisions on how to address their students' most pressing needs on an independent basis.

Stone (1997) has also created an additional list of policy instruments, including rules (impose obligations and duties), facts (information, rhetoric, or propaganda), rights (govern relationships and coordinate behaviors), and powers (which can be altered by who gets to make the decisions) (as cited in Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). These can also be seen in the implementation of the TRI, as teachers are told what activities to do and how often to do them (rule); they hear much about the consequences that await children should they not learn how to read during the summer institutes (facts); they follow the suggestions that are generated by assessments (rights); and once the teachers have proven they understand the activities and why they are doing them, the power is transferred to them.

Using so many instruments in such a comprehensive manner is one way in which the TRI has set itself up for successful implementation. Many other policies are not so multi-dimensional. For example, states that have adopted the Common Core Standards (CCSSO, 2009) are relying on mandates, where teachers and schools are required to implement the same policy in a uniform fashion, regardless of capacity. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) tried to be system changing by moving the distribution of authority from the local level to the

federal level but also failed to take into account capacity building, for example, adding in requirements for teacher's licenses, degrees, and competencies in certain subject areas without any type of plan or system to help teachers obtain such credentials (Welch-Ross, Moorehouse, & Rathgeb, 2006). With such a variety in approaches and instrument usage, one is reminded that not all policies are created equal.

**Micro-interactions.** Implementation itself can also be evaluated through the organizational/cultural processes used throughout (policy slippage, loose coupling, unintended consequences, etc.) and/or the key policy mechanisms (school finance, testing and assessment, curriculum materials, etc.). While analyzing the policy mechanisms used may help identify the values being pursued by the creators of the policy, educational researcher Milbrey McLaughlin (1990) suggests that analysis should focus on the micro-interactions at the local level amongst those implementing the policy.

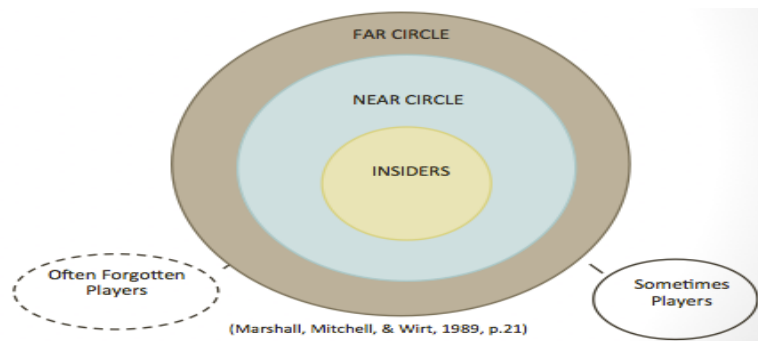
The local level is where education systems' lowerarchies and "street-level bureaucrats" (i.e. teachers, principals, etc.) sometimes resist and re-create policy intentions (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). The role of a street-level bureaucrat is not necessarily to thwart a policy but instead to make accommodations so that the implementation of the new policy causes the least amount of disequilibrium. This often requires street-level bureaucrats to routinize procedures, modify goals, ration services, assert priorities, and limit or control clientele. In Wetherley and Lipsky's (1977) well-known case study, which looked at the implementation of a new and costly special education law in Massachusetts, that meant changing procedures in identifying children with special needs, applying inconsistent mainstreaming efforts, and employing unofficial rationing techniques to reduce the number of referrals for special services. These accommodations helped explain the variations

amongst local educators in how they were implementing the new policy, which was intended to create a uniform and fair process.

However, the changes street-level bureaucrats make during implementation are not always considered to be negative. The Rand Change Agent study (1973-1978), a seminal study that considered the micro-interactions amongst stakeholders, found effective projects were characterized by mutual adaptation by the local implementers, as opposed to uniform implementation. In fact, local variability was not the exception but the rule, as it signaled that the street-level bureaucrat was integrating the policy in ways best suited to them (1990). The Change Agent study also found that implementation dominates outcome, for local choices about how to put a policy into practice had more significance than the technology, program design, funding levels, or governance requirements. In the end, the study also concluded that “change continues to be a problem of the smallest unit” (p.12) and that policy cannot mandate what matters, as the presence of the will and motivation of the stakeholders to embrace policy objectives is essential, yet also contingent on the attitudes of the leaders. While a revisit to the study would reveal later that perhaps it overemphasized the importance of initial motivation, underemphasized the role external agents can play, and was based on the assumption that teachers responded to policy objectives when they may view them as part of a broader environment, the lessons learned through the Rand Change Agent study should be kept under consideration because of the dramatic role it had in re-framing policy implementation studies – with the emphasis being on the micro-interactions at the local level.

**Cultural processes.** While it is appropriate to look at what happens at the local level, it is also helpful to have a framework for understanding the cultural processes that affect the bigger picture. One option is to examine the key policy actors and stakeholders and their

areas of influence, which can be arranged in a model that visually demonstrates their hierarchical relationship, like in Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt's model, Hierarchies of Power and Circles of Influence (1989). For example, this model demonstrates the hierarchy in place at the time of policy development, before implementation efforts even begin (See Figure 2). At the core of this model are the insiders, the creators, the policymakers, and the ones “in charge” of the project. Next are those who work within the near circle so they have access to both the core and those in the far circle at the ground level. The far circle is often a buffer and has enormous influence on what each group can do based on their positioning. Finally there are the often forgotten and sometimes players that have no voice in how the policy is crafted but still played a critical role that needs to be recognized because they are affected by the policy.



**Figure 2: Hierarchies of Power, Spheres of Influence**

This model serves as a reminder that there are always multiple stakeholders involved in policy implementation, that stakeholders' influence may shift over time, and that issues of power must always be accounted for.

There are a number of additional options that help one understand the cultural processes that have an effect on policy implementation. As detailed in Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin (2005), these include implementation realities, which examine the instruments used in

implementation and how well they fit the situation; policy slippage and mutation, which look at how people resist or alter policies and programs; loose coupling, which examines how systems are and are not well connected; street-level bureaucrats and the decisions people make in regard to implementing the policy; mutual adaptation and opportunistic adoption, which demonstrates how people adopt policy given incentives; organizational processes of attention and interpretation, which focus on how policy is received and translated at the local level; the lowerarchy, who recognize the power of teachers in the implementation process; analyzing the match between goals and instruments, which raise questions about fit; and unintended consequences, which acknowledge there will be potential backlash. This framework will be used in the discussion of this study to help put the results into context and to describe the implications.

### **Summary**

Since the release of “A Nation at Risk”, policy makers have been concerned about the nation’s seemingly inadequate education system. To combat those concerns, research has been used as a policy lever, producing a series of recommendations on quality literacy instruction, early intervention, and professional development. As a result, a substantial amount of money was set aside and awarded through IES grants to develop programs that used that research to help struggling populations. The Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) was one of the recipients of those funds through the National Research Center on Rural Education Support, dedicated to improving literacy among struggling readers in rural areas. With those funds, Vernon-Feagans, Ginsberg, and Amendum created a promising dual-level intervention. The intervention not only raised student achievement scores, but was also created to increase teacher capacity through a professional development program made up of

Summer Institutes, weekly one-on-one web-based coaching sessions, site-based team meetings, and ongoing workshops. The PD sessions taught classroom teachers how to use a diagnostic reading model and a suggested set of reading activities to deliver one-on-one instruction to a struggling reader in grades K to 2<sup>nd</sup>.

While preliminary studies demonstrated effect sizes ranging from .4 to .7 on student reading gains, additional research efforts are underway to examine the effectiveness of the TRI as it relates to improving teacher instruction. Unfortunately, because of its breadth, the current study is not able to take into consideration the policy context in which the TRI must be implemented, the differences within individual teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and capacities, the teachers' perceptions of their roles, or their perceptions of success as it relates to the implementation of the TRI. This is particularly unfortunate given the enormous amount of impact the teachers have in implementing the TRI. To fulfill this need, I initiated a qualitative study to recognize teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy, the TRI, as detailed in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy, the Targeted Reading Intervention, and if they perceived it to be successful. The rationale for looking at teacher perceptions was based on the belief that "any examination of policy implementation must include an analysis of the value system of the people entrusted with administering the implementation, because their values affect the level of resource allocation, political support, and monitoring that occurs" (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 46). To accomplish this, this study focused on the perceptions of ten first grade teachers from three rural counties working with myself as their literacy coach during the first year of implementation of the TRI from 2011 to 2012.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

While qualitative research is not explicitly driven by theory, it is often situated within theoretical frameworks and perspectives, as is this study (Glesne, 2006). First, there is the recognition that using both traditional and critical policy analyses will provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the policy being researched (Young, 1999). This recognition was realized, in part, after reading Michelle Young's piece, "Multifocal Educational Policy Research: Toward a Method for Enhancing Traditional Educational Policy Studies" (1999). Young used both frames in her work on the relationship between parental involvement policy and the participation of Mexican-American mothers. She found that the traditional and

critical frames produced similar observations and findings – that little time or effort had been put into creating a cohesive parental involvement policy or program and that neither teachers nor parents had much influence. However, she found the implications were quite different. The traditional findings provided a list of tasks for the school personnel to take on while the critical frame highlighted factors that needed to be examined and addressed during that process related to power, status, participation, and institutionalization. While the topic of investigation is quite different, the study allowed for more voices to be represented and emphasized the point that there are multiple layers of understanding that must be examined to help understand the process of change. This study will try to do the same.

In relation to implementation studies, the traditional/functionalist approach examines how and why a policy worked or failed to work as it was intended (Levinson, et al., 2009). It answers the questions “Did it work?” and/or “Has the policy been effectively implemented?” (p.768). The critical approach differs, as it assumes there is no objective way in which to analyze a policy and that the discourse of power is central. This approach helps answer the questions, “Who can do policy?” and “What can policy do?” (p.769). It requires one to consider tractability, or the ease in which something can be changed or controlled (Ackerman, 2005), where the policy came from, why it is viable, and what values are embedded in it (Shannon, 1991). While traditional policy studies have typically been used to examine implementation (Levinson et al., 2009) and processes of change (Young, 1999), the desire to include elements from critical policy analysis was fueled by my subscription to Jacqueline Edmondson’s call to action, for “strategic intervention by the people for whom policy is intended, those whom have been silenced in the policy process (i.e., teachers), is more important than ever” (2004, p.14). This approach has roots in critical theories, which

are openly political; they acknowledge a values base and expose societal inequities (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005) while also proposing that the accumulation of knowledge has the power to promote emancipation, which encourages people to become active agents within their own destinies. Just as in critical action research, this research

*demands that individuals who are studied have the right to participate in decisions that tend to produce knowledge about them. The concept of the dignity of those being researched is revered when power is shared in both the application and the production of knowledge about them. Such power sharing allows the researchers to gain new insights into the deep social structures that shape them, thus, enhancing the possibility of self-determination.* (Kincheloe, 1995, p.81)

This study searched for “new insights” to understand teachers’ voices as they related to their role and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy, the TRI. Thus, the methods used promoted what Kincheloe refers to as “power sharing” as the teachers’ perceptions were fully realized and reaffirmed through the research questions:

- 1) What perceptions do teachers have of their role in policy implementation?
  - a. What impacts teachers' perceptions of their role in policy implementation?
- 2) What influence (real and perceived) do various stakeholders (e.g. PIs, principals, coaches, teachers), have on policy implementation and on its success?
  - a. How do other stakeholders’ perceptions complement or contrast with the teachers?

## **Design**

Marshall (1997) reminds us “Bias, power, and values drive the identification and legitimation of a problem and the methods are seen as useful for studying and solving it” (p.3). Keeping this perspective in mind, the design presented here is reflective of my personal and professional opinion that analyses cannot and should not deny the presence of values and that what is “real” is relative to the location and people involved. Teachers’ perceptions of policy, their role in policy, and their measures of success of the policy do impact

implementation. Also, that my position as a policy analyst and as a literacy coach with access to both the research team and the teachers is one of influence and requires critical reflexivity to help me understand the data I collect, my role in the research process, my effect on the informants, and my assumptions (Young, 1999); and that my own values are communicated to stakeholders before, during, and after the implementation of the TRI. Given these subjectivities, this study will be approached using qualitative methods, as “the qualitative epistemology holds that you come to know those realities through interactions and subjectivist explorations with participants about their perceptions” (Glesne, 2006, p.6).

During her tenure as an advisor to doctoral students, Dr. Judy Meloy, who is both a university professor and an editorial board member of the *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research*, reminded her students, “Because qualitative research requires personal rather than detached engagement in the context, it requires multiple, simultaneous actions and reactions from the human being who is the research instrument” (1994, p.68). Relying on just one “instrument”, however, would be imprudent. Thus, a variety of data sources were consulted, some of which were deliberately sought out for this investigation, including personal interviews and focus groups and others that were accrued as part of the larger TRI study, mainly personal e-mails, feedback e-mails after coaching sessions, field notes/preliminary analyses, and surveys. The interview responses given by the members of the research team, the principals, and the teachers serve as the primary source of information while the other data sources were consulted and treated as secondary sources, used for cross-checking the data for consistency within documented practice, triangulation, and combining perceptions of the same event by using multiple methods, sources, research, theories, and/or data types (Patton, 1990, Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Sources of Data

Many data sources were gathered for this study on teachers' perceptions of policy, their role in policy, and their measures of success. Most came from or were generated from the teachers themselves. Only interviews from other stakeholders were used to assess the perceptions of these other stakeholders. This difference was due to the desire to focus primarily on the teachers and their perceptions, as they are the stakeholders who, historically speaking, have the least amount of voice in the process but the most impact on students (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1981).

**Table 1: Sources of Data**

	Interviews	Focus Groups	Personal E-mails	Post-Coaching Session Feedback E-mails	Field Notes & Preliminary Analyses	Teacher Questionnaire
Teachers (n=10)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Principals (n=2)	X					
Research Team (n=5)	X					

As observed in Table 1, observations were not conducted at the school-level or by retroactively analyzing the instructional sessions recorded between the teachers, their students, and myself, their literacy coach. This decision was made to limit the amount of data collected, as analyzing qualitative data requires considerable time (Creswell, 2008). Making assessments about teachers' behaviors based on observations also would create a gap between the teachers and myself, as it could further privilege my opinions and observations over what they had chosen to share.

**Interviews.** The primary source of data for this study on teachers' perceptions of policy, their role in policy, and their measures of success came from semi-structured interviews with the teachers, which tie the study of opinion to the study of use (Joyce &

Showers, 1996). Interviews were chosen because they encouraged the teachers to share their own perceptions.

*Such stories provide us with the understandings, values, and perceptions of what is possible and proper in policy-making. Choosing their own words, our policy elites offer open, extensive descriptions of subculture activity. The data set is replete with stories, values, assessments of personalities, groups, history, and common understandings.* (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989, p.33-34)

The interviews occurred on an individual basis via iChat, a platform that facilitates face-to-face communication, shortly before the second year of TRI implementation began. iChat was specifically chosen as the medium in which the interviews occurred because it was also the medium used in the larger TRI study where relationships were culminated between myself and the teachers during online weekly coaching sessions and team meetings. Interviews with principals and members of the research team were conducted by either Skype or in person to accommodate their preferences. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. As I expected, the longer interviews were with the teachers who typically had longer feedback sessions during the implementation of the TRI, while the shorter ones were more straight-to-the-point and reflected the quick and efficient nature of the post-TRI coaching conversations.

Consistency within the interviews was maintained by asking each stakeholder the same main questions, which also enabled comparisons both within and between groups. However, as is characteristic of qualitative research, there was a level of flexibility maintained throughout so that probes could be used when clarification or elaboration was needed or when a particular topic emerged that the teacher clearly wanted to discuss. In his book, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Patton (1990) recommends that during data collection, researchers should try to strike a balance by using empathetic neutrality “...Empathy... is a stance toward the people one encounters, while neutrality is a stance

towards the findings...Empathy communicates interest in and caring about people, while neutrality means being non-judgmental about what people say and do during data collection” (p.58). Though a critical approach argues neutrality is impossible, I did try to strike a balance during the interview so I could communicate both a deep appreciation for my interviewees’ opinions and voice while also averting judgment and being respectful of their time.

Before the interviews, I shared my definition of policy to make sure both myself and the interviewees had a shared understanding (“a policy is a plan of action or something the government does but it may also be defined and regarded as an unofficial, nongovernmental, or informal practice that shapes behaviors and outcomes”). The desire for clarity continued during the interviews, as the questions asked were clearly and explicitly tied to the research questions, promoting transparency and trust between parties (see Table 2). Because the questions were created to answer the aims of the study in a direct manner, they were largely situated within a traditional perspective, which proposes questions may be asked and answered in a value-neutral and efficient fashion. To get at the critical side of this study, the interviewees were asked several questions related to their values and sense of agency. For example they were asked, “How much power/influence do you feel you have in making decisions about policy?” “Why were you asked to implement this policy? Do you agree or disagree with that purpose and why?” and “Do you feel like you can do something differently? Why or why not?” These questions allowed the individuals to situate themselves apart from the instructional policy and explore issues related to power. This approach was taken because, as Patton (2002) articulated,

*We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time... We cannot observe how people have*

*organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (p.341)*

The perspectives shared within the individual interviews were collected and analyzed only after permission was granted through signed consent forms approved by the Institutional Review Board. Because the validity of self-reported data is sometimes called into question (Gonyea, 2005), data obtained through the interviews were triangulated by data gathered through focus groups, in e-mails, and in the Teacher Questionnaire Survey. Access to these data sources had already been granted through the consent forms signed by the teachers for the larger TRI study but each stakeholder also signed a consent form unique to this study. In addition to giving consent to access previously collected data, the stakeholders also consented to read over a summary of their answers from the interview to check for accuracy. Any misrepresentations observed by the stakeholders were then shared, completing the member-checking process.

**Focus groups.** The teachers in the study were also given the opportunity to share their views by participating in focus groups around teachers' perceptions of involvement in policy-making and the success of the TRI during the Summer Institute in August of 2012. Of the ten teachers in this study, seven participated while the other three teachers were not present. Members of the TRI team facilitated these focus groups and made sure to clearly define how the word "policy" was being used before they commenced. The focus groups included both the teachers I worked with and those who worked with a literacy coach other than myself, who were not included in this study. The decision not to include the other teachers was based on several principles; first, because they did not have the same literacy coach, it was difficult to discern whether their comments were a reflection of their coach's perceptions or their own. Second, I did not have the kind of close relationship I had with the

others, which enabled me to have such open and honest conversations. Third, adding in their perceptions would have increased the number of participants by 50%, which would have taken away from the deep and thick descriptions that have come to be associated with qualitative work. However, their inclusion in the focus groups was helpful, as many of their comments were very similar to the other teachers', leading me to believe they could be generalizable.

This approach -- using both individual interviews and focus groups -- was promoted by Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2002) in their study of teachers' perceptions about mandated standards and related tests and how teachers make instructional decisions given the mandates. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas went on to find that the interviews provided more examples of general statements and heavily laden value judgments and that the focus groups provided an opportunity for the teachers to express additional or alternative views where "researchers were almost nonexistent" (2002, p.387). Focus groups were used in a similar manner in this study so those more comfortable sharing within a group of their peers or without the potential pressure of being in a one-on-one interview, would have the opportunity to do so. See Table 2 for example interview and focus group questions.

**Table 2: Interview & Focus Group Questions**

Interview Questions	Focus Group Questions
<p>Tell me about your year. What's been going on at (insert school) and in (insert county)?</p> <p>What kind of role did you play? How do you feel about taking on that role?</p> <p>How much power/influence do you feel you have in making decisions about policy?</p> <p>Have there been times when you've been made to feel powerless? How did this happen?</p> <p>Let's talk about a specific policy you were asked to implement this year, the TRI. How did you get involved and what degree of choice did you have?</p> <p>What kinds of feelings did you have when asked to implement TRI?</p> <p>Think back to the beginning of your participation in TRI. What were you asked to do in regard to implementation? What did you understand to be your role?</p> <p>Why were you asked to implement this policy? And do you agree or disagree with that purpose? Why?</p>	<p>There was a lot going on this year. What other issues, policies, or initiatives did you have to deal with this year?</p> <p>Thinking back on all of these initiatives, do you feel you had a voice in creating or implementing any of these policies? Do you think teachers have a voice in implementing policy? How so? If teachers don't, who does? How does this make you feel?</p> <p>How would you say the TRI has impacted your sense of</p>

<p>Once implementation started, what motivated you to do it? What or who influenced you in how you did it, how frequently you did it, when you did it, and with whom you did it?</p> <p>Do you feel the TRI has been successful? Why? What did that success/non-success look like? How are you measuring your success/non-success? Do you think other stakeholders (principals, coach, research team) would agree with you?</p> <p>Who is responsible for the TRI's success/lack of success? How so?</p> <p>Consequently, how much power or influence do you feel you have in its implementation? Who else has power or influence? What does that look like?</p> <p>How will your perceptions of success affect your implementation next year?</p> <p>Will you do anything different? Do you feel like you can do something differently? Why or why not?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want to tell me about your role or feelings about policy or about implementing the TRI?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want me to know about your perceptions of the TRI?</p>	<p>empowerment? How so?</p> <p>What other influences affected how you approached the TRI?</p> <p>Do you think using the TRI has been successful? How so or in what ways? What does that look like? What influences your perception of success?</p> <p>Do you think others would agree with your assessment of the TRI's level of success? Why or why not?</p> <p>Has implementing the TRI changed your perceptions on anything?</p>
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Audio-recordings and field notes collected by the facilitators allowed me to check to see if the themes and ideas expressed through the interviews were shared in the focus groups as well, which they were.

**E-mails correspondences.** In addition to looking at data shared by the teachers through the interviews and focus groups, I also examined the correspondences that we had shared throughout the first year of implementation. These correspondences were shared via e-mail and fell into two groups: e-mails that contained post-coaching session feedback and those exchanged in both a personal and professional manner outside of the coaching session. Examples can be seen in Table 3. All were traced back to professional e-mail addresses that were issued and protected by their public school's server, including mine.

The e-mails were examined for several reasons. First, research participants may tell a researcher what they think they might want to hear (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008); this was a particularly probable occurrence since they already knew me in my role as a coach and would be working with me again. Second, the literature on qualitative methods has raised concerns about "reverse causation", where an individual who previously decided to leave

may “rationalize” the decision in part by rating his/her school or experiences poorly (Clotfelter et al, 2008). Lastly, a central concern for rigor in qualitative research is trustworthiness. “Teachers’ perceptions undoubtedly include a lot of random variation, or noise, relative to true signal” (Clotfelter et al, 2008). However, using e-mails was a form of naturalistic inquiry, as these “real world” situations were examined without artificial manipulation and control for the context of the study (Patton, 2002). Hence, using multiple sources of data, some of which were not shared within the context of this particular study, helps verify and confirm findings, which was true in this case as well.

**Table 3: Examples of E-mail Correspondences**

Feedback E-Mails (from coach to teacher)	Personal E-Mails (from teacher to coach)
<p>“I enjoyed watching you work with M today. She is moving SO quickly! While I know you were still a little concerned about some short vowels, I think moving ahead to Green and Purple activities was exactly what she needed!”</p> <p>“It was great to see you this morning! I was expected a more nervous H since you were so reluctant at the Institute but you were FANTASTIC! Your timing was great and you hit all of the main parts of a lesson, including Re-Reading for Fluency, Word Work, Guided Oral Reading, and Extensions. Your emphasis on helping A blend was integrated into many parts of the lesson and you could tell that A was really proud of himself and having a good time! I also really appreciate that when talking about what to do next, you were as enthusiastic as I am about pushing A up to another level. That’s a difficult thing for most teachers because they are worried about overwhelming the child but I agree with you 100% that since A is SO confident, there is no reason to hold him back!”</p> <p>“As I mentioned in our team meeting yesterday, boy do you do a good job of targeting two different sets of needs in one lesson! I loved how you gave G more time to practice reading with Re-Reading for Fluency and then asked F about how she was chunking her words instead of having G explain it!”</p>	<p>“Sorry for the short notice. We had PTA last night so it made for a very long day yesterday. The ESL teacher has asked for J and M to come to her class today to work on a project today for an hour, I am progress monitoring (again) and we have early dismissal today, which makes us go to lunch earlier. I am trying to see how I can fit in our ichat session but I am not sure if I will be able to do so. I wanted you to know so that you would be aware in case I am not able to get on.”</p> <p>“I hope you have had a great week! I have a quick question for you? I just tested J on a DRA2 level 16 (which is on grade level for the end of the year) and he was able to read the story with only a few errors, however he struggled with meeting the time requirement! I know that ReReading for Fluency and Guided Oral Reading are activities I need to continue to target with him, but do you have any other suggestions to improve his fluency??? Thank you so much!!!”</p> <p>“If you need me to move things around tomorrow I can. I can’t guarantee how the kids will be, but I can give them some review work at their seats for awhile, but it would probably be best for me to do it right after they get back from specials around 10:20 before I move onto math. If that makes life easier, not a problem. I’ve had a crazy day myself running out to take my littlest one to the dr. which is why I’m just getting back to you now. I did get my TRI lesson in this am before leaving though. ;) I look forward to seeing you tomorrow – although I’m still nervous about these green lessons a bit!”</p>

**Teacher questionnaires.** As part of the larger TRI study, the teachers took a survey entitled Teacher Questionnaire, much of which came from the ECLS-K national data set

(Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007). The ECLS-K national study was funded by the Department of Education to understand the academic achievement of a nationally representative sample of students who entered kindergarten in 1998-1999, including transition to early education programs and experiences and growth through the eighth grade. It can be analyzed to examine relationships between family, school, community, and individual variables thought to impact educational outcomes ([www.nces.ed.gov/ecis/](http://www.nces.ed.gov/ecis/)).

The teachers in this study filled out the Teacher Questionnaire via an online application in both the fall (2011) and spring (2012) of the first year of implementing the TRI. The questions targeted how often the teachers engaged in various instructional practices, the school climate, feelings of teacher efficacy, and demographics related to themselves, their students, and their schools. For this study, I chose to examine the questions related to school climate, as they were most closely related to the research questions asked in this study and they provided me with a sense of whether or not the teachers seemed to score the items in a similar fashion. (See Table 4.) Using a Likert Scale, with 1 standing for “strongly disagree”, 3 for “neutral”, and 5 for “strongly agree”, attention was paid to the scores themselves, as well as the change in scores from the beginning to the end of the year, which showed me whether there were big changes amongst the teachers in regard to their feelings about their schools. While some differences were noted, overall the teachers rated the items in a similar fashion, with only one teacher of the ten seeming less positive about their school climate and their ability to make decisions after implementing the TRI and three teachers showing a large increase (more than 5 points) in positive feelings towards their school climate.

**Table 4: School Climate Questions**

Power & Policy-Related Questions	Other School Climate Questions	Teacher Scores Before	Teacher Scores After
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		Implementation	Implementation
a. Many of the children I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them.	c. The academic standards at this school are too low.	Maddie – 78	Maddie – 79
b. Teachers in this school are able to make a real difference in their students' lives.	d. School Personnel at this school take a deep and personal interest in each of their children as individuals.	Haley – 84	Haley – 93
f. You can count on most staff members to help out anywhere, anytime.	e. This school is committed to high academic standards.	Pam – 76	Pam – 76
j. Staff are involved in decisions that affect them.	g. Teachers talk with teachers in the next grade in order to get an idea of what their children should know and be able to do when they enter that grade.	Lauren – 84	Lauren – 89
k. Teachers and other staff feel comfortable voicing their concerns in this school.	h. Teachers get worthwhile suggestions for teaching techniques or student activities from other teachers.	Mikayla – 78	Mikayla – 74
l. The school administrators' behavior towards the staff is supportive and encouraging	i. Teachers have many opportunities to spend at least 15 minutes or more meeting with other teachers to work on curriculum and teaching or other professional matters.	Katie – 78	Katie – 78
m. Staff members are recognized for a job well done.	p. Staff members in this school generally have school spirit.	Nellie – 72	Nellie – 79
n. Teachers have adequate professional development opportunities to upgrade their skills.	q. The level of child misbehavior in this school interferes with my teaching.	Tonya – 85	Tonya – 85
o. Some children, due to their home lives, are simply not ready to learn when they come to school.	s. Teachers in this school are continually learning and seeking new ideas.	Caren – 78	Caren – 80
r. I feel accepted and respected as a colleague by most staff members.	u. Parents are supportive of school staff.	Gloria – 75	Gloria – 95
t. Routine administrative duties and paperwork interfere with my job of teaching.		Mean – 78.8	Mean – 82.8
		Range – 72-85	Range – 74-95

**Field notes/preliminary analyses.** Field notes taken by myself throughout the year were also consulted. These notes were related to teachers' strengths and weaknesses, the number of times they were seeing their students, formative assessments used to help make data-driven decisions, and concerns voiced during team meetings or in professional development sessions. They also contained information on informal polls taken amongst the literacy coaches and others working on the project, who would frequently come together to discuss how implementation was going and anecdotally, how the TRI was going, which included references to "success". Given my role in the project, I felt it was important to

acknowledge these formative findings, as they provided a type of storyline as to what was happening throughout implementation. Also, disclosing this information is part of a verification process in obtaining trustworthiness in the study (Creswell, 1998).

### **Participants & Setting**

In traditional qualitative studies, researchers tend to work with small samples of people nested in their contexts to unearth a richly mined data set (Miles & Hubberman, 1994). Keeping with this tradition, this study used purposeful sampling to strategically focus on those who provided the most insight and the most information-rich cases (Patton, 1990), which included the ten of the thirteen teachers who consented to participate whom I worked with as a literacy coach during the first year of implementation of the TRI from 2011 to 2012. This allowed me to provide an in-depth picture of what was happening at the individual level while also sampling nearly 50% of the participants in the total sample of first grade teachers in the larger TRI study (Creswell, 2008).

**Setting.** The teachers in this study were from demographically similar environments as the other first grade teachers participating in the larger TRI study. Classrooms within schools were randomly assigned to the TRI (experimental) or Non-TRI (control) group. The teachers in this study were experimental and came from four of the five different schools I coached in, located in three different counties in this southeastern state. All of the schools were considered to be rural, low-wealth schools with large populations of African American students. Many of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, a measure frequently used to identify schools with populations that are considered at-risk for school failure; in fact, four of the five exceeded the state average for poverty-identified schools. The schools' classrooms averaged between fifteen and twenty-three students and the vast majority of them

did not have a full-time instructional assistant or abundant access to technology. The schools' populations overall did not reflect the state's large number of students labeled as having limited English proficiency, but otherwise had comparable demographics according to [www.\(state\)reportcards.com](http://www.(state)reportcards.com), as seen in Table 5.

**Table 5: School Demographics**

	County	School Size	Class Size	Econ. Disadv.	Performance	Teacher Turn-over	Adv. Degrees
State Average		499	20	54.2%	60-80% at grade level	15%	30%
Tiger Valley	Heals	728	20	87.1%	60-80% (exp. growth met)	17%	35%
Compass	Wyatt	912	22	42.7%	60-100% (exp. growth not met)	11%	30%
Myth River	Peabody	446	18	63.3%	90% (high growth)	14%	25%
Cold Court	Peabody	207	16	68.2%	60-80% (exp. growth met)	12%	53%
Dixie	Peabody	229	17	87.0%	60-80% (exp. growth met)	32%	20%

**Teachers.** The teachers in this study are all female and they were all teaching first grade at the time of this study. They ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty-five years and over half had earned master's degrees, meaning they were more educated than the state's average. All but one of the teachers was from the same state in which they were working in; two-thirds of them were teaching in the same district in which they had graduated from themselves. Nine of the ten were white and the other was African-American. All were native English speakers.

An additional characteristic that stood out was how long they were in their current position. While some of them had taught first grade before, half of the teachers were in their first year of teaching first grade with this particular team of teachers at this particular school. (See Table 6 for details.)

**Table 6: Teacher Demographics**

Teacher	School	County	Years in Current Position	Total Years of Teaching Experience
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Tonya	Tiger Valley	Heals	1 <sup>st</sup>	23
Mikayla	Compass	Wyatt	22	22
Caren	Compass	Wyatt	1 <sup>st</sup>	16
Nellie	Cold Court	Peabody	1 <sup>st</sup>	15
Haley	Tiger Valley	Heals	9	9
Katie	Compass	Wyatt	7	7
Lauren	Myth River	Peabody	5	6
Gloria	Tiger Valley	Heals	1 <sup>st</sup>	5
Maddie	Tiger Valley	Heals	3	4.5
Pam	Myth River	Peabody	1 <sup>st</sup>	.5

While formal fidelity codes had not been created during this first year of implementation, the overall consensus amongst the coaching and research team was that these teachers had done an exceptional job following through with exposure, adherence, and quality, the three elements of fidelity (O'Donnell, 2008). Regarding exposure, the teachers had completed between twelve and sixteen coaching sessions with me over the last four months of implementation and had reported performing between twenty-eight and ninety TRI sessions with their students (See Table 7 for details). They were also committed to receiving their PD. Eight of the ten teachers were trained during the three-day Summer Institutes and late hires Gloria and Pam were later trained during a one-day Make-Up Institute and in a 3-hour one-on-one session. All of the teachers but one had also attended every PD workshop that occurred throughout the year.

In terms of adherence, this was measured by looking at the number of coaching sessions where all four parts of the TRI lesson were implemented (including Re-Reading for Fluency, Word Work, Guided Oral Reading, & Extensions) (Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick, Ginsberg, & Amendum, 2010). No teacher missed more than one part of a lesson more than two times, a testament to their understanding of the TRI and their commitment to planning ahead. Broadly speaking, the teachers in this study were judged to have adhered to the TRI with a high degree of fidelity. As for quality, nearly all of them were featured as a model of demonstrating best practice in one of the ongoing professional development

sessions or in the Summer Institute. I was also privy to comments from the other coaches, which suggested that my teachers were performing the TRI with a higher degree of quality than many of the other teachers participating in the larger TRI study.

**Table 7: Fidelity Data – Exposure & Adherence**

Teacher	# Coaching Sessions	# Team Meetings	# TRI Sessions (total, w/ Children #1, #2, & #3)	# of Coaching Sessions where all 4 Parts of a TRI lesson were observed
Lauren	16	14	90 total: 46, 33, 11	15/16
Nellie	16	13	70 total: 35, 31, 4	15/16
Maddie	15	13	49 total: 9, 29, 11	14/15
Mikayla	14	13	75 total: 32, 31, 12	12/14
Pam	14	13	71 total: 47, 19, 5	13/14
Haley	14	13	28 total: 13, 15, 0	14/14
Katie	13	11	85 total: 39, 28, 18	12/13
Tonya	13	14	66 total: 24, 20, 22	11/13
Caren	13	13	47 total: 22, 15, 10	11/13
Gloria	12	12	39 total: 19, 18, 2	12/12

**TRI students.** For frame of reference, the thirty children chosen to receive the TRI across all of these ten teachers' classrooms were all in first grade for the first time; none had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) but nine had been referred to school-based student-support teams. The decision to work with these particular thirty children was based first on below-average Dibels scores in three sub-tests that were later confirmed with low scores on two sub-tests of the Woodcock-Johnson III (Word Attack or Letter-Word ID). In addition, for all children who qualified, they were administered three subtests on the TOPEL, one subtest of the CTOPP, and the PPVT-III. In the end, sixteen of the chosen were female and fourteen were male. Eighteen were African-American, nine were white, and three were Latino. The majority was eligible for free-reduced lunch. Overall, the struggling readers receiving the TRI represented the demographics of their schools and the general TRI population.

**TRI principals.** Five different principals led the schools in which the teachers were located and all participated in the larger TRI study. Of the five, there were four females and one male; four identified as African-American, the fifth as white. They had varying amounts of experience but two were quite new to the schools they were working in, having served there for less than two years. The principals had different degrees of measurable participation in the project. Two of the five attended the Summer Institute with their teachers and one had attended a team meeting. Several of the principals were known to have rearranged schedules to help build time in for the TRI or found coverage for their teachers so they may attend team meetings during the day. While the decision to participate in the TRI was made at the principal level, this did not reflect a universal commitment towards the implementation of this instructional policy.

Only two principals participated by giving interviews for this particular study, including one from Dixie (neither of whose two teachers participated) and one from Cold Court, both who responded within days of the IRB-approved e-mail request. Contact was made with the other three principals but unfortunately did not result in interviews. One principal replied in person at the Summer Institute, “Whatever you need” but then failed to return any subsequent e-mail requests to schedule an interview. A second principal agreed to an interview after several requests but was unreachable at the scheduled time. A communication received later indicated that the principal was looking forward to the interview and was unsure why we had missed one another; no attempts at follow-up were successful. Finally, the third principal responded back six months after the initial e-mail request was made, “I have not forgotten your request. I am extremely busy. The size of my school and the lack of an assistant principal makes every minute so precious”. Thus, the lack

of participation from the other three principals was not due to an expressed desire not to be a part of the study but appeared to be due to the busy nature of their jobs and schedules and thus not a high priority with their other commitments.

**TRI research team.** The research team, whose perspectives were compared and contrasted to the teachers, consisted of the principal investigator, two co-program directors, and two co-intervention directors. All self-identified as white women between the ages of thirty and sixty-five, all of whom had earned their PhDs in psychology, social work, or education. Three of the five team members had taught in classrooms within the K-12 System. While only one was originally from the state in which this research was located, four of the five resided there. Two of the five members of the research team had been involved in the TRI since its inception, the other three were on the project between six and eighteen months, providing a large spectrum of experiences within the team.

**Literacy coach.** Similar to the other four literacy coaches who were working on the TRI, I am a white female who had taught within the state, in which I continue to reside. I had five years of teaching experience (kindergarten and third grade) and was working on my PhD; the only training I had in literacy coaching came from weekly sessions working with one of the intervention directors. I differed from the other coaches in that I was not from the southeast, I had spent two years working on the TRI instead of just one, and I was the youngest coach by approximately five years.

### **Positionality**

Many literacy coaches find themselves “caught in the middle between the clearly defined roles of teachers and administrators” (K’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012, p.56). For me as the literacy coach, I was situated between the teachers and the research team. I attended bi-

weekly meetings with the research team and weekly coaching sessions and team meetings with the teachers. I attempted to ensure the instructional policy, the TRI, was implemented with fidelity while also providing scaffolding to teachers who needed assistance. I often acted as the intermediary between the two groups, transmitting messages from one to another, some of which were logistical (i.e. asking for surveys to be completed, permission slips to be sent out, or confirming days when assessors could come out) and others that were more ideological (i.e. asking for explanations around certain measures, requesting they try certain strategies with particular children). This juxtaposition enabled me to relate to both groups without being considered a full member of either, acting as insider and outsider, participant observer, and policy analyst.

Despite these various roles, within the context of this study, my primary role was to be a policy analyst, who

*then becomes a facilitator of deliberation bringing together multiple perspectives to explore alternative courses of action and to help people see the limits of their current perspectives in policy debates. The analysts' report incorporates the perspectives of key stakeholders and it incorporates the multiple, conflicting and negotiated subjective perspectives of people who lay meaning on policies.* (Marshall, 1997, p.10-11)

Some might argue that my position as the teachers' literacy coach was a key limitation in this study; that the role and subsequent association had too much influence on the results.

However, the benefits provided through the access afforded by the relationships established with the teachers exceeded the limitations, for one of the strengths in working with these teachers was that we had established relational trust. Relational trust is explicit and emphasizes interdependence, where everyone knows his or her role (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The teachers, with whom I had worked with since August of 2011, understood that as their literacy coach I was a coach and advocate for them; as a member of the TRI team that I

shared their questions and concerns with the researchers; as a former teacher that I empathized with them; and that as a graduate student, I was also involved in my own research efforts.

Relational trust also assists in teacher buy-in, increased honest communication, and an openness that allows participants to take more risks (2003). During team meetings, teachers would remark, “Only for you will I do this”, “You’re not like the others (researchers and assessors)” and “I’ve got to be honest, I haven’t met with my TRI students at all the last week”, leading me to believe the sometimes unfavorable opinions and ideas shared with me during the implementation of the TRI were genuine.

Despite my best intentions to stay objective, I am aware that my subjective perspectives did affect the study itself; knowing this from the outset is important so readers understand my position and any biases that may emerge (Merriam, 1988, cited in Adams, 2005). After all, I had authentic, sincere relationships with the teachers and frequently shared examples from my own teaching experiences; would linger after observations to hear how their sons and daughters were doing; and often were their sounding board when it came to issues they were struggling with, whether they were related to the TRI or not. And, it was in part because of these relationships that I was motivated to do this particular study, as I sincerely wanted to make sure their voices were heard. However, additional verification procedures were used to ensure the validity of the study, including the clarification of researcher bias, member checking, peer review and debriefing, and a thorough triangulation of the data sources (Glesne, 2006).

### **Data Collection**

Most secondary sources of data were collected previous to the initiation of this study, as they were gathered for use in the larger, federally funded randomized control trial of the TRI. Included in this collection were conversations between the teachers and myself after a coaching session, during team meetings and through e-mails, surveys that measured background information, general literacy instruction in the classroom, pedagogical knowledge, teacher knowledge, and teacher/child instructional match. Also, an additional survey with similar questions to those asked during interviews were collected from the five Literacy Coaches as a pilot measure to evaluate the potential levels of similarities and differences that may exist within groups.

The primary source of data came from the interviews, which were performed after the Institutional Review Board approved the appropriate protocols and consents in July 2012. The consent forms provided information about the stages and intent of the research, the time requirements and potential risk of identification in the study reports, and the steps taken to assure the highest level of confidentiality possible.

Once consent was received, the interviews were conducted with the teachers via iChat in August after the second Summer Institute, when the focus groups were conducted, but before the second year of TRI implementation began. Interviews with the two principals were scheduled and performed in August, although participation was solicited through January 2013. Interviews with the members of the research team were done in August and September. Member checking occurred in January so that participants could both check their responses and provide feedback on a summary sheet of the responses given by their colleagues. Several small corrections were identified; the majority of the participants found both their and their colleagues' responses to be an accurate portrayal of their perceptions of their roles in policy,

their and other stakeholders' influence during implementation of the TRI, and in determining whether the TRI was successful and if so, in what ways. Additionally, peer review was solicited from three teachers, two administrators, and one literacy coach from outside the study to check for generalizability. All peers indicated that the themes identified from the data resonated with them and seemed to be an honest and accurate portrayal of how teachers feel and view their roles within the policy world.

### **Data Analysis**

Once interviews were conducted, I listened to each recorded interview multiple times while transcribing them, paying particular attention to well-articulated quotes. Individual profiles were then completed, which provided a summary of what was shared between the interviewee and myself. These were sent back to the interviewee to check for accuracy and proper representation. Only small discrepancies were reported back, which were immediately documented.

As this process was being completed, I began a preliminary exploratory analysis to determine whether more information was needed and to obtain a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2008). While the interviews appeared to provide all the information needed, it became apparent that the teachers were talking about the TRI very differently from other instructional policies, like the Common Core. To provide clarification, the teachers were consulted by e-mail to explain why they were characterizing the two instructional policies differently. Approximately half of the teachers responded, all citing similar themes.

Once the data set was complete, intentional codes were applied, which were developed to look at particular ideas and categories within groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process helped condense the data into analyzable units (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Amongst the intentional codes applied were those related to the teachers' perceptions of their roles in policy and specifically in the TRI, what they identified as influences in how they implemented various instructional policies, and their definitions/measures of success of the TRI. These codes were established ahead of time because they related directly to the research questions: What perceptions do teachers have of their role in policy implementation? What influence do various stakeholders have on policy implementation and on its success? And, how do stakeholders' perceptions of a policy's success complement or contrast with the teachers?

The intentional codes were also applied to secondary sources, including the transcripts and field notes taken during the focus groups, personal e-mails sent from the teachers to myself, and feedback e-mails sent from myself to the teachers, all of which I had been given permission to do through the IRB-approved consents. Additionally, the questions from the Teacher Questionnaire that appeared to relate to the intentional codes were also examined, mainly question #6 about the environmental climate of their schools. This data was then compiled into a large data display and then examined for inconsistencies by stakeholder, of which few existed. A chart was created in the traditional paradigm, which represented the data. Once the chart was created, the results were compared and contrasted within and between the stakeholder groups following the constant-comparative method (1996). This procedure allowed me to compare emerging conceptual categories as they were recorded and clarified.

Moreover, I kept in mind the principles Linda Darling-Hammond (1990) recommends for those analyzing educational policies: Policy must be better communicated if it is to be well understood; policies do not land in a vacuum; policies land on top of other policies;

teachers teach from what they know; and the process of change is slow and difficult. As such, I also looked for patterns and themes related to context and took explicit notes related to what was happening within the schools during the time of implementation; how the goals of the TRI and the teachers' roles were communicated to them; and how these were similar and different from the perceptions shared by the principals, members of the research team, and those I had myself.

I also approached the data with an explicit aim to provide an interpretive analysis, which presents multiple meanings, because of the desire to use elements from both traditional and critical perspectives. "Interpretation illuminates experience, refining the meanings that can be shifted from the account of the experience" (Wildy, 2003, p.122). To do so, an open-coding scheme was applied so that patterns and themes were allowed to emerge from the data. "Themes", as I have referenced, are statements of meaning that run through all or much of the pertinent data (Ely, 1991). Using an open-coding scheme was important because it "can be used to expand, transform, and reconceptualize data, opening up more analytical possibilities" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.29).

Amongst others, themes related to real and perceived control, influence, responsibility, and types of power each stakeholder group was perceived to have emerged. This approach was performed with particular care for, "Such an approach requires qualitative methodology by a politically astute analyst with a moral purpose. This may not eliminate oppressive structures, but the analysis can help groups raise fundamental questions or get the oppressed to see" (Freire, 1985, Ryan, 1988, cited in Marshall, 1997, p.10-11). As such, some questions that were kept in mind as the process shifted from coding to interpretation

came from those used in critical reflexivity, which helped me understand the data I collected, my role in the research process, my effect on the data and informants, and my assumptions.

### **Critical Reflexivity**

As shared in my statement of positionality, I played multiple roles during the implementation of the instructional policy, the TRI. As a literacy coach, I was both an instructional support and advocate for the participating teachers and their struggling readers. As a member of the TRI team, I was an invested colleague, intent on doing my part during the implementation process to make sure the instructional policy was executed with fidelity and that we achieved the best outcomes possible. And as a graduate student, I was constantly making connections with what *I knew*, what *I read*, what *I saw*, and what *I felt* that was important.

At times, I felt that what *I knew*, *read*, *saw*, and *felt* were in constant conflict with one another. This is reflected in part, in the types of data I collected. *I knew*, based on what I had read, that when it comes to research on reading interventions, policy studies, and implementation, that traditionally quantitative studies are seen as the gold standard and appear to be published more frequently in highly regarded educational research journals than studies that relied on qualitative data. This is because quantitative data is often seen as being value-neutral and objective. As a result, I felt inclined to use some of the quantitative data already collected by the larger TRI study, including the Teacher Questionnaires, standardized test scores, and fidelity data. *I saw* that relying on only one or two sources of data was problematic, as it offered a limited perspective on what was happening. Additionally, if those one or two sources were based solely on self-reported data, they were not regarded as being particularly reliable, thus the inclusion of the feedback and personal e-mails. Finally, *I felt*

that to really understand what was happening during the implementation of the TRI, it was the teachers' voices and perceptions that would provide the most internal validity. The teachers were the stakeholders that were most responsible for making sure the TRI was delivered to the students; they were the ones whose lives seemed to be most intimately affected by the pressure of delivering this instructional policy on a daily basis; and they were part of the group of marginalized voices that has inspired me to leave my kindergarten classroom to get involved in the research and advocacy efforts available through graduate school. Consequently, I chose to use interviews as my primary source of data and focus groups as one of my secondary sources.

I felt the same conflict as I reflected on my role in the research process and what my effect might be on the data and informants. *I knew* based on what I had read, that interviewing the teachers I had a relationship with might cause concern or put into question the data collected. Despite all of my good intentions and feelings that the teachers simply saw me as a coach and/or a sense of support, *I knew* that when I read a study, I wondered about the power dynamics that existed between teachers and coaches, developers and implementers, and those doing the research versus being researched. When examining the data, *I saw* that sometimes there was a difference in what the teachers indicated on surveys as opposed to what they told me, for what they told me was usually less "politically-correct", more critical, and less restrained; additionally, the language *I saw* in the e-mail communications clearly indicated that some of the teachers were concerned about hurting my feelings and cared about how I viewed them ("Sorry Kathryn I had a meeting and completely forgot. I am so sorry!"), whereas others reported to me in a manner that seemed more business-like ("I was absent yesterday with my son and just got your

email. My assistant is out this week so it is a bit crazy around here. If tomorrow doesn't work we will need to shoot for next Wednesday"). Lastly, *I felt* some anxiety when I wrote up the IRB consent forms, when I asked certain interview questions (like, "Have you ever felt powerless?"), and when I began analyzing the e-mails we had exchanged, examining them as if they were simply just another form of data and not the documentation of our relationships. However, I also *felt* a sense of accomplishment that finally, someone was giving the teachers a chance to share their perceptions and opinions and I was proud to be that person.

I share these reflections under the assumption that this all matters to those examining this research. It might not. Perhaps my training as a researcher, my close involvement in the TRI, or my background as a former classroom teacher already positions me as Freire put it, "a politically astute analyst with a moral purpose". However, the hope is that by engaging in this critical reflexivity, "groups [that] raise fundamental questions" are more concerned about *the messages* transmitted through the data than by *the person*, myself, who is transmitting the data.

## **Summary**

This qualitative study was designed to provide elements from both traditional and critical policy analyses to help present teachers' perceptions of their and other stakeholders' roles and influence during the implementation of an instructional policy, the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI), and its success. It used semi-structured interviews as its primary source of data but was triangulated with data collected through focus groups, personal and feedback e-mail communications, teacher questionnaires, and field notes/preliminary analyses. Additional verification procedures were also used to ensure the trustworthiness of

the study, including the clarification of positionality, member checking, and peer review and debriefing; critical reflexivity was also undertaken to provide further transparency about data collection, my role in the research process, and my effect on the data and informants.

Through the careful orchestration and application of both selective and open codes, a number of themes emerged, which are presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

Qualitative research methods and intentional coding were used to analyze the data to help answer the research questions about the teachers' perceptions of their role in policy implementation, what influence they believed they and other stakeholders had during implementation of the TRI, and if and how they perceived the instructional policy to be successful. As is the nature in qualitative work, the data was approached with an open mind and open coding was also used so themes were allowed to emerge, providing a richer sense of what was happening during the implementation of the TRI.

Elements of both traditional and critical policy analysis were also used. The traditional approach to examining policy implementation is considered to be "efficient" (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005), as it follows the canon that "policy is value-neutral" (Luke, 2003) and not to be contested based on perceived inequities or inequalities. This approach was desired because of its connection to change processes. Policy researchers concerned with processes of change, as I was because of the connection between the TRI and Guskey's Model of Teacher Change, often use traditional policy analysis because of its assumptions that planning, implementation, examination, and evaluation can occur; that goals drive action; that the knowledge needed for implementation and evaluation is obtainable; and in the end, problems can be identified and improved (Young, 1999). However, because the questions were critical in nature, elements of critical policy analysis were also used. These elements reframed the study, adding to the "What works?" perspective with a "The policy

works for what or for whom?” (Edmondson, 2001, p. 620) type of perspective. This approach tapped into additional sources of data and assumed that, “There is no such thing as neutral education or neutral quality. Because to fight for the reorientation or reform of education implies a political option and, moreover, demands a political decision in order for it to materialize” (Freire, 1998, p.43). This reminder that “there is no such thing as neutral” required I use critical reflexivity, which I chose to acknowledge by sharing the messages I was (literally) sending to the teachers about the TRI. Additionally, Freire’s reminder about the fight for “the reorientation of education” reminded me that it is not my voice that needs to be heard but that of the teachers’. As a result, the teachers’ words were used to communicate their perceptions about their and other stakeholders’ roles and influence during the implementation of the TRI, as well as their definitions of success, as much as possible so that readers could truly “hear their voices.”

### **Perceptions of Roles**

“Things just come down the pipe; this is the way it’s going to be”

(Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012).

To recognize teachers’ perceptions of their role in policy implementation, the teachers were asked during semi-structured interviews and the focus groups about the roles they played in making decisions about and implementing policy, how they felt about taking on those roles, and what degree of choice they had in determining those roles throughout the 2011-2012 school year. To provide additional detail, the teachers were prompted to consider these questions as they related to both the policies they identified as having implemented throughout the year (Common Core, RTI, etc.), as well as to just the TRI. After triangulating the interview responses with the data collected in the secondary sources, two primary themes

emerged, that of “Real lack of control”, where teachers indicated they had no voice in decision-making and implementation efforts when it came to policy, and “Perceived lack of control”, where the data seemed to indicate a shift in the teachers’ perceptions of control when specifically applied to the TRI.

**A real lack of control.** When asked, “How much power or influence do you feel you have in making decisions about policy?” the answer for many teachers was simply, “None.” As Maddie stated, “If the county makes a decision, you’re going to do it no matter what. You don’t have any say-so” (interview response, August 15, 2012). Similarly, Haley reiterated Maddie’s perspective about the county they worked in: “The decisions they [the county] make were just given to us, and we were told, ‘Here, go with it’” (interview response, August 15, 2012). This perception that they as teachers did not have a voice was not limited to teachers from Tiger Valley. Caren mentioned in her focus group that teachers in Wyatt County also had no voice in whether or not they wanted to implement something because, “Central Office has the voice” (August 9, 2012).

At the same time, the comments about “doing it no matter what” indicated that the teachers had no voice and because of the current power structures, had to follow the decisions made for them. For when asked, “What would happen if you did not follow them?” one teacher commented, “I think you’d get either reprimanded or moved” (interview response, August 13, 2012).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While ideally more of the teachers’ perceptions of the consequences of not implementing certain instructional policies would be shared, because of the small sample size and the controversial nature of the question, it was decided that protecting the teachers’ professional identities was more important. It should be inferred that none of the teachers felt they could simply say “no” to any policy makers.

Upon changing the question slightly to who had the power to make decisions – *and who was powerless* – the answer also changed, this time to “some”. As Caren commented, “Powerless is a strong word” (interview response, August 13, 2012). The answer “some” reflected a sample of the teachers who were reluctant to say they were totally silent, as many shared that there were times when teacher involvement was invited. For example, Lauren stated, “I’ve had opportunities to help make decisions” (interview response, August 15, 2012) and while Pam did not have an opportunity to help in the decision-making herself, she did acknowledge, “I guess some of the teachers did, yes” (interview response, August 13, 2012). Tonya frequently qualified her remarks during her interview with statements like, “They always let us...” “There were plenty of opportunities to voice our opinions”, and “She [principal] does listen and tries and there are committees that ask for opinions”, (August 14, 2012). However, Tonya’s statements ended with comments like, “but they don’t always acknowledge them [our voices] in the way we want them to” or “but they go with what they want to say”. Caren’s response followed the same trend, as she said she did not feel “powerless” but yet still stated, “No matter what your opinion is, the county is going to implement this” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

However, these “opportunities” that were alluded to in Tonya’s qualifiers to become involved were seen as being disingenuous, as the teachers were not given any type of real control. Lauren, who had stated that she had opportunities to help make decisions (through her work with the district level Teacher Advisory Committee), in the same breath admitted that most decisions were “county-wide decisions so we didn’t have any actual decisions to make” (interview response, August 15, 2012). Haley was on the Leadership Team at her school and while she mentioned having some control in making decisions, they were mostly

related to “little stuff like staff parties or conference days” (interview response, August 15, 2012) and not about the things she really cared about – helping her students. Nellie recognized a similar phenomenon occurring at her school. She had been on her school’s Leadership Team for seven of the last eight years, felt people were good to her, and that she had some input into the school’s happenings (interview response, August 17, 2012). But while reflecting on this, she began to realize that her position on the team was used more to have her relay information back to her colleagues and to turn in lesson plans, team meeting minutes, and proof they were doing what they were supposed to be doing to her administration than to actually participate in making important decisions. Instead of being in control, she was the one being controlled.

The teachers did not see themselves as getting more control either. As Nellie commented, “It’s gone from no more decisions at the school level to almost no decisions being made at the classroom level” (interview response, August 17, 2012). Nellie reflected that in addition to feeling they had little control in making the policies, teachers often felt they had little power in implementing them. The teachers attributed these feelings to 1) being micromanaged by the state department of instruction (Gloria, focus group response, August 9, 2012) and 2) being so overwhelmed with the number of new policies, they never had time to put **any** of the policies into place within their classrooms. “The expectations are so beyond what anyone out here can accomplish. They are and that makes me so sad, to kind of feel defeated right from the very beginning” (Gloria, interview response, August 28, 2012). “Defeated” is exactly how Caren was feeling at the beginning of the year as well, as she explained to me in an e-mail,

*Sorry that we cannot get this together for you. It's just so much is happening right now and we have only been in school for 8 days. We are trying to do county*

*assessments to develop groups, RTI [assessors are] coming to test, we have had assemblies, a day out due to storms and the students are adjusting to procedures and routines. Just so much to do and not enough time. (September 8, 2011)*

As Mikayla, who worked with Caren at Compass Elementary tried to explain, “When you’re starting so many new things at once, you do feel overwhelmed. You feel like you don’t know if you can do a good job” (interview response, August 13, 2012). Unfortunately for her, a teacher who already had twenty-two years under her belt, those feelings were not limited to the beginning of the year. At the end of February, she was still worrying about getting it all in, noting the various tasks she was balancing while trying to reschedule a coaching session via e-mail, “How does your schedule look for tomorrow? We will be on a field trip Friday and we are ‘Progress Monitoring’ this week, also due by Friday. Ugh!” (February 28, 2012) Even come May, things had not gotten better for the teachers, as Katie commented,

*It has been extremely hard to juggle everything and do TRI. I have always tried to be diligent to the study and get on when I am supposed to, but it has been tooo much these past few weeks. I feel like I haven't really been able to be my best at anything because I have been spread too thin. (e-mail correspondence, May 3, 2012)*

These comments from the teachers indicated they felt more than “overwhelmed”, “crazy”, or “spread too thin”, terms any teacher might use to describe a day of working with twenty-something five-year-olds. Instead, the teachers’ comments indicated that not only were they not in control of making decisions but that they did not feel they were being set up for success by those who were.

The enormous number of “new” policy directives the teachers were asked to implement that year was perhaps what made the teachers feel the least in control and the least set up for success, especially given how many of them used mandates. A Mandate is a policy tool used to make sure all teachers are following the same basic sequence with the same

activities (see Table 8). As a result of feeling such little control, the teachers seemed to give up and simply accept this fate subscribed to them, a fate that involved no power or decision-making on their part and that generally made them feel poor about themselves. For example, one of the new policy initiatives included new lesson plan formats that made Haley feel, “like a student teacher again” (interview response, August 15, 2012); another set of new PEP (Personalized Education Plans) forms that “were a very big deal, no leniency” (Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012); and another, RTI (Response to Intervention, 2006), which required DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) training and “extra assessments every two weeks” (Katie, interview response, August 13, 2012). Learning Focus, a model that provided “exemplary” school reform practices, an experience which Pam described as being, “Kind of stressful for a beginning teacher in and of itself” (interview response, August 13, 2012) and Time to Teach, a behavior plan that focused more on reflection and a decentralized source of control “that we had no voice in deciding to do, we just had to get on the bandwagon” (Maddie, focus group response, August 9, 2012) were mentioned by several teachers as being equally degrading and difficult to adjust to, as were references to the Common Core Standards (2009), which required the teachers to complete online training modules, attend after-school meetings, and use all of their teacher workdays for related professional development (Tonya, interview response, August 14, 2012). (See Table 8 for more information.) In addition to these initiatives, plus the TRI, five of the ten teachers were still trying to figure out the curriculum as well, as they were new to the school and/or grade level. Already a bit broken down by all of the other policies, new teacher Pam commented that when she found out she would be doing the TRI in addition to everything else during her first year of teaching, “I was just okay, this is something I’ve gotta do so let’s

just do it” (interview response, August 13, 2012). While several teachers made statements about “making it through” and it being a “stressful year,” perhaps Mikayla summed it up best by saying, “What were we NOT doing? It was a stressful year... Trying to accommodate new PEPs, new lesson plans, new RTI, and for some of us, new TRI – it was a lot of new” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

**Table 8: New Policies Introduced in 2011-2012**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Schools Impacted...</b>	<b>Policy Instruments Used...</b>	<b>Perceptions from Teachers</b>
New lesson plan format	Tiger Valley, Compass, Cold Court, Myth River, Dixie	Mandates (except for at Tiger Valley, whose principal used capacity building by adopting the new format one subject at a time)	Time-consuming; more explicitness required than necessary; entire grade level had to do it together during PLCs (Professional Learning Communities)
New PEP plans	Compass	Mandates	Time-consuming; new eligibility requirements made them applicable to record-levels of kids, which required lots of additional paperwork for teachers
RTI	Tiger Valley, Compass, Cold Court, Myth River, Dixie	Mandates	Too many assessments; hard to keep up with progress monitoring; keeping kids who need extra support having to wait longer
Learning Focus (introduced one year previous)	Cold Court, Myth River, Dixie	Mandates, desire to be System-Changing	Required actions to comply appeared unrelated to helping children; addressed everything from what you put on your walls to how the lesson plan was written to how reading groups were created; no one knew what to do or what good implementation looked like
Time to Teach (introduced two years previous)	Tiger Valley	Mandates	Behavior plan did not give tangible consequence; teachers felt their hands were tied and instructional time was interrupted often
Common Core Standards	Tiger Valley, Compass, Cold Court, Myth River, Dixie	Mandates	Lots of time spent on professional development without any type of implementation; not sure what it would look like in practice; no practical advice; unable to answer teacher questions and concerns
New Teacher Seminars	Tiger Valley, Myth River	Inducements	Required lots of extra meetings on and off campus; very humbling for those not new to teaching and only new to the county
Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI)	Tiger Valley, Compass, Cold Court, Myth River, Dixie	(Primarily) Capacity building, mandate for some	Good for kids; always willing to learn something new; hard to work into the schedule; overwhelmed with the multiple parts; worried about videotaping; excited about quick results

What was also new for some of the teachers like Mikayla was that because they were

doing what others had decided they should do, consequently they were also *not doing what they would have chosen to do* – an issue that appeared in my field notes multiple times as we negotiated the expectations, the schedule, and the demands each teacher was facing. This meant that sometimes the teachers were forgoing special activities like plays or celebrations, as their planning days were no longer available to organize such events, filled up now with professional development sessions dedicated to learning the Common Core or the TRI; they were giving up teaching special holiday thematic units so they could get in all of their benchmark and DIBELS assessments for RTI or meet with me via web-cam for their weekly coaching session; the teachers were no longer using an instructional pacing guide similar to what they had used before, where the students would first learn the letters, the sounds, words, and only after all of those skills were mastered, would they allow the child to begin to try and read a book, as the TRI required they teach the letter sounds within the context of words within contexts of authentic literature starting day one. Additionally, some teachers had to forgo seeing all of their students on a daily basis for guided oral reading so they could “fit in” the one-on-one TRI sessions as well. As demonstrated in my feedback e-mails, I recognized the sacrifices they were making and I walked gingerly, trying to specifically acknowledge their attempts at doing what the TRI instructed them to do, wanting to make sure that they knew their efforts were appreciated.

*I'm so glad we could connect. It was really nice seeing A. again. Your lesson was so well planned, targeted, and executed that I could see very clearly that you were working on using more complex word strategies with words with the long "o" sound at the Green level. ... Again, thanks so much for getting on so I could see what wonderful work you are doing with A.! (feedback e- mail, January 27, 2012).*

I also went to great lengths to let Mikayla know that I knew it was tough for her to fit the TRI into her day but that I appreciated her efforts, writing, “Thanks for taking a break from your

benchmark testing. I'm sure it's been a long day!" (feedback e-mail, April 19, 2012), and "I'm sorry your day was such a hectic one. Thanks for making the extra efforts to make sure we could meet!" (feedback e-mail, May 9, 2012) On her end, she communicated that even though she was busy and struggling with getting it all in, she cared about working with her student, she cared about meeting with me, and she cared about how she was being seen and/or evaluated.

*I know you don't work on Fridays but is there a time today that you could make yourself available to video? I got the impression from your e-mail that you are thinking that I am not working with my TRI student if I don't video with you. We do work everyday together. Some days are just the way they were yesterday... unpredictable. (e-mail communication, January 13, 2012)*

It was a tough balance for both of us – her trying to do something she did not want to do in the first place when she felt she had no real control and me having to “force” her to do the TRI when I knew how stressed she was. Despite the tensions, the end results were her being one of the best implementers in the entire study and consequently, being incredibly generous with her time and thoughts in regard to this study.

Mikayla was not the only teacher though, that really, really cared about making sure they were being understood as someone who was trying their best at a time when they had no control and yet *not* being seen as someone who was deliberately refusing to do what was asked of them. Katie, too, made sure I knew that despite how difficult it was to balance all of the demands being placed on them, she and her colleagues at Compass Elementary were trying to follow-through, like on this day when the TRI had a half-day web-based professional development session.

*Just wanted to give you a heads up that all three of us will not have assistants tomorrow, and so I will get back and sign in [to Adobe Connect] as soon as possible. The kids will be dismissed about 1:15 and then I will get signed in asap. Mikayla and I are probably going to work out a plan so that at least I can get*

*back quickly and sign in and start listening until the others can get here. Sorry for the late notice, but I just found out for sure. Thanks!* (e-mail communication, March 13, 2012)

However, the teachers' willingness to try new policies, put forth the effort, and make accommodations was not in exchange for naught. As Nellie put it, "I don't mind doing extra things if it's good for my kids" (interview response, August 17, 2012). She later followed up by saying, "I'm always willing to try new things but I need some direction on where you want me to go so I'm not wasting my time" (e-mail communication, January 21, 2013). Without that direction, the teachers seemed to feel as if they had even less control. Lauren reported that morale was very low during the first year of policy implementation of Learning Focus because everyone felt very powerless. No one knew what to do, and, "We perceived it as, 'Everything you're doing is wrong. You need to do this, this, and this'" (interview response, August 15, 2012). She later clarified, stating, "Quite honestly we were told to change our classrooms and begin certain instructional strategies without any training or reasoning for a year" (e-mail communication, January 22, 2013).

The teachers expressed similar frustrations about implementing the Common Core. The concerns were not about the instructional policy itself but that they did not know what it would look like, what materials they should use, and how their implementation would be evaluated. In addition, when questions were asked, the frequent response during one of the schools' Common Core Professional Development sessions was, "You'll know by the end of the day" (Maddie, personal response, August 15, 2012), which put the misunderstandings back on them because at the end of the day, often times they did not "know by the end of the day".

**Not** having a voice when it came to choosing what policies to adopt, **not** really being allowed to be a part of the decision-making process, **not** being set up to implement the

policies because of the overwhelming number of them, and **not** knowing how to implement the policies all led to the teachers explicitly voicing their perception that they had no control when it came to policy implementation, nor did they feel they were set up for success. Implicitly, they also shared that they were uncomfortable with the possibility of being considered wrong, incompetent, or uncaring. Neither perception felt positive.

**A perceived lack of control.** The teachers commented that they had no control when it came to anything about policy. They felt like they were being told what to do by nearly everyone – the state “was breathing down central office’s neck” (Gloria, interview response, August 28, 2012), the district “were the ones making those decisions” (Haley, interview response, August 15, 2012), the principal told them “Well, we’re doing it, I don’t want to hear complaining” (Katie, interview response, August 13, 2012), and sometimes, those working with the TRI [like myself and others involved in facilitating the PD] left them thinking, “We heard you’ll do this, you’ll do this, and you’ll do this all in fifteen minutes and we were like really? Really?” (Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012). These feelings came up again and again during the focus groups as well, as Caren said, “We have no voice in whether or not we want to implement something. When we are given a voice, they [Central Office] respond, ‘Well this is what you’re going to do’ and we wonder, ‘Why did they even ask?’” (August 9, 2012).

However, there was also an acknowledgement by some teachers that they did not always want to have a voice. Sometimes this was due to their assessment of what they felt comfortable doing and what they knew about. For example, when discussing instructional policies related to reading, Caren stated, “I know some things, but I’m not an expert” (interview response, August 13, 2012). When asked how much power she felt she had in

reading policy implementation, Gloria responded, “I have as much as I would want” (interview response, August 28, 2012). Both Caren and Gloria, while not new to teaching were new to first grade, and indicated that they appreciated using an instructional model that helped them with the finer details of reading instruction. Additionally, eight of the ten teachers signaled that they were as involved as they wanted to be in making decisions that affected them, as indicated on the Teacher Questionnaire. Katie, who claimed she had 75% of the power and her coach had the other 25%, commented, “if it were up to you [myself, her coach], I would have been making all of the decisions” (e-mail communication, January 13, 2013). But, as Mikayla argued, “Sometimes I just wanted you to tell me what to do, it would be easier to just follow a list” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

For the teachers that did want some power, several felt they had a lot of control when it came to implementing the TRI. Haley commented, “I had power in deciding which direction kids went. I wasn’t powerless; I felt like my input was valued, and we (coach and teacher) came to a consensus” (interview response, August 15, 2012). That input was valued by me, as evident in a feedback e-mail I sent to her on February 8, 2012, “You’re right on target Haley - just keep meeting with him consistently a bit longer and maybe we’ll see that breakthrough we’re waiting for!” Haley’s perception that she had power and that her input was valued was validated in the Teacher Questionnaire as well; in fact, all ten teachers indicated on their surveys they “Felt accepted and respected as a colleague by most staff members”.

Like Haley, Lauren and Nellie both commented that they had a lot of power when it came to the TRI. They felt their power come out in deciding how to use the TRI time, deciding on what to focus on during the lesson, and when picking which activities they

wanted to do. Additionally, Lauren commented that she understood the TRI, saw how she could use it in reading groups, and didn't feel like time was wasted with it (focus group response, August 9, 2012). Having this kind of power not only helped the teachers feel valued and in control but it also helped them feel like they were taking back some of the control they lost while trying to do the overwhelming number of tasks they were often are forced to do: "I've had a crazy day myself running out to take my littlest one to the doctor, which is why I'm just getting back to you now. I did get my TRI lesson in this am before leaving though. ;)" (e-mail communication, December 5, 2011)

This change reflected a **re-framing** for most of the teachers, as they began to acknowledge that while they might not have control in deciding which policies to adopt, or how to prevent the school day from being "crazy", with the TRI, they did have some control when it came to policy implementation. This control came about for several reasons: 1) they felt their professional judgment was respected in making instructional decisions and 2) I was there to provide as much or as little support as they needed so they were set up for success.

*I have more power now than in the beginning. I feel better about it. [I] thought we wouldn't have any say or we'd be told what to do and then get scrutinized if we didn't get it done. Now I see I have a little more say in it. The teacher decides when to move on, when to go to the next level, and is allowed to pick their own book. Sometimes I just want the coach to tell me what to do; it would be easier to just follow a list. But, I feel more powerful now that I know I can pull my words from the next book [to use during Word Work] and that the coach isn't checking on us, but there for support. (Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012).*

This change in thought was especially powerful for some of the teachers more than others. Katie and Mikayla, who both taught at Compass Elementary in Wyatt County, described themselves as starting out feeling bitter because they were forced to do the TRI when their principal superseded their vote of twelve to two not to do the TRI (which was not

how the TRI team had intended for things to happen). However, after acknowledging the system they were forced to be a part of, Katie seemed to find her own power,

*At first I probably was very frustrated, very resistant to it and then I just adjusted. It was one of those things that I knew we were going to have to do. I didn't like it, but I had to do it... it's really not that bad, just one more thing to remember...and I tweaked the things I wasn't doing well with... I made it my own. That's just how I work"* (interview response, August 13, 2012).

Katie also indicated during the interview that she felt powerless "but only from a professional standpoint... and I knew it [the TRI] would be good for kids and that's the bottom line" (interview response, August 13, 2012). These two comments indicated that she differentiated between her personal and professional identity and values but that overall, Katie felt she had reclaimed some of the power she sensed was taken from her when her principal decided the school would take on the TRI (despite the majority of the staff voting "no" not to get involved); and, she had become involved in the decision-making process as it related to issues that helped her students, an issue some of the other teachers indicated were important to them as well. Mikayla seemed to build off Katie's sentiments as well, commenting, "If I'm going to be in it, I'm going to do it well. I want to see results" (interview response, August 13, 2012).

Those who were new to the school or grade level also did not have any control over whether or not they would be doing the TRI; however, they did not vocalize the same degree of bitterness, perhaps because they saw the TRI as giving them *more* control. Gloria was told that participating in the TRI was simply part of the position. She commented that she did not question it, she loved to learn, and was excited to be a part of the program and to learn more (interview response, August 28, 2012). Additionally, "it provided a systematic approach, structure, support, strategies, was helpful, and was a tremendous resource" (focus group

response, August 9, 2012). Caren was unaware that she would be participating until she was already “in the door” but also voiced that she was always willing to learn something new and felt it would help her learn how to be a better first grade teacher [since she was coming from kindergarten] (interview response, August 13, 2012). Pam, Nellie, and Tonya, who were also new to their grade levels, had similar experiences; they did not have control over whether or not to do it, but as Pam noted, “You signed up for teaching and getting kids where they need to be. So, you have to do what your kids need, to get [them] where they need to be” (interview response, August 18, 2012). Pam’s attitude was evident in her practice as well, as I had commented in the feedback e-mail below:

*Last thing - thank you for being so positive and willing to take a few risks. I loved your comment at the end of our session about how exciting it was to see her [the student] do those higher-level tasks. So many teachers are afraid of moving too fast but your understanding of the fact that we still hit on all of those sounds at some point in [level] blue is right on. (January 10, 2012)*

Nellie also identified that tension, stating that she both wanted to do it and also felt she had an obligation to fulfill, stating,

*I guess I’m such a rule follower and I don’t know, when you all [coaches] would say that some people didn’t do it, I would think really? How do you do that? I mean, you all [the research team and coaches] invested a lot in this and I agreed to do it [by taking the position] so I was going to. Once I got started, I wanted to do it, but it was also something I was supposed to do so I was going to do it. (interview response, August 17, 2012).*

Beyond wanting to do it and having to do it though, Nellie identified a key feature – “once I got started I wanted to do it”. For her, this was because, “It was quickly convincing, worth the time commitment. I saw very quick progress, the student started moving along. He was excited and the results were evident” (interview response, August 17, 2012). Lauren appeared to feel similar to Nellie, minus the feelings of tension, despite the fact that her principal (like the one at Compass) had also made the decision to join the TRI without

necessarily consulting the staff. “My motivation was ultimately to see them [her students] learn, to read independently, to be on grade level, and even if they aren’t on grade level, I want to see them grow” (interview response, August 15, 2012). Maddie repeated similar feelings, also clearly seeing the TRI as more of a helpful tool than just another policy that zapped both her time and energy. “I really wanted to get them [her students] where they needed to be. And then over time, the more we did it, the more confident they became, they were more willing to read, they wanted to read” (interview response, August 15, 2012). It was as if implementing the policy actually gave the teachers more power because they were able to control the outcomes (both in terms of academic achievement and student motivation) they wanted in their classrooms.

So, even though the majority of the teachers initially stated that they had no control as it related to policy, they did have some control when it came to implementing the TRI policy in particular. Whether they perceived there was or not, ample evidence existed of the teachers taking control in implementing the TRI in the feedback e-mails. For example, from the beginning, Katie had taken the initiative and established a great deal of control in her classroom, as I had complimented her,

*First of all, you've done a great job preparing your classroom for the implementation of this intervention. It can be tricky working with a child one-on-one when you have so many other children in the room but you've done such a nice job of getting them into a routine that you were able to work with S. with very few interruptions.*  
(feedback e-mail, November 17, 2011)

Nellie, too, took the initiative from the beginning despite not being the person who “signed up” to be involved. Her students were progressing so quickly that she actually had to start teaching her students how to do certain activities and apply specific strategies before I had taught her how to do them.

*As usual, you did an excellent job working with J. and I have to give you major kudos for doing some activities you haven't seen much modeling on. It's a little intimidating, I'm sure, but J. is really benefitting from the challenges you are throwing his way!* (feedback e-mail, January 22, 2012).

At several points, the feedback e-mails indicated the teachers had taken so much control of their own implementation efforts that they surpassed my expectations, as I commented, “By the way, were you aware that you've done over 50 TRI sessions? You are an absolute rockstar!” (feedback e-mail, March 21, 2012). Even Mikayla, who initially voiced being overwhelmed, seemed to be in control with the TRI:

*Overall, A. did great, just as you predicted. I think your plan of targeting words with the double consonants during Word Work is great and following up with a book like "Chilly Charlie" would not only reinforce that skill but also expose her to more two-syllable words. Since there aren't any huge, obvious needs, I agree with you that it might be time to move to [level] green. Very exciting! You are both pros!* (feedback e-mail to Mikayla, December 12, 2011)

**Summary.** Two primary themes emerged when examining the teachers’ perceptions of their role in policy, that of “a real lack of control”, and “a perceived lack of control”. Initially, the teachers indicated they had no real control over any policy decisions and implementation. This was evidence in the data by their descriptions of not having a voice when it came to choosing what policies to adopt; not being allowed to be a part of the decision-making process when it came to meaningful policy adoption; not being prepared for successful implementation of the overwhelming number of policies needing to be implemented; and not knowing how to actually implement some of the policies, like the Common Core. However, when the teachers began to talk about the TRI policy and its implementation, they did not indicate feeling as if an outside source was forcing them to do it. The main reasons TRI appeared to be different from these other instructional policies, as cited by the teachers were that the TRI offered choices; they were allowed to choose a time that worked best in their

schedules (Pam, interview response, August 18, 2012). There was a basic lesson plan to follow, with all of the resources already provided (Nellie, e-mail communication, January 21, 2013). It only took 15-20 minutes per day (Tonya, interview response, August 14, 2012) and if they needed help, they had a coach there to support them (Maddie, e-mail communication, January 22, 2013). Also, the results were immediate and tangible (Haley, interview response, August 15, 2012). Finally, that “the TRI was developed with a precise goal/outcome, precise activities, and many tools (including our Coach) to help us reflect and restructure to meet each child’s need!” (Lauren, e-mail communication, January 22, 2013), which led to increased feelings of control within the classroom as the teachers began to feel they could use the TRI to better meet their students’ needs. These were some of the elements that impacted the teachers’ decision to play a larger role in implementing the TRI. While the teachers did not always recognize this larger role they were playing, it seemed apparent they chose it, thus the change in theme to “perceived lack of control”.

### **Perceptions of Influence**

To understand teachers’ perceptions about what influence they and other stakeholders had on policy implementation, the teachers were asked how much power or influence they and the other stakeholders had in implementing the TRI. In response, the teachers described the influence various stakeholders had on policy implementation; they also made a distinction between who had “influence” and who was “responsible” for the outcomes associated with the TRI.

**Influence.** When asked about who had influence during policy implementation, specifically the implementation of the TRI, the teachers recognized a variety of stakeholders (see Table 9). However, they first identified themselves. As Pam noted, “It starts with me. If

I don't do it, then it doesn't get done" (interview response, August 13, 2012). This self-identification of being a person of influence also showed up on the Teacher Questionnaire. All but one teacher agreed that "Teachers in this school are able to make a real difference in their students' lives" and most teachers disagreed with the statement that "Many of the children I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them". Data from the feedback e-mails I sent after coaching sessions seemed to echo these sentiments, as I repeatedly acknowledged the teachers' positive efforts as being incredibly influential and worthy of recognition. For example, "You've done great things with all of your kids (2 of 3 in [level] Purple!) and at the risk of sounding pushy, I think you should be really proud of yourself and your kids!" (feedback e-mail to Maddie, May 10, 2012). Data within the feedback e-mails also indicated that I tried to reinforce the teachers' strong instructional decisions, like in this feedback e-mail sent to Lauren on January 11, 2012:

*Again, you showed great patience and perseverance this morning with D. and I appreciate that you still want to challenge him by moving up to [level] Blue. He may have been struggling and needing lots of assistance today but by giving him a lot of wait time and just subtle clues to help him, you were able to get him to do the hard work - which he was able to do and without much frustration!*

At times, the feedback e-mails simply sought to acknowledge the hard work they were putting in.

*It was great to see you and your girls! You've got a nice routine going with G and F and it's nice to see you're able to help support their most pressing needs, more complex phonics knowledge, with both of them at the same time!* (feedback e-mail to Pam, March 20, 2012).

The teachers also regularly cited their coach (myself) as having an influence during the implementation of the TRI. They identified me as being someone who helped them instructionally, as Gloria did during the focus groups when she commented that even though she did not get the training provided in the three-day Summer Institute (as she was a late

hire), that her coach helped her catch up (August 9, 2012). Gloria expanded on this sentiment later on in her interview, as she mentioned how lucky she felt to have a coach lead her along and work with her since she did not have as strong a background in reading (interview response, August 28, 2012).

*You Kathryn, have been such a support to us. We do feel like you are a part of our team. You have so patiently guided us through the learning curves of TRI. You are an encourager. Many days your positive words helped me refocus my efforts for the next day.* (e-mail communication, April 16, 2013)

Lauren observed during her interview that she saw her coach's influence through her enthusiasm, which then rubbed off on her, getting her excited about working with her students (August 15, 2012). Looking back at the personal correspondences exchanged over e-mail, this influence was visible, as Lauren definitely reflected back my enthusiasm, responding to our announcement that we would begin collecting permission slips with, "That is very exciting news!!! I look forward to getting started working with the students using the TRI strategies!!!" (e-mail correspondence, October 18, 2011) and then again when she was assigned her students on November 15, 2011, "That is great! I think I have everything set up and pulled for tomorrow!!! I'll see you at 8:45 tomorrow morning!" (e-mail correspondence)

On a less chipper but just as important note, several teachers noted the coach's influence on accountability. For example, both Caren and Maddie shared during the focus groups that they used the coach's presence to help hold their students' accountable for their behavior, swinging the computer screen around so the students could see me (the coach) watching them through the web-cam or to offer a friendly, "Hey!" (August 9, 2012). My presence also appeared to help hold the teachers accountable, as Lauren remarked during the focus groups that the "coach's presence reminded me to make it [the TRI] a priority and not something to push to the side" (August 9, 2012).

When it came to discussing my influence, Mikayla and Katie both joked during their interviews that I was the person who simply “made them do it [the TRI]” (August 13, 2012) and when asked what they understood their role to be, it was “to do whatever you told me to do” (interview response, August 14, 2012). While shared in a joking manner in August, earlier e-mails indicated that perhaps my influence was not received with such humor, as Katie had once responded, clearly frustrated, “Sorry I didn't send you an email because I told you during our chat that we would not be able to attend. I will check and see about tomorrow” (November 21, 2011). I too, felt a high degree of discomfort with the perceived power dynamic right from the beginning; feedback e-mails demonstrate me falling all over myself to thank Katie, acknowledge her efforts, compliment her work, and emphasize her strengths while trying to establish a strong and positive relationship. However, the benefits in having that type of close and personal relationship were important, which were made especially clear in this very candid e-mail, which I received from one of the teachers with the most success (as indicated through high implementation rates and high student test scores) who admitted, upon my request that she work with a particular student identified as a struggler by the TRI,

*Only for you my dear, as he is my least favorite student in my class and oh, how I would LOVE to help some others who have been struggling since day 1, but I certainly understand the constraints of the research/grant. I may not be so perky next week working with him, but I will try. (e-mail communication, March 22, 2012)*

While the coach's influence was definitely felt, the principals appeared to have more of a “gatekeeper's” influence. The teachers cited their principals as either “allowing” them to implement the TRI or making it easier to implement because they arranged for meeting times (Nellie, interview response, August 17, 2012). As Maddie commented,

*Ms. Armor does have influence because if she said the teachers couldn't spend time doing it, then they couldn't, not that she would ever say that. She holds power. She asks us teachers how our children are doing and wants to know they are progressing.* (interview response, August 15, 2012).

Maddie's comment, "not that she would ever say that" appeared to be stated almost like a buffer. For, while the teachers at Tiger Valley recognized Ms. Armor as the main decision-maker and a gatekeeper of sorts, they were also quick to point out that she was also a constant advocate for them and their students, one who "heard about the program [TRI] and jumped on it to help them better their reading instruction", even volunteering (and being taken up on that offer) to drive them all to the TRI Summer Institute three hours away (interview response, August 15, 2012). Haley remarked that she knew Ms. Armor stood up for them and that she "listened to everything they said and respected everything they said" (interview response, August 15, 2012); which was how they got involved in the first place, as Ms. Armor invited the TRI team out to do a presentation and then allowed the teachers to chose if they wanted to try it out. Tonya concurred, stating, "Ms. Armor does listen and does try" to share their voices (interview response, August 14, 2012) while Gloria wrote, "She is a great leader and we always want to carry out her assignments and meet her expectations to the best of our abilities" (e-mail communications, April 16, 2013).

Nellie also alluded to the tough balance principals had of supporting teachers but also being the one in power.

*I talked with Mr. Kobe and he said I could leave [for the TRI training] and go to Myth River tomorrow before 1:00 so it would cut down on time missed. He talks like he still wants me to cut out at 3:40 and attend the other training [for Common Core] and he's usually there, so I may have to do that still. Sorry.* (e-mail correspondence, November 15, 2011)

Mr. Kobe too, it appeared, felt that tug. It had been clear from my perspective that from the outset, he wanted to support Nellie's involvement in the TRI, as he attended the TRI training

in the summer with her. However, as indicated in this e-mail from Nellie, it sounded like he was also being held accountable by the district for having his teachers present at the state-mandated Common Core professional development sessions, thus “he’s usually there”.

Overall though, the teachers indicated on the Teacher Questionnaire that they received support from their principals through adequate professional development opportunities and all but two teachers felt their principals’ behavior towards the staff was supportive and encouraging and that they were recognized for a job well done, demonstrating that while still seen as gatekeepers, the principals were still respected and seen as a positive support.

Having identified themselves, their principals, and me, the teachers identified one more core group of stakeholders as having influence - their students. They felt the students had influence for they were the ones who needed to pay attention and apply the strategies they were learning and that they had to “go with it, have that motivation and desire to want to learn” (Haley, interview response, August 15, 2012). Katie commented that her students had influence during implementation by, “...listening to me and giving it their effort and applying what we learned along the way” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

Interestingly, as opposed to being the one motivating her students, Pam found *herself* in the opposite position, as she was motivated by her students. This came out as she reacted to my e-mail regarding which child she should work with next, “Thanks Kathryn! I was hoping she would be one of my ‘candidates’!! YAY!! Thank you so much!” (e-mail communication, December 12, 2011). Nellie also found her students’ needs motivated her to go above the TRI’s expectations as she stated,

*I may try to fit in two TRI sessions each day so I can work with J and JA too since the assessors are coming the following week. JA rocked out some 4-chunk words today and I don't want her to regress - even in a week! She is the type who needs to practice until she has it mastered!!* (e-mail communication, March 22, 2012).

For those teachers that did not seem to recognize their students' influence, my feedback e-mails appeared to help make that clear,

*I'm so, so glad to see him moving along! Not only is it great for him and his steadily increasing reading skills but it's equally good for you so you can see how your instruction is making a visible difference!* (feedback e-mail to Tonya, April 19, 2012)

In summary, when asked, "Who has influence in the implementation of the TRI?" the teachers most often recognized themselves, their coach, their principals, and their students, either on their own or through my facilitation. For, as Caren so articulately pointed out,

*It has to be a combination. I had to receive the instruction, had to have the coaching, and we [as teachers] had to implement, along with parents and students. I had to hold students accountable. Their parents would help them bring their book back -- a combination from everyone* (interview response, August 13, 2012).

**Table 9: Stakeholders' Influence on Implementation**

Stakeholder	# of teachers who perceived them as having an influence on policy implementation	Perceptions of Teachers
Teacher	10	"Of course the teacher holds much responsibility. Is the teacher doing it every day, using what we learned, and working with the coach? Was the teacher responsible and reading e-mails and taking suggestions? These were factors." (Lauren, August 15, 2012)
Student	6	"The kids, for listening to me and giving it their effort and applying what we learned along the way" (Katie, August 13, 2012)
Coach	5	"Having the support of the coach and principal makes it that much easier to bring it all together. If the coach wasn't available, I don't think it would be as successful. I truly believe the coach's input makes the difference because sometimes I felt lost. It was a huge help having (coach) there and getting feedback" (Haley, August 15, 2012)
Combination	5	"I think everybody (is responsible). You (coach) being there for us (teachers), me being determined to do it, everybody on our team at Tiger Valley so I could ask someone else what they were doing, Ms. Armor (principal) buying into it, and the team from Church Mountain. It was a group effort for everybody" (Maddie, August 15, 2012)
TRI Associates/ Trainers	3	"Whoever invented it and me for doing it." (Tonya, August 14, 2012)
Other TRI Teachers	2	"Team meetings were used so one could see what everyone else was doing and to give suggestions. All counter-parts tied in to make it successful." (Pam, August 13, 2012)
Parents	2	"They [the children] need to be reading at home and the parents

		need to help out.” (Nellie, August 17, 2012)
Principals	2	“[Principal] does (have influence) because if she said the teachers couldn’t spend time doing it, then we couldn’t, not that she would ever say that. She [also] holds power [in that] she asks teachers how their children are doing and wants to know how they are progressing” (Maddie, August 15, 2012)
Teaching Assistants	1	“ [It] was always helpful to have that second person around (full-time assistant), she helped train the kids how to leave me [alone] with my TRI kid” (Tonya, August 14, 2012)

**Responsibility.** While the combinations of which stakeholders each teacher recognized as having “influence” varied, what did not vary was that every teacher also claimed responsibility as either an individual or as part of the combined team. As Lauren responded,

*I think with anything, it’s a group effort, without a doubt. But, ultimately, if I don’t do it, whose going to do it? It’s my responsibility to do it, to the best of my ability, to follow the practice, step back and reflect, read notes. The bulk of the responsibility is on the teachers. (interview response, August 15, 2012)*

The teachers, as a whole, believed they had a great deal of influence in implementing the TRI. As Maddie said, “[It’s] up to me to make sure I sit down with that child. I hold all the power in that sense” (interview response, August 15, 2012). Caren agreed. “Power lies in being prepared and actually implementing it every day to move those children as fast as one can, help them excel. Use your resources, including your coach” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

However, this influence was not necessarily thought of as a way to be recognized for their efforts. The teachers did not see their influence on the TRI as something to celebrate or to receive credit for doing. Instead, the teachers viewed it as a responsibility. As Gloria stated, “Like a lot of things, it’s only as good as the person in the classroom doing it” (interview response, August 28, 2012). Mikayla echoed that thought after being asked who had the most influence, laughing, “That would be me. Without a good teacher that really has

been there and knows what they are doing and what they are looking for, I really think the classroom teacher is **responsible**” (interview response, August 13, 2012).

The teachers not only saw themselves as being responsible for implementing the policy for the children’s benefit but also for the sake of the research. Pam stated, “I take complete responsibility for my kids doing it every day, getting it done, for my aspect, for yours, for the research” (interview response, August 18, 2012). Sometimes that added piece – the research – made the teachers anxious. Haley, who was excited to be a part of the research because of her current immersion in graduate school, also expressed concern, “Am I going to be able to pull this off?” (interview response, August 15, 2012). Tonya went as far as to say she was “scared to death she wouldn’t do it right” (interview response, August 14, 2012).

These issues regarding the teachers’ anxiety over whether they could “pull it off” or “do it right” were interesting but brought up questions. What did “pulling it off” or “doing it right” look like? Who was deciding if they were doing it “right” or not? What were the consequences if the teachers did not “do it right”? One could speculate that perhaps the teachers felt a responsibility towards me based on the friendship being established through some of our e-mail exchanges. Haley and Tonya’s e-mails to me in particular routinely included apologies if they felt they were falling behind in something or not living up to an undocumented set of expectations. For example, early on in the project Tonya wrote frantically, “Trying to get online! iChat is saying I am disconnected. Went to Haley's and her's says the same thing. We are having a bad storm over here so I don't know if that is the reason or not! Sorry!” (e-mail communication, September 23, 2011). Both teachers were also quick to offer words of thanks after I provided instructional support, gave advice, or simply acknowledged all they were doing. For example, Haley responded to one of my e-

mail offers about how I could help make the implementation process easier by writing,

*You are doing a plenty. When we actually start implementing the project, I will make sure I have coverage to meet with you if my assistant is out. Thanks for all you are doing and for understanding how crazy things have been lately. (e-mail communication, November 11, 2011).*

This type of response, and the palpable feelings of responsibility, came from other teachers as well. If an issue came up that prevented her from fulfilling what she saw as her responsibility, Pam made sure I knew what was going on, offering explanations, apologies, and potential accommodations, “Just wanted to let you know that we are testing tomorrow from 8:45-9:45. I know this is short notice for you but I can get online about 9:50, if that's ok?! I'm so sorry for any inconvenience this may cause!” (e-mail communication, January 9, 2012). Caren also went to great lengths to let me know that she was really trying, once writing,

*I am so sorry. I was at the doctor's when I realized that I did not email you about iChatting yesterday. Sorry to waste your time-it is all so precious to all of us. I am not sure about making up today, as I just got a call from my assistant (yeah at 6:08 in the morning) that she will not be at work today. She told me that there were some problems yesterday that I know I am going to have to deal with today. I am going to try and get on about 9:20. Could we make up tomorrow at 10:15? Let me know. I will know more when I get to work this morning if I am able to get on at 9:20. Again, I am so sorry. (e-mail communication, April 26, 2012)*

She too, offered explanations, apologies, and potential accommodations.

The feelings of responsibility the teachers seemed to have towards me were demonstrated in other ways as well. For example, Maddie routinely kept me up to date on what she was doing with her students when we couldn't meet. “D. did such an excellent job today! He read *Egg Legs* and only made a couple of errors. I think he will move along pretty quickly and I'm excited you gave me the go ahead to work with him. Thank you!” (e-mail communication, January 13, 2012). Tonya did the same, “I could see him use the

strategies and blending that we had worked on! I am so happy to see that one of my three had gains! Thanks for your support!” (e-mail communication, May 21, 2012).

Tonya’s e-mail contained an additional word that stood out - the use of the word “we”. This stood out because of how frequently it was seen in the feedback e-mails sent to the teachers after their coaching sessions. The language showed that I too felt a sense of responsibility, for making sure the teachers knew what they needed to do, once commenting to Gloria, “Let me know if this plan isn't working for you and *we*’ll come up with some other strategies!” (e-mail correspondence, April 8, 2012); for making sure the teachers knew they were not alone and that I was supporting them, “I appreciate you advocating for your kids and *we*’ll do what we can to make sure they don't fall behind! (e-mail correspondence to Haley, April 18, 2012); and for making sure the teachers had the data and reassurance they needed. “I checked with our intervention directors and they agreed with both of us, it's more than fine for M to sound out words so *we* can hear her rather than try to get her to blend sounds in her head” (e-mail correspondence to Caren, May 10, 2012). There was also a very purposeful effort to let the teachers know that “we” were in it together, even when it came to the professional development as once tentatively stated to the teacher, “Anyway, *we* may need to share parts of your video during a team meeting - it was that good!” (e-mail correspondence to Nellie, November 22, 2011).

I felt the teachers recognized my intentions, my feelings of responsibility towards them, and my efforts to be a team, a “we”, by the end of the year. These feelings were confirmed after receiving this e-mail from a teacher at the end of the year, who consequently made sure I knew that her decision to leave her school (and thus the TRI) was not a decision made lightly, given how much she valued the work *we* had done together.

*I still feel that [the TRI] has been the most useful training I've had in all my years. I truly appreciate the opportunity I had to work with such an amazing group of people and gain such knowledge. I just wish things could work out differently and I could have the best of both worlds - a new beginning and keep working with TRI. You have been just great to work with and I hope we can stay in touch. I've enjoyed our time together and I wish you the best with everything!!* (e-mail communication, May 25, 2012)

Not only did this e-mail confirm the teamwork we had used during implementation but it also served as a powerful reminder that there were many people of influence – a team effort!

**Other stakeholders' perceptions.** While the teachers recognized their own influence during the implementation of the TRI, there were other stakeholders involved as well. One of the groups of stakeholders that also saw participation in the TRI as a responsibility, particularly one that fell on the teachers' shoulders, were the principals. During an interview, one of the principals acknowledged, "We are all responsible for kids' success", citing himself, the teacher, and the child (August 2, 2012). A second principal also vocalized that implementing the TRI required a team effort, that it was a policy they all held responsibility in. However, like the teachers, she agreed they were the ones who had the most influence, stating, "The principal doesn't move the school – they [teachers] do. I'm their cheerleader, their advocate. I can monitor, put things in place, but they are in front of those kids everyday" (interview response, August 10, 2012).

Interestingly, as the literacy coach (a different stakeholder), I saw the principal as the one who moved the school when it came to implementing the TRI. This perception was based on what I knew about the recruitment process for the larger TRI study; ideally, the principals were to decide *with* their kindergarten and first grade teachers about whether or not to sign on for the three-year commitment, preventing the TRI from being too much of a "top-down" mandate. In reality, however, this varied. Lauren commented that her school was losing its other literacy coaches and the teachers had been warned that they were referring

too many struggling readers for special education; consequently her principal “was very open to new things and ideas and thought it was a good thing to pick up” (interview response, August 15, 2012), which is how their school got involved. The principal at Tiger Valley in Heals County approached the decision differently by empowering her teachers to make the decision about whether or not they wanted to participate without her actually being there; the teachers overwhelmingly agreed and eagerly embraced it. As Haley shared, “I felt like I was one of the lucky ones to be chosen. I was anxious to learn and I didn’t feel forced into it because it was not presented as ‘you have to do this’” (interview response, August 15, 2012). However, the teachers in Wyatt County, did feel as if “you have to do this”, as the principal decided not to follow her teachers’ recommendations, who had voted twelve to two against it, telling them, “Well, we’re doing it, I don’t want to hear complaining” (Katie, interview response, August 13, 2012). As opposed to Lauren, who seemed to understand why her principal had made her decision, Katie and Mikayla were left without a voice or an understanding of what was happening.

Varying from my perception that the principals had a great deal of influence during implementation, the research team (including Lila, Patty, Alicia, Marissa, and Marcela) seemed to acknowledge all of the stakeholders when it came to reflecting on who had influence during the implementation of the TRI. For example, Marissa declared that it was a big team effort and acknowledged the Dean at the partnering institution, Lynne Vernon-Feagans and Tom Farmer for their vision and in letting graduate students help, Marnie Ginsberg for her experience, the principals for leading and helping reduce distractions, the coaches for their dedication and flexibility, the teachers for their buy-in and open minds, the children for doing the work, the parents for reinforcing what the children were learning, and

the early research and program directors that paved the way (interview response, August 23, 2012).

This perspective, which was historical and comprehensive, also varied from the teachers' perceptions, as most of the teachers did not acknowledge the efforts by the research team, nor any past visionaries. This lack of acknowledgement from the teachers may have been due to simply not knowing the history of the TRI – or being so involved in their own efforts that it was hard to recognize the efforts of those they did not work with on a regular basis.

There was also a slight difference in how the research team interpreted “influence”, as they did not treat it as a responsibility like the teachers but as something one might get credit for. As one researcher commented, “Basically anything good that’s come [from the TRI] is because of Marnie [Ginsberg]. She developed it, knows it. Without her it wouldn’t exist and the coaches wouldn’t have been trained. She knows how children how to read and how they don’t” (Patty, interview response, August 20, 2012). Not only did members of the research team recognize Marnie for her work on the development, but also the early visionaries like Drs. Lynne Vernon-Feagans and Tom Farmer for applying for and receiving the grant that funded the TRI; Drs. Steve Amendum and Marnie Ginsberg for their collaboration with Dr. Vernon-Feagans; and for earlier and current project directors who got the project off the ground like Dr. Amy Hedricks and Dr. Kirsten Kainz.

**Summary.** The teachers in this study recognized that they had a great deal of influence on the implementation of the TRI, which they also accepted and acknowledged as a responsibility. The teachers felt responsible for “getting it in” for their students’ benefit, for the research, and potentially, to please me, their literacy coach. The teachers also recognized

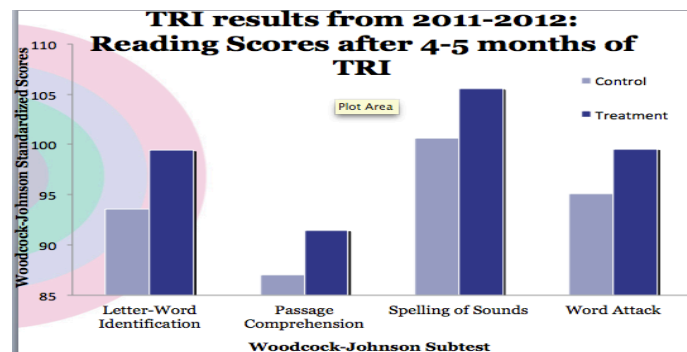
the influence some of the other stakeholders had, including the influence that came from their principals, their students, and myself. While the teachers acknowledged their principals' influence, I found that as a member of a different group of stakeholders, I acknowledged the role of the principal in a much larger way. This may have been due to my positioning, knowing "both sides of the story" as it related to the power the principals excised in deciding whether or not to participate in the larger TRI study. This idea of knowing "both sides of the story" may also be the reason the research team recognized a variety of other stakeholders as having influence, including some of the early visionaries and creators of the TRI itself, as opposed to the teachers, who rarely alluded to the research team's influence.

### **Perceptions of Success**

To take into account the teachers' perceptions of success as it related to the implementation of the instructional policy, the TRI, the teachers were asked if they felt the TRI was successful, what success looked like, and how it was measured. In response, the teachers described several measures of success, including student achievement scores as measured through standardized assessments, anecdotal notes, and TRI levels; increased student motivation and confidence; and teacher growth and increased self-awareness. Other stakeholders mentioned several of these measures as well, with issues of retention and fidelity also being introduced into the conversation on whether the TRI was successful or not.

**Student achievement scores.** The teachers' answers, in regard to whether or not the TRI was successful, were a resounding "yes!" Without prompting, most teachers immediately linked the TRI to an increase in student achievement scores. They did so by using two different reporting measures. First, the teachers shared data gleaned from standardized tests and assessment tools. For example, Tonya exclaimed, "After seeing the

data [which was presented during the second year’s Summer Institute, in Figure 3], it’s clear something’s working! In no area did something drop” (interview response, August 14, 2012).



**Figure 3: Preliminary Results from Year I**

While in that example Tonya was referring to a graph that showed student results as measured using the Woodcock-Johnson, most of the time the standardized tests used by the teachers were either DIBELS or a form of running records (as seen in Table 10); DIBELS was what the TRI used to initially identify the struggling readers and was also being used in implementing the instructional policy, RTI, while the running records were the practical measures teachers used to drive their instruction. Two forms of running records were used; for example, Myth River used the DRA2 (Developmental Reading Assessment – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) while Tiger Valley used the TRC (Text Reading Comprehension). Tonya referred to her TRC scores as she reported to me via e-mail, “I am soooooo excited to write and tell you that B (student) went from an “E” to an “I” this nine weeks!!!!!!!!!! (e-mail correspondence, May 21, 2012). Lauren and Nellie both shared their elation over seeing a change in DRA2 scores as Lauren commented, “I just tested J (student) on a DRA2 level 16, which is on grade level for the end of the year, and he was able to read the story with only a few errors!” (e-mail correspondence, May 11, 2012). Nellie wrote,

*I just wanted to share some great news - I tested JA today on running records and she passed a level 14!!! She was an 8 in January before we started. I was so excited - along with her mother!! (e-mail communication, March 16, 2012).*

It appeared that I too, tried to validate the importance of using standardized tools to measure growth, sometimes making comments in feedback e-mails like, “Thanks for sharing that he's gone from a 3 to a 6 on the DRA. That's great growth!” (feedback e-mail to Lauren, February 1, 2012) and, “I wish I could have given D a high five through the computer when he told me he's now reading at a level E!” (feedback e-mail to Haley, March 21, 2012)

**Table 10: Student Achievement Scores as Reported by the Teachers, End of Year**

Teacher	County	School	DIBELS	Running Records
Maddie	Heals	Tiger Valley	Child #1: PSF 32 NWF 30 ORF 33 WUF 35 Child #2: PSF 44 NWF 44 ORF 20 WUF 47 Child #3: PSF 39 NWF 61 ORF 14 WUF 55	RL: I  RL: I  RL: D
Haley	Heals	Tiger Valley	Child #1: PSF 49 NWF 46 ORF 16 WUF 56 Child #2: PSF 50 NWF 65 ORF 21 WUF 44 Child #3: PSF 63 NWF 45 ORF 57 WUF 63	RL: F  RL: H  RL: J
Pam	Peabody	Myth River		Child #1: DRA2 level 14 Child #2: DRA2 level 16 Child #3: DRA2 level 16
Lauren	Peabody	Myth River		Child #1: DRA2 level 14 Child #2: DRA2 level 15 Child #3: DRA2 level 18
Mikayla	Wyatt	Compass	Child #1: ORF 26 NWF/CLS 15 NWF/WWR 46 Child #2: ORF 12 NWF/CLS 5 NWF/WWR 20 Child #3: ORF 72 NWF/CLS 29 NWF/WWR 93	Level H 15-16 @ 95% retell 4 Level E 7-8 @ 88% retell 3 Level J 21-22 @ 96% retell 4
Katie	Wyatt	Compass	(Teacher out at end of year so no scores reported)	
Nellie	Peabody	Cold Court	Child #1: PSF39 NWF 48 ORF 33 WUF 37 Child #2: PSF 34 NWF 46 ORF 50 WUF 48 Child #3: PSF: 51 NWF 97 ORF 65 WUF 69 Child #4: (unofficial TRI student) PSF 39 NWF 54 ORF 36 WUF 54	RL: 18  RL: 18  RL: 24  RL: 18
Tonya	Heals	Tiger Valley	Child #1: PSF 28 NWF 26 ORF 4 WUF 37 Child #2: PSF 21 NWF 20 ORF 5 WUF 28 Child #3:	RL: RB  RL: RB  RL: I

			PSF 43 NWF 40 ORF 27 WUF 70	
Caren	Wyatt	Compass	Child #1: DORF- 9/0 NWF/CLS 52 NWF /WWR- 15 Child #2: DORF- 25/5 NWF/CLS 42 NWF /WWR- 13 Child #3: DORF- 25/9 NWF/CLS 55 NWF /WWR- 13	RL: 7/8  RL: 7/8  RL: 15/16
Gloria	Heals	Tiger Valley	Child #1: PSF 13 NWF 38 Child #2: PSF 10 NWF 30 Child #3: PSF 36 NWF 42	RL: J  RL: I  RL: J

The second reporting measure the teachers used to report student achievement scores were anecdotal notes, sharing more general comments like, “He really is moving right along and I've been impressed with his word skills. I still see some weaknesses in fluency and sight words, but I see lots of improvements” (e-mail correspondence, December 21, 2011). These anecdotal notes provided additional evidence there was both an increase in the students’ academic abilities *and* that the teachers were measuring and placing value on student growth, which I had tried to encourage by sending short notes like, “She is moving SO quickly!” (feedback e-mail to Caren, March, 25, 2012), “From this side of the web-cam, she's doing well and progressing far better than so many others!” (feedback e-mail to Katie, April 25, 2012), and “I hope everyone can say what you shared with me - that is, ‘I can't believe he's improved this much already!’” (feedback e-mail to Tonya, November 17, 2011).

This emphasis on also considering anecdotal notes seemed to have an impact on teachers’ measures of success, for when answering the question about whether or not she felt the TRI was successful and how she was measuring it (success), Nellie referred back to both the standardized measures *and* her anecdotal notes, sharing that one of her students moved from a BR (beginning reader) to a level sixteen in her running record score, that the change in levels was the equivalent of two grade levels in one year, and that, “I thought Josie Anne

was going to be retained and never could have gotten her to grade level without TRI!” (interview response, August 17, 2012). Anecdotal notes were shared by others as well: Caren cited an increased use of reading strategies (interview response, August 13, 2012), as did Tonya, who took great pride in sharing that one of the ways she knew the TRI was successful was because she was able to teach two children whom she felt should have been retained the year before how to use “Blend As You Go” [a TRI strategy] (focus group response, August 9, 2012). And, there were several teachers who mentioned seeing student growth in their writing (focus group responses, August 9, 2012), all of which were documented in anecdotal notes.

Maddie noted that she saw student growth by looking at how the children had moved up the levels in the TRI’s approach to the code (interview response, August 15, 2012). This approach to measuring student achievement had roots in both standardized student achievement scores (where certain skill sets were linked with particular levels, as indicated through levels labeled with the colors pink, blue, green, and purple) and anecdotal notes, where the focus was on strategy-usage. Like Maddie, I tended to use a hybrid-approach in my feedback e-mails, as I frequently indicated an increase in student achievement by citing the next TRI color. “While I know you were still a little concerned about some short vowels, I think moving ahead to Green and Purple activities was exactly what she needed!” (feedback e-mail to Caren, March 25, 2012). I also cited the TRI color to indicate the end point as well, as I did when I wrote, “I have no doubt Nellie that J will be able to do work at the Purple level with your support. She's really on her way!” (feedback e-mail, February 28, 2012).

In summary, the data showed that both the teachers and I used standardized assessments (including running records), anecdotal notes, and TRI-specific measures when

discussing the success of students' academic achievement scores, which the teachers often mentioned as the main indicator of the TRI's success.

**Increased student motivation & confidence.** In addition to using academic achievement scores, several teachers also noted students' increased motivation as evidence the TRI was successful. For example, Haley commented, "J had no desire to read but when we started the TRI, he'd come in and ask when he'd be reading" (interview response, August 15, 2012). Lauren had a similar response, sharing "My kids went from rolling their eyes and saying 'I can't read' to actually reading and beating me to the reading table to do it" (interview response, August 15, 2012).

These responses reflect an awareness that the TRI deliberately tried to foster – that if the children were excited and interested in reading, they would become more motivated readers, and the more motivated they were, the more likely they were to succeed. This was clear when examining the feedback e-mails, where I tried to help the teachers realize what they were doing to help increase a student's motivation. For example, I made sure Maddie knew how meaningful it was to her student that she squeezed in a lesson,

*Thank you for working in a shorter lesson. I know with the half-day and report card pick-up that you would have preferred I just watch you when you return from spring break but I think D loved the attention and extra practice he was getting!* (feedback e-mail, April 4, 2012)

For those teachers that were not naturally putting into place structures that would increase student motivation, I encouraged them to consider fostering it with some suggestions:

*If you aren't seeing a change by the middle of next week, go ahead and move to Green. The exposure to those new sounds, spelling patterns, and vocabulary words can't hurt and maybe they'll even increase her motivation. We'll see!* (feedback e-mail to Mikayla, March 15, 2012)

A similar phenomenon was evident in looking at the students' levels of confidence and independence. Katie mentioned that she felt the TRI was successful because she saw her

children learn to become independent and confident readers (interview response, August 13, 2012). Pam echoed this sentiment in her interview, as she said she knew the TRI had been successful when at one point, she looked across her classroom during reading time and saw everyone reading a book – including the two children who had been struggling before receiving the TRI (August 13, 2012). For those that did not recognize how important independence and confidence were, it was evident I often tried to point it out through the feedback e-mails. For example, I reminded Maddie that she would know if the TRI was successful for one of her students by watching to see if he did become more independent. “Good things are happening and it’ll be exciting to see if D. can apply these strategies on his own to 4-sound words, with blends both at the beginning and end!” (feedback e-mail, January 24, 2012). For Mikayla, I recommended she pay attention to her student’s confidence level to help her evaluate the TRI’s level of success in helping her student,

*As we discussed, R is doing fine but it’s time for her to start owning the lesson a little more. Because you’ve done such an excellent job modeling, I’m confident she can blend and summarize on her own. It may be that her confidence isn’t where it needs to be for her to take the initiative so hopefully having her read the books more at home will help with this! You’ll have to let me know if that works! (feedback e-mail to Mikayla, February 29, 2012).*

I did the same with Nellie,

*I know you have a limited amount of time left to work with him so let's get his confidence up by having him practice what he'll really be doing in class (reading and writing) but with you by his side to encourage him! (feedback e-mail to Nellie, April 17, 2012).*

I also used the students’ levels of confidence as a way to further remind teachers that they could see how successful they were in making good instructional decisions by recognizing those increased levels of confidence,

*You could tell that A. was really proud of himself and having a good time! I also really appreciate that when talking about what to do next, you were as enthusiastic as*

*I am about pushing A. up to another level. That's a difficult thing for most teachers because they are worried about overwhelming the child but I agree with you 100% that since A. is SO confident, there is no reason to hold him back!"* (feedback e-mail to Haley, November 22, 2011).

Two other teachers indicated that they knew the TRI had been successful because their students had become so confident that they wanted to help others. As Maddie remarked in her focus group, "When the child who hated reading was now asking if he could read to others, I knew it [the TRI] was a success" (August 9, 2012). Caren concurred, stating, "I especially knew it was a success when my TRI students wanted to teach the strategies [like Blend As You Go] to some of the other kids" (focus group response, August 9, 2012).

In summary, it appeared in the data that both the teachers and I saw students' increasing levels of motivation, confidence, and independence as indicators of the TRI's success.

**Teacher growth & increased self-awareness.** When Pam noticed that all of her students were reading independently, including her two former struggling students, it acted as an indication to her that she had grown as a teacher and was someone who could help kids learn how to read, as she admitted in her interview, "Hey, I can really do this" (August 13, 2012). Thus to her, it was a sign that the TRI had been successful in helping her become a more successful and competent teacher. Many of the other teachers agreed that they had personally benefitted from implementing the TRI too and cited examples of their own growth as evidence, with Caren citing "a new outlook and way to help children" (focus group response, August 9, 2012) and Maddie feeling reenergized because, "TRI has changed my perceptions on how long it takes a struggling child to catch up, as I'd always heard it took two years but now I see that the research says it takes shorter" (focus group response, August 9, 2012).

Recognizing the TRI's success by evaluating its effect on their own professional growth seemed to be an important piece to both the teachers new to the grade level as well as those more seasoned. After asking Gloria, who was new to the grade level, if she thought the TRI was successful, she answered, "Yeah, I do. On a personal level, it was a wonderful resource for me, to guide me through my first year of first grade. It helped me know how to help my children [students]." Lauren, who had taught first grade for five years, echoed that statement, saying "I felt lucky [to have learned the TRI] because even after going to college, I felt that reading was a personal area of weakness because it's so complicated, despite several years of teaching it!" (interview response, August 15, 2012). I too, saw both Gloria and Lauren grow, as indicated in these feedback e-mails sent in January,

*I'm sure we will see K. sky-rocket with all of your scaffolding and I'm excited for you to share your successes with your colleagues as begin to venture into Green as well!* (feedback e-mail to Gloria, January 25, 2012)

And

*Again, you showed great patience and perseverance this morning with D. and I appreciate that you still want to challenge him by moving up to Blue. He may have been struggling and needing lots of assistance today but by giving him a lot of wait time and just subtle clues to help him, you were able to get him to do the hard work - which he was able to do and without much frustration!* (feedback e-mail to Lauren, January 11, 2012)

The increased self-awareness that Lauren demonstrated was not limited to just her. After discussing why their school agreed to start using the TRI and mentions of poor test scores shared, Haley volunteered, "We [teachers at the school] all think we're giving it our all but evidently we're not doing something [or our scores would be better]" (interview response, August 15, 2012), a realization that few teachers rarely admit. In a similar fashion, Nellie too, admitted,

*I couldn't have gotten her to grade level without TRI... It's true, if I weren't doing this and was supposed to pull her... it wasn't that I wouldn't want to but you all gave*

*me something easy to follow so when I pulled her, I knew exactly what to do so it made it easier for me to pull her everyday.* (interview response, August 17, 2012)

When teachers did not have the positive self-awareness that indicated a degree of success, as both Haley and Nellie demonstrated, I found that my feedback e-mails often made a point of trying to encourage that acknowledgement of success through self-growth. For example, I would start by reminding them how much they were accomplishing in a short amount of time, as I did with Pam on January 10, 2012,

*Great job today! You've only been trained on the TRI for less than 2 months, have only been able to work with your student for a few weeks, and already you seem to have it down! Thank you for being so positive and willing to take a few risks. I loved your comment at the end of our session about how exciting it was to see her do those higher-level tasks. So many teachers are afraid of moving too fast but your understanding of the fact that we still hit on all of those sounds at some point in blue is right on.* (feedback e-mail)

Contained in the feedback e-mails were additional mentions as well, some related to reduced levels of anxiety “I was expecting a more nervous [teacher] since you were so reluctant at the Institute but you were FANTASTIC!” (November 22, 2011); others related to experimenting, “I have to give you major kudos for doing some activities you haven't seen much modeling on!” (January 10, 2012); and then others related to actually going through the entire TRI series, “You've taken your kids a long way Tonya and I'm glad you were able to move through all four levels!” (May 8, 2012).

On the other hand, both Katie and Mikayla came to their own self-actualizations that the growth they saw with the TRI was not necessarily because of the strategies but perhaps something else. Katie wondered out loud, “Is it the process or the time I spent with the kid [that got the results]?” (interview response, August 13, 2012). Mikayla commented, “I would have worked one-on-one with kids anyway” (interview response, August 13, 2012). Both of these teachers appeared to be outliers compared to the other teachers in whether or not they

thought the TRI was responsible for the successful results of their students; however, an increased sense of self-awareness may also be considered an indication of the TRI's success.

In summary, it appeared in the data that both the teachers and I saw teachers' levels of professional growth and self-awareness as indicators of the TRI's success as well.

**Other stakeholders' perceptions of success.** As indicated earlier, the data showed that the teachers and I often pointed to student achievement scores, increased levels of student motivation and confidence, and teacher growth and self-awareness as indicators of the TRI's success. Some of the stakeholders also identified those areas; additionally they identified an alternative measure of the TRI's success by focusing on fidelity.

Given that the larger TRI study revolves around increasing student achievement scores, it was not surprising to find that the other stakeholders also identified this as an area in which to judge the TRI's success. However, there were differences noted in how the stakeholders measured student achievement scores. For example, one of the members of the research team who was familiar with the teachers' DIBELS and running record scores indicated that they were part of the reason she found the TRI to be successful (Marissa, interview response, September 23, 2012); Principal Kobe also indicated he felt the TRI was successful because of the students' reading levels and DIBELS scores (interview response, August 2, 2012). However, the majority of the research team used Woodcock-Johnson scores, amongst a battery of other standardized tools (as seen in Table 11).<sup>2</sup> While no members of the research team had seen the results from the Woodcock-Johnson at the time of

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<sup>2</sup> (See Table 10 below for scores on the Woodcock-Johnson's four sub-tests; the first score in each box is where the class mean started in the fall of 2011, before implementation of the TRI; the second score indicates the class mean after teachers began implementing the TRI in the spring of 2012. For example, Maddie's class saw a mean gain of four points in Letter/Word ID, moving from 97 to 101. Because these scores are normed by grade, with 100 being typical, many of the gains above were larger than they may appear.)

their interviews, Lila had professed that, “if they had made big gains on standardized reading tests, they had hit the gold standard” (Lila, interview response, August 15, 2011) and it appeared that some did indeed do that. Unfortunately, only one set of scores’ growth showed statistical significance (Caren’s Word Attack Skills)<sup>3</sup>; as Patty had said, her measurement of success was, “based on statistics. It’s where I come from” and thus one might guess that she would not judge the TRI to be successful if only looking at those particular student achievement scores. However, like the teachers and myself, some stakeholders did consider both the standardized measures and the anecdotal notes.

*I have heard anecdotally from the coaches in team meetings the teachers were successful but some anecdotal evidence shared by the assessors [who administered the battery of tests like the Woodcock-Johnson] indicated some teachers were disheartened. We will just need to see data, mainly the pre and post test scores of the kids as represented through statistics”* (Alicia, interview response, August 13, 2012).

Since both Pam and Haley’s students’ growth appeared to go down in at least half of the sub-tests, Alicia too would probably be wary of declaring the TRI to be a success based on student achievement scores.

**Table 11: Student Achievement Scores as Determined by the Woodcock-Johnson**

	<b>Letter/Word ID</b>	<b>Passage Comprehension</b>	<b>Spelling of Sounds</b>	<b>Word Attack</b>
Maddie	97-101	82-90	102-103	101-94
Haley	98-94	94-91	97-97	88-84
Pam	101-104	96-101	114-110	102-95
Lauren	98-102	93-94	102-107	99-98
Mikayla	94-97	90-90	104-107	94-98
Katie	102-108	101-104	112-114	104-107
Nellie	104-108	100-103	113-114	108-109
Tonya	87-92	77-77	87-97	89-89
Caren	95-98	93-95	113-105	92-103*
Gloria	95-97	78-82	94-96	79-99

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<sup>3</sup> Statistical figure provided by Dr. Mary Bratsch-Hines

Anecdotally, there was also a difference noted between the teachers' beliefs about student achievement scores and my own as the TRI literacy coach, especially when looking at issues of retention. While I was not so concerned about the actual test scores, past field notes indicated that one of the ways in which we would know the TRI was successful was if the children were to perform at a level similar to those of their classmates. However, after finding that Tonya, Mikayla, Maddie, and Gloria all had TRI students that ended up being retained, I questioned how well we really did in successfully meeting those student achievement gains and wondered why those teachers did not see the issue of retention being in direct conflict with the TRI's "success" themselves.

Another area of contrast was that the teachers and I believed "success" could also be related to an increase in student motivation and confidence. An increase in the students' motivation to and confidence in reading was not recognized by the principals or research team as a measure of the TRI's success, although Marissa did connect feelings of confidence with the coaches (interview response, August 23, 2012). In a similar vein, nothing was explicitly mentioned about teacher growth and increased self-awareness either during any of the interviews. One of the research team members, Marcela, indicated that *she* felt teacher knowledge grew immensely (interview response, August 24, 2012). Additionally there was a sense that there must have been some teacher growth, otherwise there would not have been reports that the teachers were doing the TRI with fidelity (Marissa, interview response, August 23, 2012). The feedback e-mails indicated that the teachers were doing the TRI with fidelity, as my voice in the data was often heard saying things like,

*Your timing was great and you hit all of the main parts of a lesson, including Re-Reading for Fluency, Word Work, Guided Oral Reading, and Extensions. Your*

*emphasis on helping A. blend was integrated into many parts of the lesson – Great work! (feedback e-mail to Haley, November 22, 2011)*

and,

*He is so lucky to have you because not only are you interested and committed to helping him learn how to read but your second lesson ever was AWESOME! You really did a fantastic lesson. You included all of the parts of a normal lesson, used the TRI language, used all of the materials we gave you, and helped D. feel accomplished and successful (feedback e-mail to Lauren, December 8, 2011).*

This mention of fidelity is where some of the stakeholders' perceptions were different from the teachers', as Patty vocalized the idea that the TRI's success could be based on the viable fidelity measures the team had created; in that case, she believed the TRI was successful. While Lila appeared to concur that fidelity would be a strong measure of success, she was reluctant to make any declarative statements, as there were still no descriptions yet about what the minimum amount was needed to make change; it had yet to be established if the student gains would be sustained over the course of a year; and it was unknown if there was enough teacher "buy-in" to keep the TRI going once the research piece was over (interview response, August 15, 2012).

This hesitation was not necessarily indicative of all of the research team members' evaluation of whether or not the TRI was successful. Both Marissa and Marcela indicated in their interviews that they found the TRI was successful in most, if not all, ways. Yes, they (as members of the research team) had seen improved scores on the Woodcock-Johnson subtests; yes, they recognized that teacher knowledge had improved; and yes, they had heard from the coaches that the TRI was being implemented well. Both Marissa and Marcela also identified an additional factor– the relationships that had been established between the teachers, coaches, and research project – and indicated they were strong and that most people appeared happy (interview response, August 23, 2012 & August 24, 2012).

In summary, the data indicated that while the other stakeholders also used student achievement scores when measuring whether or not the TRI was a success, they sometimes used different standardized measures like the Woodcock-Johnson. Additionally, they often did not recognize many of the measures the teachers used and came to more different and inconclusive ends than the teachers.

**Summary.** Most of the stakeholders (including all of the teachers, myself, and both principals) felt the TRI was successful, as demonstrated through increased student achievement scores, higher levels of student motivation and confidence, increased teacher growth, and increased self-awareness. However, the TRI research team used different measures of student achievement, choosing to look at scores from the Woodcock-Johnson over the running records the teachers used (including both the TRC and DRA2). This sometimes resulted in alternative conclusions, mainly that statistically speaking, there was not significant growth in student achievement, despite a variety of anecdotal records shared between and amongst all stakeholders. Stakeholders other than teachers also questioned the TRI's success when related to retention and fidelity while choosing not to address results that were related to increased student motivation and teacher growth. Thus, after looking at all of the findings, one can see that while the teachers, myself, two principals, and several members of the research team agreed that the TRI was a success, there was no one definition as to what that looked like.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The major goal of this study was to make sure teachers' voices were heard, for the teachers are the true policy-makers and implementers within their classrooms, the real central change agents (Han & Weiss, 2005). Through the generosity, honesty, and good will of Lauren, Nellie, Pam, Haley, Gloria, Maddie, Tonya, Mikayla, Katie, and Caren, this group of teachers were given voice as it pertained to their role in the implementation of the instructional policy, the Targeted Reading Intervention, (TRI).

One of the reasons it was so important to hear the teachers' voices was to help us understand what perceptions teachers have of their role in policy implementation and what impacts those perceptions, for those perceptions will ultimately have an impact on how the teachers implement particular instructional policies like the TRI. "What is actually delivered or provided under the aegis of a policy depends finally on the individual at the end of the line..." (McLaughlin, 1987, p.174); thus if we (as researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, and advocates) want to have a say on what is delivered, we need to understand the individual at the end of the line - teachers. Some of what I came to understand was that these teachers were dedicated to helping their children no matter what, in spite of their personal feelings towards a particular policy; that both external and internal contextual factors had an influence on the teachers' perceptions; that feelings of being overwhelmed- as a result of implementing a number of policies at one time – remained a dominant theme and concern

among teachers; and that it really mattered to the teachers that the policy was successful, even if that meant overlooking potentially contradictory evidence.

A second reason it was important to hear the teachers' voices was because it provides validation that their voices and their influence are valuable. Researchers Green and Dixon (1996) point out, as the ones implementing policies, teachers are directly responsible for shaping and responding to present and future demands. How they respond to these demands varies. Sometimes the teachers respond on their own, as street bureaucrats and the "policy is largely what the practitioners perceive it to be..." (Jennings, 1996, p.15). However, when they have a partner or coach to help them, the responses differ, resulting in increased implementation.

Finally, a third reason in which it was important to stop and hear teachers' voices was because it forced me to stop and consider what questions I was asking and why. It reminded me to use the critical reflexivity that I detailed earlier, where I had to step back to consider what *I knew*, what *I read*, what *I saw*, and what *I felt* that was important. This reflection made explicit the fact that I made a very tactical decision when framing the TRI as an instructional policy instead of as an intervention in an attempt to draw attention to the power in the language; that the notion of "success" attributed to the teachers was actually an essential piece to the TRI; and that while it was empowering to frame the TRI as a policy, presenting it as research also allowed those implementing the TRI to let down their guard, be a little more humble, and form more authentic relationships.

These findings will be elaborated on throughout the rest of the discussion; the answers to the research questions will also be answered. Additionally, recommendations will be made to policymakers, teacher educators, and researchers so that this work is connected to

the greater discourse and hopefully extended and built upon by others interested in sharing teachers' voices.

### **Synthesizing the Data**

Given how connected the research questions were to the organization of this study, it is appropriate to return to them. Thus, after multiple analyses and re-workings of the data, the findings were synthesized and compiled into answers to the research questions, as detailed below.

**Answering Question #1.** *What perceptions do teachers have of their role in policy implementation? What impacts their perceptions?*

Overall, most of the teachers' did not feel they had a spoken role in anything to do with "policy", with "policy" being broadly defined as something one was made to do by someone at a higher level. This perception of policy was related to issues of control. The teachers felt they had no control in deciding which policies they would adopt and/or implement, as their school districts were making most of the policy decisions for them. When given a chance to participate in the decision-making process, which usually occurred at the school level, the teachers felt that while they may be invited to make smaller decisions at the school level, the invitations were disingenuous and unfortunately, did not address issues that were related to helping students. The teachers also pointed out they were not set up for success when it came time to implementing most policies in the classroom, in part because of all the other policies they were trying to implement, like RTI and the new lesson plan formats but also because of the lack of direction they received concerning what implementation should look like, like with the Common Core or Learning Focus. As a result, the teachers

were implementing policies they did not fully understand, saw little value in, and that took time away from other more enjoyable practices.

However, when asked about their role in implementing a specific policy, the TRI, the teachers' responses were different. The teachers felt they had some control in policy implementation and that their influence was critical, which re-framed the issue. This re-framing was impacted by a number of factors, including the amount of choice the teachers were given during implementation. On a pragmatic level, the teachers had the choice to *not* exercise their voice, as they were already being provided with a sound and systematic approach that used a diagnostic reading model, a suggested set of reading activities, and web-based coaching. However, they also had choices in how to fit the TRI into their schedules, what the focus of the lesson should be on, and what activities they thought would best meet their students' needs. Thus the teachers moved from perceiving themselves to playing a static role in which they had no control over policy development or implementation to having an active role where they recognized themselves as having a lot of control implementing the TRI through making their own choices.

When considering what impacted the teachers' perceptions of their roles, there were several potential influences. One was related to support. The teachers did not feel that with most policies, they had the support they needed to understand and implement the instructional policy being asked of them, which would eventually be a barrier for success, like with Learning Focus and Common Core. This was different with the TRI, where the teachers had ongoing professional development sessions throughout the year, multiple opportunities for reflection on their own or during team meetings, and weekly coaching

sessions where each teacher had the opportunity to work with a coach committed to helping them improve their diagnostic thinking while increasing their students' reading scores.

A second influence related to the teachers' perceptions of their roles was related to the feelings generated by the policies themselves, for in addition to feeling they had little control in making the policies, the teachers often felt they had little power in implementing the policies as well. These feelings of having little power were attributed to feeling micromanaged by the state department of public instruction and/or district and by being overwhelmed with the number of new policies they were expected to implement. The result? The teachers did not have time to put any of the policies into place within their classrooms. Additionally, the teachers were not convinced many of the instructional policies required of them that year would help their children, whereas there was minimal turnover time in seeing exciting, positive student results with the TRI. Lastly, the teachers showed little confusion, anxiety, or frustration around implementing the TRI, as they had choices regarding when to implement it, felt its approach, structure, support, and strategies were helpful and easy to follow, and knew they had a live support system to consult if need be; this contrasted sharply from some of the other policies detailed in Table 8, which seemed ambiguous, non-specific, and unclear.

Finally, a third influence that impacted the teachers' perceptions of their role during the implementation of the instructional policy, the TRI, may have been related to the relationship that existed between the teachers and myself. As their coach, I often made a distinct point to acknowledge what the teachers had to do to fit the implementation of the TRI into their schedules; then, whenever possible, I would thank them for their efforts, identify exactly what all they did well, and then help them plan out the next lesson. This

approach helped me forge a relationship with the teachers, one that was built around equal-understandings and collaborative teamwork, high energy and enthusiasm, and that honored their professional opinions and knowledge about what was best for their students.

**Answering Question #2.** *What influence do various stakeholders have on policy implementation and on its success? How do other stakeholders' perceptions complement or contrast with the teachers?*

Amongst the stakeholders, each one recognized their influence and the influence of others. The teachers recognized that they held a tremendous amount of influence because as one put it, "It starts with me. If I don't do it, then it doesn't get done". The teachers also acknowledged that I, their coach, had a lot of influence on the implementation because of the influence I had on them. Not only did I provide instructional supports but also enthusiasm, accountability, and a degree of candidness that encouraged the teachers to push themselves to work beyond their own expectations. The principals were also recognized by the teachers as having influence during implementation efforts, for they were perceived to be the gatekeepers, telling the teachers what they could or could not do, arranging for supports to be put into place, and shifting between playing the role of advocate and the person in charge. Lastly, the teachers recognized their students as having influence. They felt that it was up to the students to pay attention and apply the skills and strategies they had been taught; that without their internal sense of motivation, there would be few tangible outcomes; and that the students' actions were not just important for them but for the teachers as well, for the teachers' motivations were affected by their students.

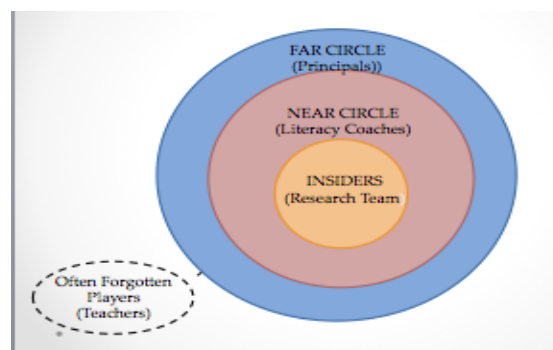
While many of the teachers acknowledged there was a "team effort" put forth by those particular stakeholders, there was also a collective understanding among the teachers

that they had the most influence but also the most responsibility. As Pam noted, “I take complete responsibility for my kids doing it every day, getting it done, for my aspect, for yours, for the research” (interview response, August 18, 2012). Because most teachers take their job of educating children seriously, it was not surprising to find the teachers to be particularly cognizant of their role as it related to their students. However, the teachers’ feelings of responsibility towards me, their literacy coach, were surprising, especially given that I was an outsider with very little influence on anything else outside of the TRI.

Interestingly, I also felt responsible for making sure the teachers were successful in implementing the TRI. I considered us to be a team, a “we” of sorts, and as a result, my field notes indicated that I too felt a great sense of responsibility. I was not alone in this. The principals also mentioned during interviews they felt responsible, responsible for supporting their teachers.

What the principals did not mention feeling responsible for was making the decision itself to participate in the TRI, an influence I acknowledged in a much larger way. This may have been due to my positioning, knowing “both sides of the story” as it related to the power the principals excised in deciding whether or not to participate in the larger TRI study. This idea of knowing “both sides of the story” may also be the reason the research team recognized a variety of stakeholders not identified by the teachers as having influence, including some of the early visionaries and creators of the TRI itself. However, not only did the research team identify different people of influence but they also linked them to various skills/activities differently as well. Unlike the teachers, who essentially linked influence and responsibility, the research team linked influence with who should receive credit and accolades for a job well done.

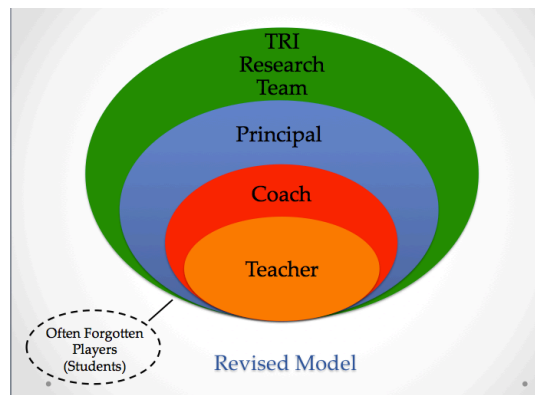
**Explaining the differences.** The teachers and the other stakeholders viewed their (and each others') influence differently. This may be because they were working from different frameworks, which help explain the cultural processes that affect the bigger picture. The research team was most likely working from the model proposed by Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt (1989), Hierarchies of Power and Circles of Influence, which demonstrated the hierarchy in place at the time of policy development, before implementation efforts even began (See Figure 2). At the core of this model was the TRI Research Team, the insiders, the creators, the policymakers, and the ones "in charge" of the project. Next, were the Literacy Coaches, those trained to help implement the TRI and who worked within the near circle so they had access to both the core (research team) and those outside the circle at the ground level (teachers). The far circle was composed of the Principals. They were often a buffer between the coaches and teachers, as they had their own agendas, plans, and priorities and had enormous influence on what each group could do based on their positioning. They also turned out to be the "gatekeepers," as they were the stakeholders who ultimately chose whether or not the school would adopt the TRI. Finally there were the Teachers, the often forgotten players who had no voice in how the policy was crafted but still played a critical role that needed to be recognized.



**Figure 2: Hierarchies of Power, Spheres of Influence**

This model seems to match much of what was reported regarding teachers' perceptions of their influence in policy implementation, in its most generalized form. The teachers did not feel they had much control when it came to implementing district, state, and federal policies. The principals were the “cheerleaders” for the teachers and had the power to make things easier because there was a geographical, physical connection. The core research team may have been referenced but did not have a lot of contact with the “often forgotten” teachers, who often forgot about them as well when it came to examining what influence each group of stakeholders had in the implementation of the TRI. In the middle were the literacy coaches, those who appeared to be involved in the implementation, sometimes playing a critical role or one of influence, but not responsible for the actual implementation with the children. One of the influences, however, that was not addressed often was that of the principals, who in reality had a huge impact. The reason they had such a large impact was because ultimately, it was their decision whether or not their school participated in the TRI; as mentioned in the Findings, the principals approached these decisions in different ways.

However, there was a re-framing that occurred for the teachers when they began to acknowledge how much control they had when it came to implementing the TRI, as represented in the “Revised Spheres of Influence” model below in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Revised Spheres of Influence**

This model features the teacher as being in the core, as the teacher is the one making the instructional decisions, the one who has the most influence. In the near circle is the coach, the stakeholder many of the teachers indicated as having a lot of influence on them. While in the previous model the coach was not situated next to the teachers, the teachers also addressed this change. “It feels like you’re getting checked on initially but now we see the coach is there for support” (Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012). In the far circle of the revised model is the principal; while they were still seen as being involved, the principals’ presence did not seem to play as large a part in the teachers’ estimation. As Tonya acknowledged, “Ms. Armor does listen and tries but they [district] go with what they want to say” (interview response, August 14, 2012). On the outside is the TRI Research Team. While the teachers still acknowledged the team’s influence, rarely were they mentioned during implementation. Lastly was the student, the “often forgotten player”. As indicated in the model, the student was still connected to the teacher but not explicitly mentioned by any of the other stakeholders.

As indicated in the new Spheres of Influence in Figure 4, a rather large change occurred for the teachers when they began to acknowledge how much control they had when it came to implementing the TRI – so much so that the model was revised. As Carless (1999) confirmed, “teachers are the individuals who implement, adapt, reject, or ignore curriculum innovation. It is thus something of a truism that they are the core of the innovation process” (p. 374).

### **Understanding What Matters to Teacher Implementers**

The new model presented in Figure 4 acts as a reminder that since teachers are at the core of the model and the ones most closely connected to implementation, it is essential we

understand what matters to them. Darling-Hammond (2005) argues that, “Any examination of policy implementation must include an analysis of the value system of the people entrusted with administering the implementation, because their values affect the level of resource allocation, political support, and monitoring that occurs” (p. 46). Based on the findings and drawing from the supporting literature, one must understand that an analysis of the teachers’ value systems indicate that children matter, context matters, quantity matters, and the level of success matters.

**The children matter.** To understand a teacher and how they implement a policy, one cannot forget that for most teachers, the children are who matter. They are not concerned about policy mechanisms like finance, testing, or school buildings – the children come first. There were numerous references to this in the findings presented in Chapter 4: Nellie didn’t mind learning something new if it benefitted her students; despite not wanting to do it, Katie did the TRI eighty-fives times, had thirteen coaching sessions, and attended eleven team meetings, as she was told it helped her kids and to her, that is what mattered; Lauren wanted to keep doing the TRI because she saw how much it helped her students grow; and Haley remarked off-the-cuff that the “important” decisions were the ones regarding children and their outcomes.

Consequently, the teachers accepted the TRI because they saw exactly how it related to their students. They were meeting with their students on a regular basis, building stronger relationships with them, and seeing outcomes that were quick, tangible, and real. The teachers would see the students’ faces light up when they figured out how to “crack the code”; they shared high-fives when a student was able to make a word more difficult than the one the day before; and they saw their students take pride in their new-found abilities. I was

lucky enough to see this in action. After one of my first TRI coaching sessions, Lauren indicated that she had a story to share with me. When her student had left the reading table, Lauren recounted how the child had gone home the day before with his TRI book in hand saying, “My mom always reads to me but now I get to read to her because I know how to read!” Lauren followed up by saying, “You’ve convinced me, I’m sold [on the TRI] already!” Nothing out of the ordinary had occurred; the TRI had simply applied what McLaughlin reported in the Change Agent Study that, “Individuals responsible for carrying out a policy act not only from institutional incentives, but also from professional and personal motivation” (1987, p.174). Lauren valued her children and thus by keeping the focus on the child, the TRI ensured she would want to implement the policy because she felt motivated to keep soliciting similar results.

**The context matters.** When the teachers discussed barriers to implementation, there were numerous references to the societal-driven issues like whose voices were heard. The teachers pointed at the district as “the ones making *those* decisions”, saw the state as “breathing down their neck”, and felt “no more decisions were being made the school level, let alone the classroom level”. However, when looking at what really prevented the teachers from implementing a policy, such as the TRI, they were events and occurrences that were significant at the school level, within the local context. For example, many teachers indicated in e-mails that they could not meet for coaching sessions because their assistants were out; this was a legitimate barrier for them. On the other hand, the first grade teachers at Myth River did not have assistants and Lauren and Pam (the teachers that worked there) were still able to meet with their coaches a record sixteen and fourteen times, indicating this was a local issue, not a universal one.

The teachers also spoke to some of the positive contextual aspects. Lauren commented that her county felt too many students were being referred to special education services for reading difficulties; as a result it was an issue already on her radar, one that she was enlisted in trying to help remediate, along with the rest of the county, before she began starting the TRI. The teachers at Tiger Valley were also already on board to help their struggling readers, as several teachers commented that everyone knew their reading test scores were not where they should be and so they embraced the TRI and were excited about it; it was evident their principal was on board as well, as it emerged in the data that she asked how the students were progressing and checked in on the teachers to see how they were feeling quite frequently. “Being on board” as a school, without a doubt, had an impact on the individual teachers’ attitudes, as seen by the consistently more positive voices generated by the teachers from Myth River and Tiger Valley. However, there was no question it was more difficult for those at Compass whose majority had voted against the wishes of their principal, only to find their opinions disregarded, to display positive feelings towards the TRI.

These findings answer back to Louis and Miles’ (1990) work in which they identified external contextual factors, such as the district level context, the role of the state, and community factors, as having an influence on the perceptions of teacher implementers, as all of the teachers described these factors as entities that prevented them from having a voice. When examining the internal context factors, Louis and Miles described school factors such as staff cohesiveness, preexisting attitudes and beliefs, and elements of school leadership. When applied to the TRI, the teachers identified both negative and positive implications, as they related to school culture and principal leadership. All in all, the findings reinforced Louis and Miles’ work that both external and internal contextual factors do have an impact.

**The quantity matters.** The teachers had the best of intentions to do the TRI. Their e-mails indicated they were making an effort to “get it in”, that they “tried to be diligent to the study”, and that many of them “looked forward to working with the student and the TRI strategies”. However, the sheer quantity of policies they were being asked to do lead them to feel “like you don’t know if you can do a good job” for there was “just so much to do and not enough time”; no one felt empowered to try to challenge the system because some policies were presented as, “a very big deal, no leniency”, leading teachers to “come in already feeling defeated”.

These feelings have a huge impact on implementation efforts, as educational change expert Gene Hall warned policy makers *twenty* years ago,

*More and more curriculum innovations, rules, regulations, policies, and prescriptions are being laid upon teachers, principals, and schools...Multiple innovations are being adopted at the same time. There has been a complete failure of the top, middle, and bottom to accept the fact that new things, when added to an already full vessel, have little lasting effect. Until we start understanding that there is a finite amount of activity that can be accomplished at any one time, we are going to continue to have system overload. System overload brings with it a whole new round of symptoms in addition to implementation failure...(1992, p.894)*

While “failure” did not necessarily occur during the first year of implementation during the TRI, this message continues to beg to be heard.

**Achieving success matters.** Despite the number of initiatives the teachers were grappling with, “failure” was not an option and success, a frequent theme. It was measured and demonstrated in multiple ways - increased student achievement scores, higher levels of student motivation and confidence, increased teacher growth, and increased self-awareness. This does not imply that all teachers or stakeholders used the same forms of measurement; each teacher had their own “voice” and reason for why it was successful. This occurrence is reflected in the literature, which states, “If students, teachers, or administrators believe that

the results of an examination are important, the effect is produced by what individuals perceive to be the case” (Madaus, 1999, p.78 as cited in McGee, 2006). As evidence, some spoke about the students’ academic growth: Maddie referenced the data while Mikayla highlighted growth. Nellie mentioned lower retention numbers and TRC scores, Pam saw it in DRA2 scores, and Tonya spoke about Dibels scores. Other teachers spoke about the students’ motivation, like Haley and Lauren, who both saw their students rushing to their reading table so they could read with their teachers right away. Caren mentioned the students’ use of strategies and increased confidence. Finally, several teachers spoke about their own professional growth. For example, Gloria spoke about it being a wonderful resource for her in helping her get through first grade and Katie mentioned growing as a teacher.

As a result, because all of the teachers had their own idea of what it meant to be successful, they were able to focus on their perceived successes to motivate them to continue to implement. However, we know that success was really important to them because there were also a lot of signs noted in the secondary sources the TRI was not successful but that were not acknowledged. For example, Tonya did the TRI forty-four times before seeing a child move up more than one level, yet she continued to do it a total of sixty-six times! Both Mikayla and Katie voiced their doubts about whether or not the TRI was the impetus behind their childrens’ growth multiple times during implementation, yet they also implemented the TRI with a high degree of fidelity, seventy-five and eighty-five times. While they were not privy to the scores on the Woodcock Johnson, both Pam and Haley’s students appeared to go down in at least half of the sub-tests; a result one might think would translate into some of the classroom findings they did themselves. Finally, Tonya, Mikayla, Maddie, and Gloria all

had TRI students who ended up being retained. While the reasons for their retention were not revealed, typically reading scores are quite influential in first grade. Yet again and again, all of the teachers declared the TRI to be successful. While this data appears to be contradictory, it reemphasizes the main point – that it matters to teachers if they/the policy/the intervention are successful or not – so much so that findings contrary to those of success may be and often are, ignored.

### **Understanding How Teacher Implementers Respond**

While knowing what matters to implementers is important, educational researcher McLaughlin (1990) suggests that analysis should also focus on the micro-interactions at the local level among implementers. As the ones implementing the policies, teachers must respond to varying implementation demands. Sometimes the teachers respond and work on their own, as street bureaucrats. At other times they may have access to a consultant or coach, which may result in changes in teacher morale and/or student achievement. In both cases, their situations have an effect on implementation.

**Working alone.** Instructional policies are often developed and then transmitted in a top-down manner. However, “the coordination, monitoring, and communication of the ideal rational bureaucracy is not the reality of school systems” (Marshall & Gersl-Pepin, 2005, p.53), as it often leaves teachers responsible for implementation but with little to no support in actually doing so. Out of necessity, they make adjustments or accommodations so that they are able to continue meeting their current needs while also meeting the new ones identified in the new instructional policy. Wetherley and Lipsky (1977) refer to these implementers at the ground level as those who take on the role of a “street level bureaucrat”. In our findings, this was seen as the teachers began to make accommodations by determining how much of a

priority it was to meet with their TRI students; whether or not they were going to stick to only using the TRI with the strugglers identified by the TRI research team; how often they would use the TRI, as in whether it was rationed and used only with the strugglers or if its strategies were used across the day as well; and modifying the goals based on their definitions of success. Table 11 demonstrates how I perceived the teachers to be acting as street-level bureaucrats, using the framework suggested by Wetherley & Lipsky:

**Table 12: Street-Level Bureaucrats**

Teacher	Setting priorities	Limiting clientele	Rationing services	Modifying goals
TRI Expectations	Do it everyday	Work with 3 TRI students, one at a time	Use only with TRI students on a one-to-one basis but techniques should transfer to other students too	Growth in TRI students' academic achievement scores; more growth in non-strugglers' academic achievement than those in control classrooms; increase teacher capacity in matching instruction to kids' needs
Katie	Do it everyday	Worked with 2 at a time almost from beginning	Yes – not used in classroom, only during TRI sessions	Grew as teacher, kids' confidence grew, decoding better
Mikayla	Do it everyday	Did reluctantly but still worked with other individuals one-on-one	Yes – not used in classroom	Growth in childrens' skills
Caren	Do it four times a week	Worked only with those chosen by the TRI but fought it	Yes – not used in classroom explicitly	Childrens' skills and confidence up, Dibels scores up for one
Nellie	Do it everyday – 1 <sup>st</sup> thing in the morning	Added one student w/o hesitation	No – also used with other reading groups	All made progress, none retained, one up 2 grade levels
Lauren	Do it everyday – 1 <sup>st</sup> thing in the morning	Stuck to the TRI-identified students but reluctant to switch to others	No – used in whole group and reading groups	RR levels up, kids' motivation up
Pam	Do it everyday but quickly	Stuck to the TRI-identified students but worked w/ 2 at a time most of the year	Yes – but wanted to use more this year in whole group settings	RR levels went up, kids confident reading in class
Gloria	Do it some days, when behavior was manageable	Stuck to the TRI-identified students but saw one very little	Yes – not used in classroom explicitly	Teacher knowledge went up
Maddie	Do it most days	Stuck to the TRI-identified students, reluctant to switch,	No – used Blend As You Go with entire class	RR levels went up, kids grew, skills improved, kids actually reading

		one child chronically absent		
Haley	Do it some days, when behavior was manageable	Stuck to the TRI-identified students but saw one very little	Yes – wanted to use it with class but was concerned about being respectful of the research	RR levels up, Dibels scores up, motivation up
Tonya	Do it everyday	Stuck to the TRI-identified students, even with 2 that didn't make much progress	Yes – not used in classroom explicitly	one student's scores went way up, growth in two others' skills
AVER-AGE:	Everyday	Stuck with kids	Kept it limited to TRI sessions	RR levels up, growth in skills, confidence, & motivation

Even though all of the teachers were not alone and in fact, had the same literacy coach, myself, they were able to make these individual decisions. This was due, in part, as a result of loose coupling. Loose coupling can occur when a system or unit is not being tightly monitored, coordinated, or communicated with; while this allows for units to maintain their own identity and independence, “loose coupling defeats some policy efforts” (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p.53). For example, it would not work for a policy intent on becoming system-changing like the Common Core; nor would it work if say an entire county wanted to standardize their PEP system. However, in the case of the TRI, the decision to allow the local implementers (i.e. the teachers) to make decisions was intentional and one of the ways in which I was creating teacher buy-in. I knew that if I took away all of their decision-making, our relationship would suffer and we would never form a strong collaborative relationship.

**Working together.** Alternatively, if the teachers were to make all of their own decisions, problems would surface there as well. First, the teachers would probably not change their instruction in the ways in which the TRI was suggesting. This is because, “Without companionship, help in reflecting on practice, and instruction on fresh teaching strategies, most people can make very few changes in their behavior, however well-intentioned they are” (Joyce & Showers, 1996, p.6). Plus, for those teachers that did get past

that hurdle, “the frame for those changes was the pedagogy that had been pressed by the older policies” (Cohen & Ball, 1990, p.334).

Just as research indicates how hard it is to make change when on one’s own, there is also research that shows the benefits of working with a coaching model. For example, several studies have examined the implementation of a reinforcement-based treatment by a classroom teacher where the use of process and outcome feedback from a consultant resulted in substantial increases in implementation (Noell, Witt, LaFleur, Mortenson, Ranier, & LaVelle, 2000). Findings in our study as well indicated that implementation seemed to increase when coaching sessions were already scheduled; for example, teachers typically wouldn’t fit in TRI lessons during half-days but in one feedback e-mail it was clear the coaching session was the impetus, as it read, “ Thank you for working in a shorter lesson. I know with the half-day and report card pick-up that you would have preferred I just watch you when you return from spring break...” In another study, this one sponsored by Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney (2008), it was suggested that classroom teachers who receive coaching are able to significantly reduce the number of children at risk for reading failure; some of our teachers also felt that way commenting, “I couldn’t have gotten her to grade level without TRI....”. Both of these studies indicate that the implementation of a coaching model increases a teacher’s ability and likelihood to successfully implement a treatment and increase student achievement.

### **Considering My “Re-Framing”**

A third, and important reason for stopping to hear teachers' voices, was to make me stop and consider what questions I was asking and why. It reminded me to use the critical reflexivity that I detailed earlier, where I had to step back and consider what *I knew*, what *I*

*read*, what *I saw*, and what *I felt* that was important. This reflection made explicit the fact that I made a very tactical decision when framing the TRI as an instructional policy instead of as an intervention in an attempt to draw attention to the power it had when labeled as a policy; that the notion of “success” attributed to the teachers was actually an essential piece to the TRI; and that while it was very empowering to frame the TRI as a policy, presenting it as research also allowed those implementing the TRI to let down their guard, be a little more humble, and form mutually-benefitting relationships.

**The TRI as a policy.** As disclosed from the start, I very purposefully chose to approach the TRI as a policy, a set of informal practices that shape behaviors and outcomes. The TRI uses traditional policy instruments like mandates, inducements, and capacity-building techniques. It seeks to solve problems and change outcomes; because the TRI is also concerned with making change and is overt in making sure the classroom teacher is the one in power, it makes sense to use elements from both traditional and critical policy analyses, even though the approach is rarely used in this area of study.

As a result of the unconventional approach, one consequence I hoped for was that framing the TRI as a policy would inspire others to reconsider the way they look at the TRI. Many simply saw it as a reading intervention but I saw it as being much more than that, for better or for worse. It was a policy that created a whole lot of change for teachers as we carefully nudged them towards implementation: subsequently, the teachers then had to make changes to their practices, schedule, pacing guides, small group instruction... it had a big impact (“We heard you’ll do this, you’ll do this, and you’ll do this all in fifteen minutes and we were like really? Really?” (Mikayla, interview response, August 13, 2012)). At the same time, it empowered teachers to help their struggling readers on their own (“Hey, I can really

do this!” (Pam, interview response, August 18, 2012)), gave themselves something concrete to follow (“It wasn’t that I wouldn’t want to but you all gave me something easy to follow so when I pulled her, I knew exactly what to do so it made it easier for me to pull her” (Nellie, interview response, August 17, 2012)) and showed tangible results (“I just tested J on a DRA2 level 16, which is on grade level for the end of the year, and he was able to read the story with only a few errors!” (Nellie, interview response, August 17, 2012)). “Policies” garner a lot of attention and thus, it seemed to be an appropriate approach.

Policies also bring with them a certain amount of attention to those who created and implemented them; I felt the TRI stakeholders deserved that attention for a number of reasons. First, it was a really well thought-out policy that used a variety of policy instruments, even though it was not created by people who consider themselves to be policymakers or even versed in policymaking. The developers had spent a lot of time looking at the research, seeing what mattered and worked, considering their past mistakes and those of others (Garet et al., 2008), all with the hopes of avoiding unintended consequences and helping students become more successful readers and the teachers more successful instructors in reading. Second, a lot of people devoted copious amounts of time and energy into the implementation. The teachers especially worked really hard at implementing the TRI and gave up substantial amounts of their time as well. Not only did they participate in the three-day Summer Institute, subsequent follow-up professional development sessions, weekly coaching sessions, weekly team meetings, daily lessons with students but they also spent many hours filling out surveys, evaluations, and doing specific instructional match activities that were filmed for later inspection, much of which they were paid for doing. Implementation is just as, if not more, important but is often forgotten, as policy makers

often provide support for development but none for implementation (Hall, 1992); framing the TRI as a policy opened up that space to recognize teachers' efforts.

Lastly, policies are often evaluated as being successful or not with a more global view. Since "being successful" was so important for the teachers, I felt more confident stating whether or not the TRI was successful as a policy as opposed to discussing whether the TRI was a successful research-based intervention, which would entail relying on statistics, which are typically used to evaluate programs and interventions in very quantifiable and specific ways. This turned out to be a good decision, for after the first year, the scores on the Woodcock-Johnson did not indicate statistically significant findings. However, on a global level, we know there are more young children struggling to learn to read and that their teachers are feeling more confident and comfortable in their reading instruction and in their ability to engage in policy implementation in a more forward and proactive fashion. This seems like a clear indication of one kind of success.

**The TRI as a success.** While the teachers indicated that being successful mattered to them, upon examining my questions and field notes, I realized that the notion of "success" I was attributing to the teachers was actually an essential piece to the TRI as well. This is because the TRI was built with Guskey's Theory of Teacher Change (1986) in mind. The expectation is that once the teachers see change, they will feel successful and motivated to continue implementing the TRI on a regular basis, as activities that are successful are more likely to be repeated than those that are not (1986). If the teachers do not see a change, especially in student outcomes (i.e. don't feel successful), there is less inducement for them to change their beliefs, attitudes, or teaching practices (Lamb, Cooper, & Warren, 2007). Thus, even though Mikayla and Katie did not want to do the TRI, it was imperative that they

see at least some success, or else it would be extremely difficult to convince them to continue to implement.

As a result, upon examining the feedback e-mails I sent to the teachers, it is clear that I made a distinct effort to reinforce all of the good things the teachers were doing, commenting, “J. is really benefitting from the challenges you are throwing his way!” “I think moving ahead to Green and Purple activities was exactly what she needed!” and, “Because you’ve done such an excellent job modeling, I’m confident she can blend and summarize on her own”. I also made sure the teachers recognized the progress/success we were seeing in their students, making remarks such as, “You could tell that A. was really proud of himself and having a good time!” and “She is moving SO quickly!”. These reminders served not just as a way to recognize and validate what they were doing but to also reinforce that the success they were seeing was visible and valuable to others.

### **Recommendations**

This study sought to share teachers’ voices about their perceptions of their roles in policy implementation and what impacts those perceptions. The study also examined what influence the teachers believed they and other stakeholders had on policy implementation. Their voices were solicited – and hopefully heard – in an attempt to help us understand what matters to them during implementation, for those perceptions will eventually have an impact on the implementation of instructional policy. Moving forward, the hope is that this study will influence policymakers, teacher educators, and fellow researchers, contribute to the literature and inspire others to promote sharing teachers’ voices.

**For policymakers.** There is much to be desired when it comes to how policymakers currently approach education policy, both in regard to the creation and development of new

policies but also in how implementation proceeds. In the past, we have allowed those furthest from the classroom to dictate policy that fundamentally changes the interactions and instruction that take place in schools through the use of mandates (Meier, 2002), a model that reflects the original Hierarchies of Power/Spheres of Influence by Marshall, Mitchell & Wirt (1987). We have permitted teachers to be bombarded with new policies year after year. Finally, we have stayed relatively quiet about what we know about good implementation. This can happen no longer; thus findings from this study will be directly applied and used as impetus for these recommendations.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that results from this study do not point to traditional “do this, do that” types of mandates and recommendations. For example, findings from this study do not indicate unilaterally that teachers need to always be involved in the making of policies, which is a common recommendation in policy studies, as several teachers indicated that they were already “as involved as they wanted to be”. Instead, the teachers wanted it known that if their opinion was solicited, it should be respected. As one teacher commented during a focus group, “If they weren’t going to listen, why did they ask?” Also, findings from this study did not indicate there were major structural or philosophical problems with the policy being examined, the TRI, which again, is common in policy studies, particularly those as of late that examined Reading First and No Child Left Behind. This was because in reality, there was no indication that those who created, developed, and went about implementing the TRI made any large-scale errors, even though they were not recognized by the teachers as having a lot of influence on the implementation of the TRI. In fact, none of the teachers commented that the TRI was difficult to do or that they disagreed with any of the components, just that it was hard to find time to do it during the course of the day. Finally,

the teachers in this study did not point to a particular “thing” that needed to be done to “fix” education or bring about change – no demands for smaller class sizes, higher salaries, or less regulation were heard. Instead, while it might sound condescending, it seemed most of the teachers were thrilled to simply be asked their opinions, heard, and be given the opportunity to share their perceptions of a.) their roles in policy implementation & what impacted those perceptions, and b.) what influence they believed they and other stakeholders had on policy implementation.

So while *asking* teachers for their perceptions is an important validation of their influence, *hearing* these perceptions is even more important, especially for policymakers since teachers are the ones “at the end of the line” and thus, have the most impact on how policies are implemented. Keeping this fact in mind, findings from the study did indicate that most teachers felt policymakers should solicit teachers’ voices and feedback during the decision-making process as policies are being developed. This decision-making should not include insincere or symbolic attempts, as the teachers recognize those moves for what they are, attempts to “look good on paper”. Instead, the decisions should be centered on how to best support children since children matter to teachers. Additionally, policymakers should also take note that their policies are more likely to be implemented if the teachers implementing the policy are surrounded by internal and external contextual factors that support the general message; if they are not so overburdened with a number of other policies needing to be implemented; if they receive support during implementation by way of ongoing professional development and the support of an instructional coach; and if they can see tangible results, as measured through increased student achievement scores, student motivation and confidence levels, and/or teacher growth and increased self-awareness.

If their policy does not require strict standardization from the beginning, policymakers might also consider using loose coupling, which provides the flexibility local implementers need but the oversight most governing bodies require. Teacher beliefs about professional development are impacted by the amount of choice they have in deciding what to attend to and if they see a positive change in student achievement (Moorewood & Bean, 2009); without the options then that allow teachers to make choices, teacher beliefs are less likely to be changed, which is problematic for those looking to create lasting teacher change for, “it is not sufficient to establish policies...unless there is a parallel and consistent effort with effective professional development designed to alter, modify, or transform the practices, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers” (Fullan, 1982 as cited in Gatt, 2009).

Finally, policymakers should also keep Lauren’s advice in mind when creating new policies – develop them with a precise goal/outcome, precise activities, and many tools (including a Coach) to help the teachers reflect and restructure to meet each child’s need. Broad-sweeping policies are too much to grapple with, especially when teachers are often unsure of what policies are, what they are really saying and consequently, how they should affect their teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Instead, they might try using the TRI as a model, which uses mandates but also inducements and a great deal of capacity building.

**For teacher educators.** While addressing policymakers is important, addressing teacher educators is as well, for “We need to recognize that the measure of a policy’s worth is not knowing the better way or even knowing better ways to teach teachers the better way. The worth of a policy is in what teachers learn from it. This means we must attend more to teachers’ learning than to policymakers’ actions” (Carless, 1999).

As this study has shown, depending on the policy, teachers can believe they have influence and they can recognize when they are put into positions of power, as both Haley and Mikayla mentioned when discussing their role in implementing the TRI. However, practicing teachers are fully entrenched in a system where their voices are often unheard and where the consequences might be too high for them to say anything or to question the present social order. In order for this to change, the teacher preparation system needs to adjust how they are preparing teachers, for they are not just preparing teachers but also advocates, leaders, and policy-makers and implementers. Teacher educators could do this by teaching them the Revised Spheres of Influence model (in Figure 4) as one way to instill that belief right from the beginning that “teachers are the individuals who implement, adapt, reject, or ignore curriculum innovation. It is thus something of a truism that they are the core of the innovation process” (Carless, 1999, p. 374). Innovation and a change of this nature needs to occur for,

*Educational reform has failed time and time again. We believe that this is because reform has either ignored teachers or oversimplified what teaching is about. And **teachers themselves have not yet taken the initiative** to build the new conditions necessary for reversing a trend that has overburdened schools with problems, and ironically added insult to injury by overloading them with fragmented, unworkable solutions. **Teachers have been too busy responding to the latest forays to steer a bold and imaginative course of their own** (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1996, p.xiii).*

We know that when teachers enter their classrooms, their hands are full as they attempt to implement policy after policy after policy, just as my teachers were doing. Thus, if we can empower them to take the initiative before they become too busy, perhaps we will have a shot towards real, long-lasting change.

That said, once their hands are full, we need to keep that knowledge in mind as we develop continuing professional development for our in-service teachers, one of the

influences associated with gains in student achievement according to Hattie (2009). As teachers, they are busy and they professional development that is easy to implement, meaningful, and shows results. This is part of the reason the TRI was successful, for as Nellie put it, “You all gave me something easy to follow so when I pulled her, I knew exactly what to do so it made it easier for me to pull her everyday” (interview response, August 17, 2012). Additionally, there was a basic lesson plan to follow, with all of the resources already provided, it only took 15-20 minutes per day, and if the teachers needed help, they had a coach there to support them. Also, the results were immediate and tangible. Knowing that these features worked with the professional development administered through the TRI, why would teacher educators not want to use them in future endeavors?

Teacher educators might also want to take into consideration some of the lesson learned in this study when thinking about how we teach and prepare our future administrators. Wixson and Yochum (2004) found in their research on literacy policy that the high reform schools typically had a supportive principal. While this qualitative study is not trying to imply causation, one cannot help but notice a similar trend in this study, as the teachers that were the most positive towards the TRI, like those from Tiger Valley, who were the same ones who had a positive principal who “listens to us” and allowed them to make the decision to implement the TRI. On the other hand, Mikayla and Katie were initially bitter and were never totally sold on the TRI; they came from the school where they were asked if they wanted to do the TRI, the majority of teachers voted not to do it, and yet the principal still took it on. These are the types of experiences that should be shared with future administrators so when faced with similar options, they will remember the implications.

**For researchers.** Working with teachers and presenting their voices in a forum such as this has been one of the most fulfilling projects I have ever done and I hope this study inspires other researchers to do the same. For those of us doing research in public institutions, we have a duty to represent those teachers who are too busy in the classroom teaching our students - in our writing, in our advocacy work, and in our policy-making. Additionally, we need to listen to our teachers when they explain what works and what does not work for them, while also guiding them towards the goal. While I will not go as far as Haley in saying that I “truly made the difference” for her when implementing the TRI, I do think that having a partner is essential. As researchers, we should be those partners – partners who will consider both the traditional and the critical perspectives.

Furthermore, we need to write about those relationships and partnerships. I personally felt that my relationships with the teachers were very strong and thus part of the reason we were so “successful”. The teachers too, indicated that having a coach made a huge difference in their ability to implement the particular instructional policy under investigation, the TRI. However, these anecdotal notes become lost in the sea of quantitative analyses and the number of qualitative studies that acknowledge the importance of these interactions, especially when examining policy implementation studies, are few and far between. As a result, other researches, interventionists, and policymakers are no longer privy to those lessons learned and thus unaware of the benefits in including them in their policies as well. It is up to us to be more proactive in emphasizing the benefits that come with working as a team – teacher and coach, implementer and researcher. Whether that writing occurs in a peer-reviewed journal, a policy briefing, a professional magazine, or a blog, the results need to be shared.

Another responsibility the research community needs to take on is using more than one perspective or theoretical frame. While this study did not adhere strictly to the tenants of traditional and critical policy analysis, it did use elements of both. This should be done more frequently, for as Michelle Young put it,

*This practice [using two approaches] may help us better understand the policy problems we study; the relationships among policy discourse, planning, implementation, and practice; the dynamics of policy contexts; and the impact of policy and practice on individuals... using more than one frame will increase the trustworthiness of research findings because each frame serves as a check on the other. (1999, p. 679)*

As researchers, we contribute to the field not just through the content we write about but by upholding and extending research methods that are trustworthy and reliable. Thus, using two approaches is advisable for not just those examining implementation policies but any areas of critical inquiry.

## **Limitations**

This study filled a number of gaps in the larger TRI study. It took into account teachers' voices, their contexts, their understandings of their roles, and their perceptions and measurements of success. This study also made sure to acknowledge the power in framing the TRI as a policy, the power dynamics that existed between myself, the researcher/ literacy coach, and the teachers, and the power issues the teachers recognized outside of the TRI in the larger policy context. However, as in any study, there are always some limitations or areas in which the study could be extended to broaden its impact, as listed below:

- Limitation #1: I interviewed my own teachers. By doing so, I in large part, controlled how the teachers answered the questions based on what I asked, what reactions I inadvertently gave off, and the ways in which I responded. Additionally, while I like

to consider us having a relationship on even terms, in reality, that is not the case; I am in a place of power. The teachers are required to meet with me on a weekly basis within the context of the TRI; they are routinely the ones soliciting information and advice from me; and in doing this interview, may have been drawing from those previous social interactions with me when responding to my interview questions.

- Limitation #2: While my goal was to elevate teachers' voices and to make them the center of this study, I also recognize that in order for that to occur, the teachers' voices still had to go through me as a filter. Not only did I make the decisions which answers to share, where to place their answers within the text, and/or how to frame their words, but I have explicitly connected/associated them with me, meaning that they will no longer be considered sole author of those thoughts, as my name will also be connected with those instances as well.
- Limitation #3: By focusing on perceptions and relying heavily on self-reported data, the majority of the findings are considered to be subjective. This is problematic, for those that prefer to think of research as being value-neutral or whose research limits "evidence-based practices" to quantitative work may not find this work to be accessible or useful.
- Limitation #4: The sample size used in this study was quite small, which limits any type of generalizability. While one must be careful with generalizing qualitative results in any situation, the especially small number of principals interviewed is a forceful reminder that one must be careful in how results are shared and disseminated, as special consideration must be put into place to protect participants' identities and

to also make sure they are not touted or presented as “the representative” of a particular group.

- Limitation #5: At present time, one cannot specifically link these findings to student achievement scores. There is a general unease in the research community in linking qualitative measures with data thought to explain causation or to infer correlation. And, while some statistical analyses could be completed with little fan faire, doing so might privilege that information over the views and perceptions of the teachers, which is the opposite of what this study wanted to do. Unfortunately, this prevents many potential follow-up studies from receiving grant-funding, as grants still function within a culture that tends to reward mostly quantitative studies.
- Limitation #6: I may have brought up new issues and ideas simply by asking certain questions during the focus groups or interviews. The teachers may have never considered certain ideas or concepts before and thus simply asking the questions had an impact on the findings.

### **Extensions**

Despite the number of limitations, there are a number of ways in which this work should be expanded upon and continued. For example, adding in a mixed methods design would enable more researchers to access and appreciate the work being done here. Additionally, those more familiar with quantitative measures could then compare standardized assessment results with the qualitatively collected teacher perceptions without the fear or concern of over-privileging one form of data over another. By doing a study of this kind, there would be a more concrete link/non-link established between the

standardized assessment results and the subjective observational notes, opening additional doors to the research world and potential would-be grant funders.

Going the opposite way, we could also use a case study approach in examining these issues of teacher perceptions and influence to give more “thick descriptions”, which would allow us to explore the data a little deeper. Using a case study approach would also enable us to really look at a particular area of interest; for example, to explore the influence of principals on both the teachers’ practices and the students’ achievement scores. That particular issue was one that appeared anecdotally but quite frequently. An ethnographic case study would provide an opportunity to perform a more in-depth examination of the dynamics between the two (students and principals), hopefully revealing concrete practices that either aid or dissuade student participation and success or at the very least, help us reframe what is happening between the stakeholders.

Finally, a natural way to extend the scope of this study would be to broaden the group of stakeholders, broadening the sample size. By adding in stakeholders like parents, students, and potentially TRI assessors, the research would become more robust and representative of the entire TRI population; meanwhile by broadening the sample size, the statistical power credibility ratings would go up, a necessity for anyone doing quantitative or mixed methods work. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2005) says, policies do not operate within a vacuum; interviewing and examining all of the stakeholders’ views then would really give a much broader, bigger picture of what’s happening in children’s’ and teachers’ lives that may be helping or hurting implementation efforts.

While the hope is that policymakers, teacher educators, and researchers continue to move this work forward, it is understood that “Essentially, how a policy is viewed, understood, and

experienced only becomes real when teachers attempt to implement the policy” (Smit, 2005, p.298). It is with great hope then, that this is just the beginning of my work with teachers, sharing their voices in the policy conversation.

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