Misplaced Inadequacies: A Comparative Case Study of Three Students Struggling to Learn to Read

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Abstract

Changes in policy and practice that originated with the 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA], US Department of Education) created systems that exposed students to earlier and more consistent research-based intervention (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012) thereby reducing the rate and increasing the mean age of students diagnosed with learning disabilities. Despite these documented positive outcomes, research has identified 2 -5 % of students who continue to demonstrate an "inadequate response" to evidence-based instruction that has been largely effective for their peers (Greulich et al., 2014). Little research has traced the educational histories of "inadequate responders," and no known case studies have included children's perspectives together with those of their parents and teachers. There is also a dearth of special education literature that is situated in private, faith-based schools where students function without all of the protections and structures of IDEA (Russo et. al., 2011; Scanlan, 2009a).

This dissertation was an exploratory, comparative case study (Yin, 2014) of three third grade boys who were identified by their Catholic school staff as having demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention in reading. Each student was observed in a combination of his general education classroom and reading intervention periods, and interviews were conducted with the students and their parents and teachers. The learners' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), test reports, and cumulative records were also analyzed.

Findings indicated that the students' identification as inadequate responders did not accurately reflect their early reading experiences in which their instruction did not align with evidenced-based practices for students with learning disabilities (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). The students shared the deep emotional impact of past school-related events, and demonstrated patterns of sadness, anxiety, and avoidance during reading instruction. Parents and educators expressed their dedication to the students' achievement as well as their frustration with the lack of comprehensive on-site academic systems of support within the boys' schools. Implications for creating evidenced-based systems of intervention that honor and take into account the strengths and emotional-needs of students struggling to read are discussed.

Dedicated to Claire, Evan, Ella, and Sophie –
the four greatest case studies of my life.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

"*Sometimes reading is hard. It is never actually easy, because they are always trying to help you to get to a new level. Sometimes it can be frustrating, and it can be embarrassing when you get stuck on a word." - Third Grade Student Who Receives Reading Support*

Reading Policy

Although learning to read has always been one of the central goals of elementary school, educational policy in the past 15 years has emphasized the importance of early childhood literacy experiences and has identified third grade as the point at which students should be expected to demonstrate proficient skills in reading (Annie E. Casey Foundation Report, 2010; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, [ESEA], 2002). The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, often referred to as The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), mandated that all students must demonstrate proficiency in reading by the end of the third grade and put systems of accountability into place to measure that achievement. Test scores were disaggregated by subgroup in order to insure the universality and consistency of achievement (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2003), and students with special needs, a subgroup that traditionally lagged behind the general population in third grade reading scores, were expected to demonstrate the same level of proficiency as were their typically developing peers by the year 2014 (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2003). The Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA], 2015), which recently went into effect and replaced NCLB, and reduced the federal government's control over states' educational processes and procedures, but continues the systems of accountability mandated by NCLB (Klein, 2016).

The Race to the Top Legislation (RTTT, 2009), created by the Obama administration, built upon NCLB by creating incentives for states to raise their standardized test scores in reading and to decrease the achievement gap among specific subgroups such as students with special needs (Race to the Top Executive Summary, 2008). In response to NCLB and RTTT, districts across the country have created policies designed to ensure that all third graders develop the reading skills necessary to pass the standardized tests utilized by their states. These policies have impacted curriculum and instruction in elementary schools throughout the country (Rose & Schimke, 2012).

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) by forty-two states including Massachusetts, and utilized in many private schools throughout the country (Neiyemer et al., 2016), reinforced the emphasis on rigorous, early childhood literacy practices by creating the impetus for states to develop goals comprehension skills for first through third grade that were traditionally taught later in elementary school (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). The connection between the CCSS and the evolving systems of accountability used in third grade assured that young students were not only taught to decode, but to understand and interpret textual information, particularly non-fiction texts (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). As a result of all of these changes, third grade is no longer considered students' introduction into the art of delving deeply into texts; it is, instead, a meaningful step on a long literacy journey during which students are asked to carefully analyze print as soon as they can read it (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013).

The rationale for the strong emphasis on reading proficiency in early elementary school has been widely discussed in educational policy and government reports (Annie E. Casey Foundation Report, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The Annie E. Casey Foundation Report (2010) described the connection between reading proficiency and poverty,

stating that they, “see school success and high school graduation as beacons in the battle against intergenerational poverty” (Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 7). The report discussed the influence of poverty on school readiness and early learning, and stressed the importance of strong early reading experiences on future academic and economic success. Through citing research that found that 75% of students who were “poor readers” in 3rd grade remained struggling readers in high school, they established a close connection between early reading experiences and future economic stability. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (2016) corroborated this finding reporting that students who did not read proficiently in third grade were four times as likely as their more typical their peers not to graduate high school. Both reports recommended that global supports be put into place that address children’s basic needs in the early childhood period, while simultaneously providing them with strong early reading curricular experiences.

Although special education policy has addressed this issue from a slightly different perspective, many of the same themes around equity and early reading development have been present in its legislation. The most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA], 2004) occurred at a time period marked by the disproportionate identification of specific racial and ethnic groups in special education, particularly in the category of learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). During this period the practice of waiting to provide students with extra assistance in reading until they had fallen significantly behind their peers in their academic skills, and identifying students as having a learning disability based on a statistically significant discrepancy between their cognitive ability and their academic achievement were also common procedures (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The reauthorization of IDEA suggested that special education identification should, instead, be

determined by a student's response to evidence-based intervention that is delivered as soon as a need for it has been demonstrated by formative assessment measures (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This legislation aligned with the research documenting the more effective nature of reading instruction delivered in the early elementary grades when compared to similar intervention implemented in the later elementary school period (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2014). Early reading experiences were therefore identified as important in preventing mis-diagnoses of learning disabilities as well as later school difficulties.

Catholic Schools

Private, faith-based schools operate outside of the laws and structures created by the IDEA (Russo et al., 2011), and are therefore not obligated to meet the needs of all students who demonstrate difficulties in reading. Catholic faith-based schools are committed, however, to serving an increasingly diverse population of learners, and are striving to do this more fully and effectively through research and through policy (Scanlan, 2017; United Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2014). There has also been a push for Catholic Schools to use standardized testing and data-informed instruction to make sure that their students are achieving at a level that is at least commensurate with their neighborhood public schools (Neimeyer et al., 2016), and reports on the status of Catholic Schools utilize test data to demonstrate their students' academic performance. Students are therefore expected to demonstrate adequate progress in reading but do not always have the built-in supports that are often present in public schools to enable that achievement to occur.

The Problem

After decades of disproportionality and biased referrals in special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), the 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

([IDEA], US Departments of Education) ushered in nation-wide changes in the instruction and assessment of students who were struggling to develop basic reading skills. This legislation, which mandated the widespread use of evidence-based practices in intervention and the continual progress monitoring of students' responses to that instruction, has resulted in an 18% decrease in the number of students diagnosed with learning disabilities and a delay in the mean age of diagnosis (National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2014). Additionally, the pre-referral systems such as Response to Intervention (RTI) that have been put into place since 2004 have demonstrated significant preventative benefits for typically-developing at risk-learners, particularly for those students who have been traditionally over-identified as having learning disabilities (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Carderelli, 2010; Veluntino et al., 2006).

Despite the benefits of systems such as RTI for typically developing students who require intervention to reach grade level expectations, research has identified an inconsistency of methodology and effectiveness for learners with more significant deficits in reading (Gilbert et al., 2013). Approximately 2 -5 % of students continue to lag substantially behind grade level expectations despite having participated in evidence-based instruction (Cho et al., 2015). These learners, who are often referred in the literature as "inadequate responders to intervention" (Greulich et al., 2014) have been shown to struggle despite having participated in extensive remediation, at times, representing over 200 hours of structured reading instruction (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009). If these students are enrolled in private or faith-based schools in which they do not benefit from all of the protections of IDEA, including in-house special education supports (Russo et al., 2011; Scanlan, 2009a; Scanlan 2009b), their identification as inadequate responders as well as their educational histories can become more complex and uncertain.

There is a small but growing body of research on "inadequate responders" to intervention (Jenkins et al, 2012). This literature has focused on the specific qualities that these learners have in common (McMaster, 2014; Toste et al., 2013), and has attempted to identify interventions that could be effective where other instructional methodologies have failed in the past (Gilbert et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). There is little research, however, that traces the educational histories of individual learners (see Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009), and no known case studies that included students' perspectives as well as those of their parents and teachers. Although factors have been suggested to explain why these students have struggled (Sanchez & O'Connor, 2015; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008), a more in depth analysis of the educational lives of these learners could help to identify both the innate child-centered factors that have led to their difficulties as well as the instructional and systemic practices and assumptions that have guided their reading –related educational histories.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and school-based experiences of three young readers in Catholic Schools who were identified by their school staff as having demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention, and who were simultaneously or subsequently diagnosed with a learning disability in reading. Through combining an analysis of students' educational records and current reading instructional practices with interviews of the students and their parents and teachers, the goal was to identify the historical and reading-related educational factors that have contributed to their difficulties as well as bring to light any assumptions or systemic understandings that may have influenced the decisions that shaped the students' experiences in literacy. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics and backgrounds of three third grade students who are considered "inadequate responders to reading intervention"?
    a. What are their cognitive attributes?
    b. What are their social/behavioral histories and attributes?
    c. What are their instructional/intervention histories in reading?
2. What are the students', teachers', and parents' perspectives on the students' intervention histories and current identification as inadequate responders? What, if any, are the common and divergent themes across these perspectives in each individual case?
3. What are the students' current experiences in reading/reading intervention in school?
4. What are the commonalities and areas of divergence across the three cases?

Overview of the Methodology

This study was an exploratory, comparative case study (Yin, 2014) of three third grade boys who have been identified by their school staff as having demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention in reading. The unit of analysis was each of the students (Miles & Huberman,1994), and the study utilized a replication design, following the same data collection and analysis procedures for each case in order to assure construct validity and overall consistency throughout the research (Yin, 2014). The goal of the study was to create individual cases and then to study all three as a group in order to find the similarities and differences across them (Yin, 2014).

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of each learner and to consistently triangulate the data, multiple data sources were used. Each student was observed five times in a combination of his general education classrooms and his reading intervention periods. A content analysis (Weber, 1990) of each participant's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), test

reports, and evidence of curriculum-based measures and interventions was conducted in order to create a longitudinal history of each learner's reading experiences. Group interviews were convened with two of each student's teachers and specialists in order to understand teachers' perspectives on those histories. Finally, individual interviews were conducted with the students and their parents in order to solicit their perspectives and to understand the emotional impact of inadequate response on the learners as individuals.

All data sources were analyzed individually using Two-Cycle Coding (Saldaña, 2016). At the conclusion of this process themes were identified from each individual data source (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes and themes were then analyzed together on an individual case level creating a complete case about each learner. Finally, the cases were analyzed together through a process of cross case analysis (Yin, 2014) to identify the areas of similarity and divergence among them.

Contribution to the Field

Students who demonstrate an inadequate response to evidence-based intervention continue to baffle both researchers and practitioners (Jenkins et al., 2012), and therefore continue to struggle in school (Sanchez & O'Connor, 2015). The research on these students has been largely quantitative in nature with the goal of locating factors that have led to their difficulties or identifying interventions that can help them to achieve more effectively (Greulich et al., 2014; Lam & McMaster, 2014). The small collection of literature that has analyzed the learning characteristics and longitudinal history of individual learners (see Wanzek and Vaughn, 2009) has failed to take into account the perspectives of the students themselves as well as those of their teachers and parents. This gap in the literature has limited researchers' depth of understanding about their participant learners and has underemphasized the significance of their

interactions with their school environments. The research has also been situated largely in public school environments, and has neglected to represent students in private school settings. It is only through deep investigations of individual students that educators can begin to understand their innate child-centered attributes, as well as the school-based and systemic factors that may have contributed to their difficulties.

The findings of this study may deepen educators' understanding of some of the assumptions, practices, and intervention-related decisions that impact the experiences of struggling readers, as well as the effect of those factors on their academic and emotional well being. They may also shed light on the interactions among child-centered factors such as cognitive strengths and weaknesses and responses to specific interventions. Although these results are deeply contextual and are therefore, not generalizable to the overall population of struggling readers, the questions asked in this study can be a model for future researchers who hope to gain a deeper understanding of why certain students have not met the expectations of their teachers and districts, and of researchers. It hopefully also serves as a reminder that no child is ever inadequate.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains six chapters. This first chapter includes a short historical, policy-based context for the selection of third grade as the age at which students' progress in reading is universally measured, and at which learners may be referred to as inadequate responders to intervention. It also provides an overview for the remainder of the dissertation. Chapter 2 contains a complete review of the literature on the topic of inadequate responders to intervention. Topics included in the literature review are reading instruction, tiered systems of intervention, characteristics of students who demonstrate an inadequate response to intervention,

efficacy studies of interventions for this group of learners, and Catholic school settings. Parent, teacher, and student perspectives are also discussed, as are meaningful gaps in the literature on this topic. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology that was utilized in this study. It includes the rationale for each instrument, how it was utilized, and the methods that were used to analyze each data set that was created. Chapter 4 consists of three detailed case descriptions, one for each of the three learners in the study. It is followed by Chapter 5, which contains the findings of the cross-case analysis organized by cross-cutting themes. Finally, Chapter 6, the discussion, connects the study's themes to the relevant literature on students with learning disabilities in reading, and lays out the implications for practice that relate to those findings. The goal of the entire study was to tell the story of the reading lives of the three student participants, including the roles and perspectives of their parents and teachers. The students themselves undoubtedly had an enormous influence on all parts of the study including on the researcher herself; the impact of their words and actions should be apparent throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

The Importance of Learning to Read

The act of reading is an integral part of the educational experience of learners throughout their academic careers. The ability to fluently decode and comprehend texts has been linked to academic success and achievement throughout primary and secondary school (Snow et al., 1998). Reading is integrated into a wide range of curricular domains and is essential for solving math problems, conducting scientific investigations, understanding history, and following written directions. Those who are able to effectively gain meaning from texts, therefore, have an advantage over less advanced readers in many aspects of academic life (Stanovich, 1988). Learning to read is a developmental process that begins "long before the school years, as the biological, cognitive, and social precursors are put into place" (Snow et al., 1998, p 43). Children's experiences in the years leading up to school set the stage for their future reading development, and prepare them for elementary school. Reading has long been seen as developmental in nature, and reading growth occurs in stages as a young child develops (Chall & Jacobs, 1983). The acquisition of reading skills is therefore, impacted by a child's developmental level and follows an individual trajectory as the student grows (Snow et al., 1998).

Although the foundations of reading are set in early childhood, developing the ability to negotiate meaning from text is a lifelong process; readers continually recreate their understandings of text as they gain background knowledge and incorporate their life experiences into their comprehension of print (Perfetti, 2007). Meaning is therefore constructed through the intersection of information that comes from a text and that which originates from a reader's background experiences, and a reader's life experiences can deepen or interfere with his/her

interpretation of printed material (Kintsch, 1988). This makes understanding a reader's background essential to comprehending how he/she is able to interpret a text.

The act of learning to decode is often the focus of the early elementary years, and it is in the first through third grade years that reading-decoding instruction is usually the centerpiece of instruction (Sanchez & O'Connor, 2014). During these years reading instruction can take two hours of a typical school day, and reading achievement is emphasized as one of the central goals and measures of school (Allington, Billen, & McCuiston, 2015). Historically, the reading curriculum has focused largely on reading-decoding in kindergarten through third grade and on using reading as a means of acquiring new information beginning in grade four (Chall & Jacobs, 1983). The adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) has shifted the binary nature of the curriculum, and has infused the act gaining information and knowledge through texts into curricular practices in the early grades (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). This shift has altered the long accepted model that the goal of early elementary school was to "learn to read", and the goal of later elementary school was to "read to learn". Early childhood curricula now incorporate strategies to facilitate the deep comprehension of texts as soon as students are exposed to connected print.

Although modern day classrooms can vary in their reading curricula, a balanced literacy approach is often identified as an overarching curricular framework that guides the construction and implementation of reading instruction (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2011). This methodology, in which reading instruction is multi-facetted and centered around authentic print-based experiences, involves direct instruction as well as pre-set opportunities to practice new and established skills individually and in small groups (Pressley & Allington, 2014). Balanced literacy can include multiple domains such as phonics instruction, guided reading, individual and

partner reading, shared reading, and direct modeling of comprehension strategies (Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project Website, 2010). Programs such as the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project Units of Study (Calkins, 2015), which have gained popularity in the United States, are aligned with the Common Core and focus on teaching young readers to conduct close and fluent readings of meaningful texts (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). Most schools that utilize a balanced literacy approach incorporate a range of instructional activities into language arts blocks and dedicate ninety minutes each day to literacy instruction (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [ESE], 2008); this represents a large percentage of the overall school day.

Well before the implementation of a balanced literacy model or of the Common Core, researchers had long debated what constitutes effective reading instruction and what attributes teachers should work to nurture in their young readers. The National Reading Panel's Report ([NRP], 2000) attempted to synthesize the vast array of literature on this topic, and through its analysis selected the aspects of the reading that its authors believed had the strongest evidence-base in the literature. Their selection of phonemic awareness, phonics, oral fluency comprehension, vocabulary, and text comprehension as the "big 5" central components of effective reading instruction, brought about significant curricular changes throughout the country (Shanahan, 2005). The "big 5" have been the basis for numerous reading curricula, and are cited frequently in the literature as the central components of effective reading instruction (Shanahan, 2005). Although all of the elements of the NRP are often referred to as compulsory elements of effective reading instruction, fluency has often been prioritized as a desired outcome of reading instruction (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). Researchers have demonstrated the close connection between fluent reading and meaningful comprehension of texts, and have warned that

accurate but dysfluent decoding can interfere with understanding (Rasinski et al, 2005; Wolf, 2001). This emphasis on fluency has become evident in the formative assessments that many students take during their elementary years. The Oral Reading Fluency Task of the widely used Diagnostic Inventory of Basic Early Literacy Skills ([DIBELS], Good & Kaminski, 1988) for example, asks students to read grade level passages for up to one minute while their rate and accuracy is measured by a teacher. The DIBELS has gained enormous popularity; as of 2005 it was used in 40 states throughout the country (Kennedy, 2005) and that number has continued to grow (Hoffman, Jenkins, & Dunlap, 2009). Its measurements define fluent reading as the product of accuracy and speed (Roerhrig et al., 2008) but neglect to incorporate prosody, which researchers have also identified as essential for effective reading comprehension both in third grade, and as students age (Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009).

Fluent reading has often been described as the product of an effective "reading circuit" (Wolf, 2007). Research has demonstrated that proficient reading is the result of the simultaneous activation of multiple areas in the brain (Odegard, Ring, Smith, Biggan, & Black, 2008). These neurological centers, that are associated with "phonological, orthographic, semantic, syntactic, and morphological processes" (Wolf, 2011, p. 2), are necessary for the effective reading and the understanding of texts. This research connects lower word-level skills with more sophisticated comprehension processes, and also identifies the lower and higher level aspects of language necessary for the full negotiation of texts. In other words, children and adults who are reading efficiently and effectively are able to access lower-level word level information in the text while simultaneously making the meaningful cognitive and linguistic connections necessary to gain meaning from it. This is the result of the brain working in concert with itself to tackle the bottom up and top down processes of reading simultaneously (Norton & Wolf, 2012). This is a

miraculous process, and is one that is often taken for granted by the vast majority of people who learn to read at a typical rate.

When Students Struggle to Learn to Read

Approximately seven to fifteen percent of young learners have difficulty learning to read (Veluntino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004). Research into the causes of reading difficulties have often connected learning disabilities in reading to deficits in phonological processing that originate from differences in function in the specific areas of the brain associated with segmenting, blending, and differentiating sounds in words (Shaywitz, et al., 2002). These neurological differences can be seen in brain imaging at an early age; recent research, in fact, is working to locate signs of future difficulties acquiring reading-decoding skills in infants less than one year old (Gabrieli, 2009). Although difficulties with phonological processing are widely accepted as one of the core causes of learning disabilities in reading, they are not the sole cause of reading difficulties. Students who struggle with Rapid Automatic Naming, or the quick and accurate labeling of common items such as colors or numbers, often demonstrate difficulties learning to read (Wolf & Bowers, 2000; Wolf & Norton, 2012). This skill, which can be identified during the early childhood period, has been shown to be a later indicator of learning disabilities in reading, and can inhibit or facilitate the fluent negotiation of texts. Students who struggle with both phonological awareness and Rapid Automatic Naming have been identified as exhibiting a "double deficit" and typically demonstrate more significant deficits in reading, more severe than those exhibited by students who have difficulties in either of the two areas alone (Wolf & Bowers, 2000). These students often struggle to develop both the automaticity required to read efficiently as well as the skills needed to decipher unknown syllables and words.

The act of reading involves not only the manipulation of sounds but also the recognition of patterns of letters, and the association of those letter patterns with meaningful units of language (Cunningham, Nathan, & Schmidt Raheer, 2011). Students who struggle with the orthography, or the letter patterns of the English language, often exhibit difficulties reading connected texts at a rate that is sufficient for full comprehension (Cunningham, Nathan, Schmidt, & Raheer, 2011). The automatic recognition of letter patterns in English incorporates "phonological, semantic, morphological and syntactic information" (p 263), and enables a reader to connect groups of letters to sounds, word chunks, and semantic understandings. Struggles with the visual recognition of groups of letters can, therefore, interfere with fluent reading.

Reading is considered a complete circuit that works most effectively when all of its components are functioning properly and the connections among those elements are intact. Any breakdown in that circuit can cause difficulties with the fluent decoding and comprehension of texts (Wolf, 2011). Students who struggle with syntax, morphology, and other areas of receptive language are therefore, at risk of developing reading difficulties, as are individuals who have other neurological issues such as working memory and processing speed, as these deficits can interfere with fluency, focus, and comprehension (Wolf, 2011). Single areas of breakdown can cause the acquisition of reading skills to be delayed, but difficulties in multiple areas of the reading circuit can make learning to read a greater challenge and can require a higher level of remediation (Katzir, Kim, Wolf, Morris, & Lovitt, 2008).

Intervention

Reading interventions have been a central focus of educational research for several decades (Venezky, 1984). Years of intervention studies have demonstrated that students with learning disabilities in reading benefit from structured, systematic, and sequential instruction in

phonemic awareness and phonics (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). Programs such as *Orton Gillingham Phonics Instruction* (O-G) and the *Wilson Reading System*^{R} (WRS), which feature structured phonics instruction that systemically and methodically build the lower-level processes that enable readers to improve their overall fluency, have been celebrated in the literature on reading disabilities and have been utilized widely and effectively for decades in school districts throughout the country (Torgeson et al., 2006). This type of instruction has been utilized since 1989 with both young children and adults with learning disabilities in reading with great success and recognition (Wilson Reading System, 2016).

More recent syntheses of the research on reading interventions, however, have shown that phonics instruction alone is not enough to develop competency in texts. Scammacca et al. (2007) found that interventions that contained training in phonological awareness, decoding, word study, and guided and independent reading of texts of increasing difficulty were most successful in helping students to improve their reading abilities. This type of instruction was more effective than structured phonics instruction that did not include exposure to connected print. In their synthesis of 18 studies of interventions used with young readers in early elementary grades, Wanzek and Vaughn (2007) found that interventions that included both direct phonics instruction and timed reading in texts had the greatest effect sizes. Phonics instruction helped to develop the lower-level skills that may have been delayed or impaired, but structured work in print was necessary to carry over skills learned in isolation to connected texts. They also reported that small group size and early intervention were closely tied to success. Research has also demonstrated the benefits of text-based programs such as Reader's Theater or partner reading; when paired with structured phonics instruction, these programs can enable young readers to improve their overall fluency and engagement with texts (Millin & Rinehart, 2010).

If reading is thought of as a connected "reading circuit", intervention that builds on all areas of that circuit can enable students to make meaningful connections that may be missing because of breakdowns in the lower level processes of reading. In a 5 year randomized control study students who participated in a seventy-hour long intervention that combined direct phonics instruction with a program that addressed morphology, semantics, syntax, fluency, and orthography demonstrated statistically significant improvements in word level skills as well as in fluency and comprehension when compared to students who received classroom-based controls and a phonics only intervention (Morris et al., 2010). In a separate study these differences were seen across students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, and were evident a year after the intervention had concluded (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009). The authors concluded that intervention that addressed multiple components of the reading circuit were effective at enabling students to build automaticity in lower level skills while making meaningful connections among the higher level components of comprehension.

Although there are a range of interventions that have been shown to result in progress for struggling readers, research has consistently demonstrated the relative benefits of reading intervention in the early elementary grades when compared to the same form of instruction delivered later in elementary school (Gabrieli, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2014). Systems of reading intervention that take place in the first years of elementary school are more time and cost effective than are those implemented later in elementary school when students typically demonstrate more significant areas of deficit. The delivery of this type of early intervention is dependent on early and universal screenings of young readers, and quick and organized responses to those assessments. These are among the key components of tiered systems such as Response to Intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) stemmed from the intersection of educational research and public policy. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA], US Department of Education) stated that districts are not required to continue to utilize the IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Model that had previously been the basis upon which learning disabilities were identified and special education eligibility was determined. This system had been shown to result in disproportionate and biased referrals, and prejudicial systems of special education determination (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). In response to this, IDEA stated that the existence of a learning disability could, instead, be decided by a student's lack of response to research-based interventions.

In the years surrounding the reauthorization of IDEA researchers worked to develop RTI frameworks that could be adopted by school districts throughout the country (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). They also publicly criticized the IQ/discrepancy model as an inadequate and potentially prejudicial method of determining learning disability, and suggested that districts adopt special education models that focus on a child's response to intervention, thereby connecting instruction to special education eligibility (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The authors of IDEA did not specifically define all of the components of RTI, which has resulted in a great deal of diversity in its implementation (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love & Saenz, 2008). In most districts, RTI is composed of three tiered stages of intervention, each defined by its increasing intensity and individualization (Denton, 2012; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). According to the RTI Action Network (2014) Tier 1, commonly referred to as primary prevention or core instruction, consists of universal, research-based, whole class instruction

designed to enable approximately 80% of learners to acquire grade level skills. The multiple components of Tier 1 instruction generally make up the ninety-minute literacy block in schools (Teachers' College Reading and Writing Program Website, 2016). All Tier 1 students are screened approximately three times a year to determine if they are reaching grade level expectations. Tier 2 intervention, or secondary prevention, is designed to address the needs of learners whose screenings have indicated that they are at risk of developing reading difficulties. This accounts for approximately 15% of the population. Tier 3, or tertiary intervention, is designed to provide additional, intensive support for the between 2% and 7% of students who are in need of intense remediation to make effective progress or to prevent the onset of a secondary problem (e.g., delays in acquiring reading-based content knowledge). These students generally demonstrate significantly below grade level skills, despite having received previous supports within the RTI system. Although the majority of students move sequentially through the tiers as they demonstrate greater levels of need, some learners skip the linear sequence moving directly to Tier 3 based on results of screenings or academic performance (RTI Action Network, 2014). Systems such as RTI have changed the landscape of reading and reading interventions throughout the United States. As of 2011, a nation-wide web-based survey of 1400 district administrators found that over 68% of districts throughout the country reported utilizing tiered systems of intervention such as RTI for the purposes of reading intervention (Shah, 2011). These programs, that utilize evidence-based interventions and regular assessments of student progress, have been shown to have significant preventative benefits for at risk students, but have also unearthed a new group of learners who have participated in years of research-based interventions, but have continued to make progress at a level that is incongruent with the expectations of their districts (Greulich et al., 2014). The term "inadequate responders to

intervention" (Cho et al., 2015), the identifier that this group of students often receives in the literature, is indicative of the link between their response to instruction and the achievement of the overall population of students who receive intervention in their districts. These students differ from their peers in that, unlike their classmates in intervention, their progress has not matched district or nation-wide norms for their age.

Inadequate Responders

Students who are identified as inadequate responders to intervention generally represent 2% - 5% of the student population in a school (Greulich et al., 2014). Although the concept inadequate responders is tied closely to modern tiered systems of intervention, it has been long documented that 2 % - 5% of students struggle to respond to phonics-based interventions in reading (Shaywitz et al., 2002; Torgeson, 2000). In recent years the definition has been complicated by the inconsistent classification criteria for inadequate responders to intervention among schools, even when that lack of progress is linked to the diagnosis of a learning disability (Toste et al., 2014). There is a great deal of diversity in the instruction and assessment practices within the most intense level of many tiered systems of intervention (Jenkins et al., 2102). This variation makes it difficult to identify the contributing factors to what has been considered these students' lack of response to intervention. Additionally, the concept of inadequate response is predicated upon the idea that there are common expectations that students at specific grade levels must meet or certain trajectories that learners must follow in order to be considered to be progressing appropriately (e.g. Dibels Pathways of Progress, Good, Powell-Smith, & Dewey, 2013). This concept has been questioned by some researchers who have expressed that although it is important to have high expectations for all students, one set of benchmarks for progress does not take into account the diversity of needs and backgrounds of a group of learners in a given

setting (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). This critique calls into question some of the criteria that qualify learners to be labeled as inadequate responders, as well as label itself.

The research on inadequate responders has attempted to locate the attributes that these learners have in common and how these qualities relate to their reading difficulties. Lam and McMaster (2014) conducted a synthesis of 14 studies with experimental designs in which students did not adequately respond to research-based interventions in reading. They concluded that, as a whole, these students struggled with word identification, the alphabetic principle, fluency, and phonemic awareness. They suggested that these learners would benefit from being moved more quickly from Tier 2 to Tier 3 intervention in order to receive support that meets their unique needs. Wanzek and Vaughn (2009) performed a case study of three students who struggled to acquire grade level skills in reading. These children, who were representative of the 0.6% of the school population that participated in all three tiers of intervention, received between 175 and 235 hours of instruction each, and continued to demonstrate below grade skills by the end of third grade. Through a careful analysis of the systems of intervention and the students' progress monitoring measures, they found that the students had remained in intervention programs long after they had been deemed ineffective. They also concluded that early intervention along with strategies to help readers transfer their skills learned in isolation to connected text were essential elements that were missing from the educational plans of these learners. Wanzek and Vaughn's findings indicate the significance of intervention processes used with those learners who have struggled to acquire basic skills and the importance of taking them into consideration when studying the instructional histories of those who have demonstrated inadequate response to intervention.

Researchers have also attempted to identify the cognitive features of this group of learners. Denton et al. (2013) identified the attributes of second grade students who did not respond effectively to a research-based intervention in reading. They found that students who struggled to make effective progress had more severe deficits in word level and oral language skills than did those who met the expectations of the intervention. Their profiles were not qualitatively different from their peers, but they were significantly different in terms of the severity of their areas of difficulty. Cho et al. (2015) identified cognitive attributes that separated fourth grade inadequate responders from their higher achieving peers. They found that in older students verbal language ability played a much larger role in achievement than did phonological awareness. They did, however, identify two groups of inadequate responders – one group who struggled with both word level skills and comprehension, and the other that demonstrated strong word-level reading ability but could not understand what they had read. This reinforced the central connection between verbal language and comprehension, and caused them to conclude that as students age, inadequate response can mean more than one thing for individual learners. Nelson, Benner, and Gonzalez (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of studies of young learner characteristics and their influence on the effectiveness of reading interventions. Through their analysis of thirty studies published during the first three years of the century, Nelson et al. found that the three variables that correlated most strongly with response to interventions were, in order of magnitude, the rapid automatic naming of letters, "problem behavior" and phonological awareness. They attributed the findings related to problem behavior to the high number of studies conducted with students with emotional and behavioral issues as well as the high rate of co-morbidity between emotional/behavioral disabilities and reading difficulties. They concluded that it is important to think about the role of behavior in the acquisition of reading skills.

Intervention for Inadequate Responders

The research on interventions for inadequate responders has been "in short supply" (Jenkins et al., 2012, p 2). As of 2014 there were only seven experimental or quasi-experimental studies on the impact of the interventions situated within Tier 3 of RTI (Greulich et al., 2014). The existing research shows that the landscape of Tier 3, the tier in which students are placed when they have not responded to previous intervention, is quite diverse and inconsistent (Jenkins et al., 2013). In their study of 31 urban, suburban, and rural school districts in 17 states, Jenkins and his colleagues found that there was an enormous amount of variation in the implementation of Tier 3 in terms of size, duration, and intervention methodologies. There was a 285-minute difference in weekly instructional time between the schools with the shortest and longest instructional periods. Tier 3 group size ranged from 1 to 6 children, and there were twelve different approaches used to serve children on IEPs within those systems of intervention. In some locations students with special needs received Tier 1 plus Tier 2 intervention, some Tier 1 plus Tier 3 intervention, and some schools reported no difference in time spent on reading for typically developing students versus students with learning disabilities in reading. There was also a great deal of variation in the way that districts and teachers within those districts make instructional and placement decisions for students who are struggling. (Fiorella, Hale, & Snyder, 2006; Velluntino, Scanlon, Zhang, & Schatshneider, 2007).

The research has also pointed to an inconsistency of effectiveness of interventions designed for inadequate responders (Gilbert et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). Gilbert et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of 628 first graders who had struggled in Tier 2 and analyzed the difference between continued participation in this level and Tier 3 remediation, which differed from Tier 2 only in the group size, and frequency of the

intervention. They found that there was no significant difference between the two groups in achievement and only 40% of all of their participants were reading at grade level at the end of the third grade. They explained that interventions designed to meet the needs of struggling readers would be better addressed by a more individualized approach to RTI in which teachers begin with a standard protocol including a curriculum that is implemented with fidelity, and then change it for individual students when progress monitoring shows that it is not effective. They also concluded that there are significant limitations to short-term interventions for students who are struggling with reading.

Time spent in intervention groups (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008) and the scripted nature of many instructional programs used with struggling readers also seemed to play a significant role in students' response to them. As Wanzek and Vaughn (2008) experienced in their study, young children have a limited attention span and an inability to sit still and focus on reading instruction for extended periods of time. The increase in duration that is often a core component of instruction for inadequate responders can, at times, be a contributing factor to students' loss of attention or behavioral difficulties during intervention periods.

In their pilot study of a Tier 3 program of intervention for third grade students who they called, "long term slow growers" (p. 171), Sanchez and O'Connor (2015) found that by changing the time, duration, size of the group, and the content of the intervention, they were able to bring about growth in students who had struggled to make progress in previous years of intervention. Through continuing to focus on reading skill department, including oral reading, during a period of time when these types of experiences were waning in the general education classrooms, they were able to bring about change for students who had demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention for extended periods of time.

Emotional Ramifications of Inadequate Response

The research on RTI has largely overlooked the relationship between response to intervention and the emotional well-being of students participating in it (Grills et al., 2014); other related studies, however, point to the psychological impact of school related difficulties, and of the systems of intervention designed to address them (e.g., Bergen, 2013; Polychroni, Kalliopi, & Anagnostou, 2006; Vallas, 1999). In a 1999 study of students who were labeled as learning disabled as well as those who demonstrated "low achievement" in school, Vallas used quantitative measures of loneliness, acceptance, depression, and self esteem to measure that impact of school difficulty on those emotional outcomes. He found that students with learning disabilities were less accepted by their peers and experienced greater loneliness than did their typically developing and low achieving counterparts, but the lower achieving students were more depressed than were either of the other groups of learners. Overall, he discovered that the impact of difficulties in school had a profound effect on learners' self esteem and feelings of acceptance.

Polychroni, Kalliopi, and Anagnostou (2006) compared 5th and 6th grade students with Dyslexia's measures of self-concept, attitude and motivation towards reading and other academic subjects, with those of students who demonstrated low/average and high performance in reading. The researchers found that the students with dyslexia demonstrated lower self-concepts and more negative perceptions of their reading and other school-related abilities than did either of the other two groups. They considered reading to be a less valuable task and demonstrated less motivation to read. They also blamed themselves and their abilities for their academic difficulties. Additionally, they found that students with LD generally displayed a more "surface level" approach to reading than did their peers. Those who demonstrated a deeper approach to reading described it as more enjoyable and desirable and viewed it as "less utilitarian" (p 423) than did

the more general population of students with LD. The emotional impact of their reading-related difficulties was somewhat mitigated by deep level processing and making meaningful connections to text.

In the only known study about the relationship between an inadequate response to intervention and anxiety, Grills et al. (2014) divided students into adequate and inadequate responder groups, and then used the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children ([MASC], March, 1997) to measure separation anxiety and harm avoidance in each of the two groups, and related subgroups that they formed within them. They found that the students with the most significant reading difficulties had lower scores on the harm/avoidance measure of the MASC than did the more typically developing readers. They explained their thoughts on this finding, stating that these students were, "more likely to have comorbid externalizing symptoms, such as impulsivity or poor behavioral inhibition, which influenced their feelings of harm avoidance as well as interfered with their task performance" (p. 427). They also expressed that the two measures of anxiety that they addressed did not fully paint a picture of overall feelings of anxiety in young readers, and that reports from parents and teachers could paint a fuller picture of the students.

As students move into higher tiers of RTI instruction often increases in duration and intensity (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), resulting in students participating in longer and more frequent periods of intervention, that at times may seem uninteresting or engaging to them. In a meta-analysis of studies of the impact of boredom on academic achievement, Tze, Daniels, and Klassen (2015) found that students' feelings of boredom had a negative impact on their academic outcomes and motivation. They also discovered that participants expressed more feelings of boredom in class than they did while learning material at home because of a perceived lack of

control over their own learning. For students who have participated in long periods of intervention during which they may not feel in control or successful, Tze et al.'s study indicates that the feelings of boredom that they experience may influence their overall academic achievement.

Self-efficacy has often been connected with academic motivation and achievement (Bergen, 2013), and the interactions among teachers and students with learning disabilities can impact students' views of themselves as learners (Klassen & Lynch, 2007). When students are specifically singled out for struggling in school, they may lose confidence in their abilities to conquer difficult tasks. When they spend large amounts of time in teacher-directed intervention that focuses on their areas of difficulty, they may internalize the belief that they are incapable of tackling difficult problems. Young learners have been shown to respond to instruction in which they have choices, find the material engaging, understand the rationale for decisions that are made, and are able to experience success (Guthrie., McRae, & Klauda, 2007). Interventions for struggling learners often neglect to incorporate these autonomy supportive practices (Guthrie et al., 2007); this may inhibit students from being able to take full advantage of reading supports in their buildings.

Delayed access to intervention has been shown to impact students' emotional well-being as academic difficulties can be associated with task avoidant behavior (Polychroni et al., 2006), which can increase as students age, particularly as the achievement gap widens between students with LD and their typically developing peers (Leopla, Salonen, & Vauras, 2000). Early intervention is necessary to reduce the impact of academic difficulties on externalizing behavior, but must be performed in a way that spares students' self esteem while still giving them some locus of control over their own achievement (Guthrie, McRae, Klauda, 2007). Additionally, as

Polychroni et al., (2006) concluded, students' negative opinions about books and reading as well as their avoidant behaviors are often shaped by their negative experiences in reading in early elementary school. Delaying appropriate intervention can therefore have an emotional impact on young learners who are struggling to develop basic reading skills.

Catholic School Settings

The successful implementation of evidenced-based systems of intervention is dependent upon the schools in which they are executed as well as the structures and priorities that exist within those schools (Dulaney, 2013). Although the vast majority of children with special needs are enrolled in public schools, one percent of all students who are served under IDEA attend private schools (Aud et al., 2013), which is equivalent to 4.8% of the population of these institutions (Office of Non-Public Education [OPNE], 2013). Private schools are not bound by the majority of laws and structures related to IDEA, which means that they are not fully obligated meet the academic and social-emotional educational needs of the students enrolled in them (Bon, Decker, & Strassfeld, 2016; Scanlan, 2009).

Catholic Schools, one subset of private schools, are bound by the laws of section 504, but not IDEA (Scanlan, 2009). As a result, they are not obligated to accept all children who wish to enroll in them, and often make admission decisions based on whether or not they believe that they are equipped to meet individual candidate's needs (Russo et al., 2011). When they do choose to enroll students who require specialized instruction, they do not have a legal mandate to provide intervention on-site during the school day or to implement the academic accommodations or curricular modifications delineated in students' IEPs (Russo et al., 2011). This has impacted the way that Catholic Schools have historically served students with special needs. Mary Carlson (2016), in her study of the education of students with diverse learning needs

in Catholic School settings noted that, “a preliminary review of the literature indicates that most Catholic schools do not offer a range of services...for students diagnosed with special (or exceptional) needs” (p. 63). Although there are certain exceptions to this finding, there has historically been a lack of on-site special education support and an acceptance that students’ must go outside of their home schools to receive the service delineated on their IEPs. This reality is beginning to change (Scanlan, 2017; State of the Schools of the Archdiocese, 2014) but over time has impacted the culture of the schools and the pedagogical practices of the teachers within them (Scanlan, 2009a).

The absence of IDEA as a guiding principle has implications beyond just the lack of a legal mandate. The absence of the structures connected to IDEA means that many schools must create their own guiding systems for serving students with special needs (Howells, 2000; Scanlan, 2009b), including internal and external systems of communication and models for differentiating curriculum and instruction. It also means that historically Catholic school classrooms have varied significantly from each other, even within individual schools, (Howells, 2000), and building administrators have become responsible for setting the tone for how their schools have responded to the needs of their students (Scanlan, 2009b). In a 2016 study of Catholic School principals, Boyle et al. found that the primary mitigating factor in the creation of school-wide programs for students with special needs was the lack of funding required to hire and maintain staff and provide those educators with the space needed to work with children. The second most commonly reported issue was a lack of teacher training. The principals in the study reported that their teachers were well-meaning and intentioned, but did not possess the skills or strategies necessary for working with diverse populations of learners.

The lack of a legal mandate has, at times, contradicted the moral obligation of the Church towards the service of those in need. The United Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005) encouraged the inclusion of all students within the Catholic School network, and the research has cited the moral imperative to meet the needs of a more diverse group of learners (Carlson, 2104; Scanlan, 2009a; Scanlan, 2017). Unfortunately, the philosophical imperative has, at times, contradicted the practical factors standing in the way of inclusion (Carlson, 2014; Howells, 2000; Scanlan, 2009b), Additionally the small collection of literature on students with special needs in Catholic Schools (Carlson, 2014) has limited the extent to which research can inform the practice of teachers and school leaders, and has establish public schools as the centerpiece of education for students with special needs.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Young students in all school settings are inextricably linked to the people with whom they interact while they are learning to read. Parent and teacher reports and perspectives are therefore, of vital importance to understanding the reading experiences of elementary school students.

Teacher Perspectives

Teachers' reflections on their educational decisions can help to shed light on how and why instruction has taken place, and what factors have led to student placement and intervention decisions (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2011). Additionally, teachers' perspectives can help to inform researchers' understanding of the implementation of systems of interventions and the ways in which teachers' decision-making processes and beliefs can impact student achievement (Dulaney, 2013). Teachers' beliefs influence the ways that they implement policy (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011) such as systems of tiered intervention, and are therefore, essential to

understanding their implementation. Through conducting extensive interviews with teachers across five schools, Bean and Lillenstein (2012) found that educators reported that RTI impacted both their core curricular practices as well as the methods that they used to support students who were in need of extra assistance. Teachers also reflected on the ways in which the adoption of RTI frameworks enabled them to deepen their understanding of their struggling learners as well as their collaboration with their colleagues.

Teacher research has pointed to the link between educators' understanding of the components of RTI and their ability to implement it fully and effectively (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2011; Vujnovik et al., 2014). In their study of the ways in which school psychologists and teachers implemented the various components of RTI, Vujnovik et al., (2014) found that professionals had knowledge of the RTI frameworks but had trouble applying that knowledge successfully. Similarly, in their surveying of the major stakeholders in RTI in schools, Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2011) discovered that many teachers lacked the knowledge of decoding skills and interventions required to intervene on behalf of struggling readers. In both studies the researchers expressed concern that their educator participants needed support to be able to work effectively with the range of learners who received intervention in the RTI system. Teacher knowledge, however, is not static. Albritton and Truscott (2014), in their investigation of teachers' feelings about their ability to use data to make decisions on behalf of learners, found that professional development enabled educators to feel more confident in their decision-making abilities and in their in use of student data. Additional professional learning along with time to work with their colleagues around issues of instruction and planning enabled educators to feel more capable and empowered to participate in all aspects of RTI.

Teachers' beliefs, thought processes, and reflections are also essential to understanding the ways in which interventions are carried out for struggling learners. Stuart et al. (2011) studied an urban elementary school that piloted RTI as part of a university partnership. Through a series of interviews and focus groups the authors discovered that the teachers at the "Garden School" reported that RTI was effective in their schools because they were given time to problem-solve issues, and in some cases, to plan professional development for their colleagues. The authors concluded that they were successful because there was a balance between faculty and administrative roles, and throughout the entire process there was a goal of having teachers' voices heard. The teachers shared their enthusiasm, commenting that their school culture had shifted, and that they were able to identify and serve students with diverse needs more effectively. In a related study, Dulaney (2013) conducted extensive observations, focus groups, and individual interviews with school personnel in a secondary school in the Southwestern part of the United States. Dulaney concluded that the participants addressed five components of successful RTI implementation in their conversations. They included consensus building among staff, time set aside for collaboration, inclusion of all members of the school community in decision-making, high quality professional development, and a complex process of decision-making based upon both student data and recognition of children's talents and needs. Delaney concluded from these findings, that RTI cannot be successful if it is a mandate from administrators without teacher support; it must become a part of school culture.

Parents

Parents share an intimate relationship with their children and are in many ways the foremost experts on their sons/daughters. The unique connection that parents have with their children enables them to understand their academic growth in the context of their emotional

well-being and overall development. It also allows them to reject the deficit perspective that often surrounds students who struggle in school, and to instead, situate their children's academic achievement in a more holistic paradigm (Lalvani, 2015). This unique knowledge base can help to deepen teacher knowledge and can inform educator decision-making and instruction.

Children bring to school funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005) that come from their lives at home and in their communities. These funds of knowledge stem from students' day-to-day lives, and are based upon the assumption that all students bring rich cultural resources to the classroom that can be used to deepen instruction and to enable them to establish meaningful relationships that facilitate deep learning (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005). This type of knowledge is often left out of discussions about interventions for students who are struggling to meet district benchmarks for progress (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Education that values those funds of knowledge can expand educators' understandings of students' backgrounds and life experiences, enabling students to establish stronger connections in the classroom and experience greater success (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2009). Parents' perspectives can inform teachers and researchers about students' lives outside of school as well as their reactions to school, and can deepen the narrative of how they are learning to read. Their insights can also help to reinvent the negative paradigm that often encompasses students struggling to achieve in the classroom (Klingner & Edwards, 2006) and can inform and deepen intervention decisions.

Parent-teacher collaboration has been linked to student success (Ishamaru, 2014), as well as to stronger graduation rates, a greater likelihood of attaining educational goals, higher levels of student engagement, and stronger overall academic achievement (Newman, 2005). Unfortunately, systems are not always in place to facilitate meaningful parent-teacher interactions. Parent –teacher conferences are the means through which information about

children is often shared, but in a study of parent and teacher perceptions of parent-teacher conferences in South Africa, Lemmer (2014) found that most parents perceived conferences as "diagnostic, problem-solving occasions" (p. 94) that were relatively inflexible in nature. Parents reported that although they were grateful for teachers' time and effort they felt that the "voices of parents as authentic partners are held in reserve" (p. 94), particularly if they wanted to change the format of their child's conference. Lemmer found that although many parents were able to gain information about their children's academic performance through their conferences, there were groups of participants who hoped for teachers to share more positive information with them or to set aside the time that they needed to collaborate more effectively.

For children with special needs, parents are legally required to sign IEPs, as well as to be involved in designing their children's educational plans (IDEA, 2004). The research on parent participation in their students' educational planning has largely focused on transition planning (e.g. Berman & Berman, 2009; Landmark, Zhang, & Montoya, 2007), but the research that does exist has pointed to the significance of parents' roles in designing and critiquing their children's educational programs. In their study of the interactions among parents and school faculty on behalf of children with special needs, Buchner et al. (2015) found that parents reported that they often felt compelled to advocate for their children to counteract ableist practices that they believed clouded their children's school experiences. They also described their need to help to negotiate their son/daughters' roles in what they referred to as "mainstream classrooms". Roll-Petterrson and Heimdahl Mattson (2007), in their interviews with mothers of children with dyslexia, reported that their participants had to advocate for their children in order for them to receive the support that they required to be successful. The authors concluded that collaboration between parents and the school was essential for their participant students' success. Parent

perspectives were necessary to deepen educators' understandings of their students as well as to enable teachers to design intervention more holistically and effectively.

Students

Students themselves can offer insights into their educational experiences and can deepen educators' understanding of the emotional impact of the inadequate response to intervention. Students' self -determination has been linked to stronger outcomes for children with special needs, particularly as they reach adulthood (Shogren et al., 2013). Students who are actively involved in their decision-making have been shown to experience more success once they leave the protections of the school environment. Students' perspectives are often missing from studies of younger students (Clark, Kjorholt, & Moss, 2005), particularly students with disabilities. The research that does exist reflects the ways in which students' insights can add to teachers' understanding of their school experiences, and can reveal possible areas of misalignment between teachers' areas of focus and students' needs (Ross, 2004). In a 2001 study in which they interviewed 20 middle school students with reading related difficulties, Cray, Vaughn, and Neal (2001) were able to gain great insights into the reading experiences of their participants. They found that their students were "striving to achieve at a task that has seemed insurmountable to them. Regardless of why they have failed to learn to read….these students continue to want to learn to read" (p. 28). Their participants spoke about their desire to receive individualized explicit strategy and phonics instruction as well as their longing to read interesting texts and to be spared from embarrassment in front of their classmates. The majority of readers in their study could not name a favorite book or reading material, but stressed the central role of their families in their reading development. The perceptions of the readers in this study shed light on the type of curricular and pedagogical practices that they had been exposed to during their elementary and

middle school years, and the ramifications of that instruction on their reading and classroom experiences.

Enriquez (2014) utilized an anthropological lens to study the experiences and identities of two struggling readers. Through interviews with the students, observations of their classroom experiences, and some analysis of reading-related documents, she found that her participants felt disengaged from the act of reading and expressed that books generally didn't interest them. She reported that her students avoided reading and expressed melancholy about themselves as readers. She concluded that struggling readers often lack a sense of agency over their own literacy development, and that teachers need to discover what motivates readers in order to better match their instruction to the needs and interests of their students.

In a series of interviews collected over a three to four year period, Casserly (2011) found that third and fourth grade Irish students' self esteem was influenced by their beliefs about their teachers' behaviors, their classroom environments, their placement with learners with similar areas of difficulty, and their deep understanding of their own reading abilities. The participants were generally very aware of their difficulties in reading and discussed the areas of the school day that were difficult for them. She explained, "Children discussed the rapid pace of work and their inability to keep up with their peers in the mainstream classroom. Difficulty completing homework was widespread with enormous parental input as well as the length of time to complete it" (p. 19). Students from the study were educated in a combination of mainstream classes and self-contained classrooms for students with dyslexia. Those in the "separate" classrooms reported higher levels of self-esteem and comfort because they reported feeling similar to their peers and being able to get the specific help that they needed to be successful. Students positively described teacher behavior that met their specific needs, but also mentioned

that, “good teachers were nice to kids with learning difficulties, had a sense of humour, demonstrated kindness and patience and were good listeners” (p. 21). Casserly argued for the importance of creating environments in which students feel safe to make mistakes and don’t feel alone in their struggles.

Casserly’s work was powerful both because of the voice that it gave to students and because of the longitudinal nature of its investigation, a methodology that is rarely seen in the literature on inadequate responders. Although studies have traced the educational histories of struggling readers (see Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009), an extensive review of the literature (2008 – 2016) yielded no longitudinal research that included the perspectives of teachers, parents and students within that longitudinal model. Additionally, although there is a collection of literature that addresses the perspectives of individual groups of key stakeholders in the lives of young struggling learners, there is a need for research that looks more in depth at individual students who struggle with reading and incorporates the views of all of the major stakeholders in their academic lives. Individual case studies of students who have struggled are largely missing from the literature and are a necessary addition to it (Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008). This type of work is required to understand these young learners not just as the sum of their reading struggles, but as complex individuals who function within diverse and multi-faceted school environments (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001). Case studies can deepen our knowledge of students’ interactions with interventions (Griffiths & Stuart, 2011), and can help to uncover the learner-centered and environmental factors that may have contributed to their areas of struggle and success.

The study described in the next four chapters focused on students who have been identified by their teachers and administrators as having demonstrated an inadequate response to

intervention despite having participated in extensive reading remediation. It utilized a case study approach (Yin, 2014) that incorporated observations and a review of documents as well as the often-lacking parents', teachers', and students' perspectives described in this review. This methodology embraces the assumption that students are complex individuals who do not exist in an academic bubble (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001). It also enabled the researcher to delve deeply into students' attributes and characteristics, and to compare the participants' profiles to attempt to identify traits and environmental conditions that these learners had in common. This approach is largely lacking from the existing literature on students who demonstrate inadequate response, and is necessary to understand struggling readers as more than just the sum of their collective cognitive deficits.

Chapter 3
Methodology

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and school-based experiences of three young readers who were identified by their schools as having demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention, and who were diagnosed with a learning disability either previous or subsequent to that identification. Through combining an analysis of the students' educational records with interviews with the students, their parents, and teachers, and classroom observations, the goal was to identify the historical and educational factors that have contributed to their difficulties as well as bring to light any assumptions or systemic understandings that may have influenced the decisions that shaped their experiences. The research questions in this study were:

1. What are the characteristics and backgrounds of three third grade students who are considered "inadequate responders to reading intervention"?
    a. What are their cognitive attributes?
    b. What are their social/behavioral histories and attributes?
    c. What are their instructional/intervention histories in reading?
2. What are the students', teachers', and parents' perspectives on the students' intervention histories and current identification as inadequate responders? What, if any, are the common and divergent themes across these perspectives in each individual case?
3. What are the students' current experiences in reading/reading intervention in school?
4. What are the commonalities and areas of divergence across the three cases?

This research was an exploratory, comparative case study (Yin, 2014) of the three young learners. Case study research "allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2014, p. 4). In this study, the students were situated within the

school environments in which they spent six to seven hours of each day. Because the students in this study were studied within the context of their "real-world" surroundings, their experiences and interactions with that environment and the key stakeholders within it were viewed as inextricably linked. Each learner is unique and those students who struggle can do so for a myriad of reasons. A case study methodology allowed for a deep investigation of each individual learner and enabled the researcher to unearth the individual attributes that have contributed to his academic successes and difficulties. The open-ended nature of the research questions aligned with an exploratory case study design in which the goal was to "develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for future research" (Yin, 2014, p.10). The goal of this research was to delve deeply into each case to unearth the pertinent factors, circumstances, and assumptions that have impacted each participant's achievement in reading and designation as an inadequate responder. This study followed an individualized, learner-centered approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) to understanding inadequate responders to intervention, and can certainly be a starting point for future research about this topic.

The unit of analysis in this research was each individual student (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The study utilized a replication design, following the same data collection and analysis procedures for each case, in order to assure construct validity and overall consistency throughout the three cases (Yin, 2014). The goal of the study was to create individual cases and then to study all three cases as a group in order to find similarities and differences across them (Yin, 2014).

Setting

The data was collected in two schools in the Catholic Archdiocese school network of a large city in the Northeast. The network of schools is quite large, encompassing 116 schools within 144 cities and suburbs and 36,039 students (Catholic Schools Office Website, 2017). Of

the total population of Pre-K to 12th grade students within the Archdiocese, 4% are labelled as "special education" students and two schools are identified as "special needs schools." Students of color represent a minority of the population in the Archdiocese; 71%, in fact, self- identified as white (Catholic Schools Office Website, 2017). As of 2014, the teachers working in the Archdiocese schools ranged in experience from beginning teachers to educators who had spent their entire careers teaching in Catholic schools; at that time 41.9% of teachers possessed a graduate degree (State of the Schools Report, 2014), just below the national average of 56% recorded during a similar time period (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Though the Archdiocese encompasses the city and its surrounding suburbs, both schools studied were located within the proper boundaries of the city itself, though in two very different neighborhoods. St. Gemma's[1] is situated on outskirts of the city, in an ethnically and racially diverse area that contains single family homes, apartment buildings, and shopping areas. There are 415 students who attend grades Pre-K through 8th grade, with the largest number of students attending the preschool. There were 39 students in third grade during the 2016 - 2017 school year (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2017). Approximately 42% of the students in St. Gemma's identified as white, followed by 14% self identifying as Hispanic, and 9% as Asian (Private School Review Website, 2018)[2]. The school has close partnership with a local university through which its teachers receive extensive training each year. In the past three years the school has raised well over a million dollars to complete internal renovations as well to update its outside recreational spaces (St. Gemma School Website, 2018).

East End Catholic School (EECS) is located in a densely populated urban neighborhood close to the ocean that contains older apartment buildings, shops, restaurants, and many new

1All school and participant names are pseudonyms.
2 The Catholic Schools Office does not share demographic information with researchers. These demographic numbers have, therefore, not been verified.

developments. It enrolled 338 students ranging in age from Pre-K until 6th Grade, including 32 third graders during the 2016 - 2017 school year (Massachusetts Department of Education Website, 2017). Approximately 82% of the students enrolled in EECS self-identified as white, and just under 10% as Hispanic (Private School Review Website, 2018). The school's facilities are quite different from those at St. Gemma's; the children have recess in a parking lot and there are no fields or sports facilities on campus. More information on both schools as well as the classrooms studied can be found in Chapter 4.

Participants

The sample consisted of three third grade students who participated in evidence-based intervention and demonstrated what their teachers considered to be an inadequate response to that support. Third was selected as the grade level of the participants in order to enable the students to have had ample opportunity to develop foundational skills in reading and participate in reading intervention in their schools, thus reducing the variability of developmental influences on their reading development. (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). Third grade is also the point at which educational policy has indicated that students throughout the country should be able to demonstrate proficient abilities in reading (ESSA, 2001). In addition to the required age, participants were required to meet specific criteria designed by the researcher to maintain the integrity of research. Students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities or sensory impairments were excluded from the sample, as were learners who spent more than 50% of their time outside of the general education classroom. All of the participants were diagnosed with a learning disability that impacted their ability to acquire grade level skills, and this identification was a requirement of the study. The participants were nominated by their teachers and administrators and were approved by the researcher. The researcher provided school staff with specific

characteristics to use to select the students, but relied on the teams in the schools to follow those criteria. The criteria indicated that participants must have participated in structured intervention for at least two years, must be reading below grade level expectations, and must have demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention for a year or longer, and could not have missed more than six months of schooling . It was the original intention of the researcher that students needed to have been enrolled in the same school since first grade to be eligible for the study, but this requirement was lifted upon the advice of school staff in both settings. The researcher was in close contact with teachers and administrators as they went through the process of nominating potential participants. In one school a teacher met with the researcher to share information about students to ensure that they did, in fact match, the criteria. During one such conversation more than one potential candidate was eliminated from the possible sample. In the second school, staff did not share confidential information with the researcher, and instead independently nominated students who they deemed as meeting the criteria that was given to them. Throughout the sampling process, the researcher and the school discussed that if at any time it became apparent that a student was not the right fit for the study, the researcher may opt to remove him/her from the sample and replace the participant with another student who met all selection criteria. It was also made clear to school staff that students, staff, and families also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Once the cases were selected, the parents and teachers of each participant student were included in the sample, and helped to create a full picture of the participating students. Any former or current classroom, special education, or reading teacher, as well as direct service providers who had knowledge of the participant's academic achievement (e.g. speech/language pathologists) were eligible to be included in the sample. Although all teachers and specialists

were invited to participate, each individual educator ultimately chose whether or not he/she wished to be included in it, and in the end only two of each students' teachers participated in the research.

In order for a student to be part of the study, one parent was required to participate in it. Before beginning any data collection each teacher and parent in the study participated in the informed consent process, and the students had the opportunity to give their assent to the study. The informed consent documents included the reasons for the study, participants' roles in it, the potential risks and rewards for participating in the research, assurances of confidentiality, and participants' rights. The informed consent process was a part of an "ongoing conversation between the participants and the researcher" (Boston College Guide for Preparation of Informed Consent, 2003). The researcher was available to answer questions and address concerns at any point throughout the study and spoke at length on the phone with each parent before consent was granted; during these conversations it was made clear that this access would not be limited to the informed consent process, and sporadic contact continued with the families throughout the study.

The participants are described in Figures 3.1 and 3.2. The third grade participants ranged in age from 9 to 10 years old at the beginning of the study. Two attended St. Gemma's and one attended EECS. One classroom teacher and one reading or support teacher per child participated in the study as did one parent for Daniel and Cameron and both parents for Ryan. No educators outside of the students' schools participated. The teachers had all known the students for seven to eight months at the beginning of the study, having met them, or in one case been reintroduced to them, at the beginning of the school year.

Figure 3.1
Student Participant Characteristics

Child's Pseudonym	Age	Race	Disability Category on IEP	Neuropsych. Diagnosis	Grade Level Retained	Parent Participant
Ryan	9	White/Asian	Specific Learning Disability	Double Deficit Dyslexia	N/A	Mother and Father
Daniel	10	White	Specific Learning Disability	Developmental Dyslexia	3rd	Mother
Cameron	10	White	Specific Learning Disability	Language-Based LD/ Double Deficit Dyslexia	3rd	Mother

Figure 3.2

Teacher Participant Characteristics

Teacher's Pseudonym	School	Role	Race	Years Teaching at Child's School
Ms. Mulkahey	St. Gemma's	Ryan and Daniel's Classroom Teacher	White	13 years
Ms. D.	St. Gemma's	Ryan and Daniel's Reading Teacher (other third grade teacher)	White	13 years
Ms. Kelly	East End Catholic School	Cameron's Classroom Teacher	White	6 years
Ms. McDonald	East End Catholic School	Cameron's Learning Support Teacher	White	8 years

The small size of the sample was designed to enable extensive, in-depth investigations of each student. The data collection plan included several sources of data for each participant; the small sample size allowed for an in-depth analysis of each data source as well as the triangulation of the data (Yin, 2014).

Instruments and Data Collection

A variety of data collection instruments and data collection procedures were used in this study. Figure 3.3 summarizes the instruments and the research questions to which they relate. Each research question was addressed by three or more data sources in order to triangulate the data. (Yin, 2014).

Figure 3.3
Data Sources and Research Questions

Data Source	**Research Question**
Educational Files/Special Education Records	RQ1,RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
Group Interviews with Teachers	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
Interviews with Parents	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
Interviews with Students	RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
Observations of Students in Intervention/Reading Class	RQ1, RQ3, RQ4

Review of student files. A systematic analysis of the cummulative and special education files was conducted for each of the three participant students. An analysis of student files was important, "because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection

in doing case study research. Systematic searches for relevant documents are important in any data collection plan." (Yin, 2014, p. 107). In this study the collection and analysis of student files played a central methodological role in developing an understanding of the past educational experiences of each learner as well as his learning profile and academic goals, and was therefore a vital instrument in the creation of each case. The objectives of the file collection were to both attain information that traced the reading achievement and intervention records of each participant from kindergarten until third grade, thereby creating a longitudinal reading history of each student, and to understand each student's current neuropsychological and academic profile.

While additional informative documents were discovered upon entering the files, certain specific documents were sought. Assessment data was collected, including curriculum-based measures used for the purpose of progress monitoring and benchmarking as well as formal evaluations that were utilized in the special education determination process and related to the research questions. In addition, records of specific literacy interventions noted on the students' IEPs, progress reports, and some report cards were compiled along with reading-related programs and support services delivered as part of the general education curricula. Finally, neuropsychological evaluations conducted by psychologists hired privately by the families were collected for each student. A checklist that contained the items sought (see Appendix A) directed the collection of documents; using the checklist helped ensure that the information obtained was consistent among all three participant students. The children in the study transferred schools thereby creating some gaps in their educational records. Parents and teachers were asked about missing pieces of information during their interviews with the researcher.

Observations. Observations allow a researcher to "learn first-hand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the

unexpected" (Glesne, 1999, p. 43). In this study observations enabled the researcher to understand each participant's present day reading-related experiences and to develop an understanding of each student's role in his classroom environment. Each participant student was observed five times. The first observation consisted of one-half of a school day chosen by the teacher as representative of a typical period of time in the student's classroom. The purpose of this observation was to develop a holistic portrait of each student's school life, including class schedules, routines, social interactions, and curricular activities, as well as to observe the day-to-day functionings of the classroom. Two subsequent observations occurred during each of the student's general literacy instruction, and two additional observations took place during reading intervention periods. Because of the scheduling requirements of the researcher and the schools, reading observations were generally extended in length and the subsequent academic and less-structured activities were observed previous or subsequent to them. Additionally, because Ryan and Daniel were in the same classroom they were observed simultaneously during their less-structured activities and their whole-group reading activities. They were observed separately, however, during all of their small group reading periods.

The diversity of observation experiences was designed to help the researcher to understand the landscape of each student's reading experiences in school, including the structure and elements of his reading programs as well as his reactions and responses to them. The researcher situated herself behind or to the side of the learners in order to take on the role of an outside observer, as opposed to a participant observer (Glesne, 1999). Extensive descriptive and analytic field notes (Glesne, 1999) were taken during and at the conclusion of each of the observations; this included scripting salient conversations when appropriate and recording both teacher and student behavior. As an observer the researcher was "intruding into the world of the

case" (Yin, 2014, p 88). As such, it was important to keep in mind the impact of that intrusion, and to consider the effect of the observations on the behaviors of the teacher and student participants.

Group Interviews. A group interview was conducted with the present teachers of each of the students in the sample. The participants included the students' classroom teacher and special education or reading teacher. Because Ryan and Daniel had the same teachers, they participated in two separate group interviews but were asked to limit their reflections to the child who was the topic of each individual conversation. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit the teachers' perceptions of their participant students' strength and interests as well as reading experiences and struggles, to ask them to reflect on the decisions that were made on behalf of the child, and to explore their beliefs about those decisions and their students' responses and reactions to them. The researcher also used this as an opportunity to ask the teachers to fill in any gaps in their students' curricular histories and to provide the researcher with other relevant information that was not included in the cumulative files. The group design enabled the teacher participants "to relate participants relate their experiences and reactions among presumed peers with whom they shared some common frame of reference" (Kidd & Parshall, 2000, p 294). Although each of their interpretations of their students' reading experiences differed, they all had the student in common; this impacted the nature of their conversations. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were based loosely off of a pre-designed protocol (see Appendix B). Topics included their descriptions of the target student, their perceptions of his past and present systems intervention, reflections on past instructional decision-making on behalf of the participant student, their opinions of the student's progress, and their perspectives on his

experiences in reading. The group interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in order to aid in authenticity of analysis (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Interviews. Interviews with participants enable researchers to probe in-depth about specific issues and to ascertain their perceptions of and perspectives on salient topics (Glesne, 1999). In this study each target student as well as his parent(s) participated in one individual interview with the researcher at separate times and locations. The goal of the interviews was to unearth their individual perspectives on the child's reading experiences in kindergarten through third grade, as well as to learn about each child's educational history and reactions to salient educational events.

Each student's interview followed an observation of a reading intervention in order to utilize a shared reading experience as an impetus for conversation, and to enable the student to feel comfortable with the researcher because he had just spent time together with her in his familiar classroom environment. Student interviews focused on reflections of observed reading interventions, each participant's perceptions of himself as reader, his recollection of his previous experiences in reading, and his opinions of his reading-related experiences at school. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, and were driven by thoughts and reflections of the student, as well as his language abilities and stamina for adult conversation.

The parent interviews took place either over the telephone or at a coffee shop chosen by the participants that enabled them to speak openly with the researcher. Each parent was asked to reflect on his/her son's school-related reading experiences and identification as an "inadequate responder to intervention," and as appropriate, to comment on any of the students' reading intervention experiences in school. Just as with the other interviews, these conversations were semi-structured in nature; topics included descriptions of their children, including specific areas

of strength and interest, perceptions of their sons as readers, potential reasons for their difficulties learning to read, their opinions of their children's school-related reading experiences, and their reading-related goals for the future. The parents also provided the researcher with each child's educational history in order to fill in gaps that were created from missing documents in the students' files or gaps in teachers' knowledge because of their lack of history with their students.

All interviews were based loosely off of a pre-written protocol and were guided by the responses of the participants (see Appendices C and D). The interviews focused on the participants' perspectives on each student's "inadequate response to instruction." All of the interviews were audio taped to allow for accuracy of analysis, and field notes were taken both during and after the interviews to aid in analysis.

Schedule. The data collection plan was designed to allow the data sources to support and inform each other. The order of the data collection facilitated the creation of a longitudinal history of each student's reading history, and added participant perspective and interpretation to that history. It was also designed to enable the researcher to form her own impressions of each student's educational history and performance before the participants deepened and extended those understandings with their own perspectives and beliefs. Although the plan was to extend the data collection over several months, the reality of school schedules that required that data be collected during the last three months of school, and in the case of two of the students, during the final six weeks of school. Figure 3.4 delineates the data collection schedule and each of the three students are represented by the first initials of their name, C, R, and D.

Figure 3.4
Data Collection Schedule

	April	May	June	July
Review of Student Files	C	R D		
Half day Observations (1 per student)	C	R D		
Reading instruction observations (4 per student)	C	C R D	R D	
Interviews with students	C		R D	
Group Interviews with Teachers		C	R D	
Interviews with Parents			C	R D
Collect any Needed Data			C R D	

Analysis

Each type of data was analyzed in multiple cycles (Saldaña, 2016) that began as soon as it was collected. Data collection and initial analysis took place almost simultaneously (Glesne,

1999), allowing earlier forms of data to inform the collection and analysis of later data sources. The latter stages of analysis, however, occured well after the data was collected. Figure 3.5 delineates the data analysis schedule; each participant is represented by C, R, or D, and a . indicates the continuation of analysis.

Figure 3.5
Data Analysis Schedule

Data Source	**Apr**	**May**	**June**	**July**	**Aug.**	**Sept.**	**Oct**
Student Files	C.....	…… R… D….	…… …… …….				
Observations		C….. R.… D……	….. ….. ……	……. ……. …….	…. ……. …….	… …..	
Student Interviews			C….. R.…	……. ……. D…..	…… ……. …….	… …	
Teacher Group Interviews				C….. R….	…… ……. D….	… ….	
Parent Interviews					C…. R….. D….	… …. ..…	

Case Analysis						C... R… D…	…… …… ……
Cross-Case Analysis							C…. R….. D…..

The process of analysis was iterative in nature and was guided by the codes and subcodes that were created and then altered through multiple and purposeful reviews of the data (Saldaña, 2016). First cycle codes (Saldaña, 2016) emerged from the data and were guided by the related research on inadequate responders and the study's research questions. Following the conclusion of the first cycle of coding, second cycle coding methods were used as a way of "reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through the first circle methods" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). Codes were restructured, abandoned and revised, and ultimately common themes and assertions were identified.

The data was coded both manually and through the HyperResearch Program (HyperResearch, 2015). The manual codes were created using visual displays (Miles and Huberman,1994) that fit the nature of each individual data source. This methodology enabled the researcher to structure and restructure the codes and subcodes, and to visually represent the relationships among the data as well as individual and groups of codes. Through this method data was literally moved around as they were organized and reorganized into meaningful chunks and ultimately themes. The Hyperresearch program allowed the researcher to create codes and subcodes, and to experiment with variations and combinations of those codes with the goal of ultimately identifying themes. It also facilitated the analysis of a large collection of data.

The plan before the data was collected was to utilize a small group of overarching a priori codes to guide the initial analysis of the data. These codes were designed to serve only as a starting point for analysis, and the option existed for them to be neglected once the data were analyzed. They were developed either because they were central themes in the literature, or because they were topics in the research that were observed in practice by the researcher and were therefore especially salient to her. Figure 3.6 contains these initial codes and their origin in the literature. During the early stages of coding it became apparent to the researcher that a grounded approach (Charmaz, 2014) to coding would more be appropriate for the specific data that were collected. The a priori codes were therefore abandoned and codes more closely connected to the actually data were utilized throughout the coding process.

Figure 3.6
A Priori Codes

Code	**Location in the Literature**
Learners' Cognitive Characteristics/Abilities	Denton et al., 2013; Nelson, Benner, and Gonzalez, 2003
Learners' Behavior	Nelson, Benner, and Gonzalez, 2003
Systems of Intervention	Jenkins et al., 2013
Specific Intervention Practices	Gilbert et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2009;Wanzek and Vaughn, 2008
Educators' Beliefs/Assumptions	Casserly, 2001; Klingner & Edwards, 2006

Student files. The files were analyzed through a process of content analysis of the material within them (Weber, 1990). Using Appendix A as a guide, I read and reread the quantitative and qualitative information provided in the student files in order to ascertain each student's academic and cognitive characteristics delineated in the test reports, strengths and areas of need described in the IEPs, and intervention history and progress included in the classroom and cumulative files. I also noted the methods of measurement that were utilized by each student's evaluators, and recorded any missing pieces of data. Close attention was paid to the students' neuropsychological reports both because of their attention to their cognitive and academic attributes and because of the sophisticated nature of those documents. In order to fully comprehend the nuances of each child's report, I consulted with neuropsychologists as well as appropriate guide books and research manuals. Despite all of these tools, these reports were interpreted through the lens of an educator and a researcher, and not that of a trained educational psychologist.

The data that were delineated in the checklist and that I collected through my review of the documents were intended to create a detailed background of each student's academic history in school. A time ordered matrix (Miles & Huberman,1994) was created to "cover trends over an elongated period of time, following a developmental course of interest" (Yin, 2014, p 53). The matrix contained the data in the files in chronological order beginning in kindergarten. The data sources were labeled along the top of the matrix and the dates progressed along the vertical axis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because of the transient nature of the students there were significant gaps that appeared in the records. These gaps were noted throughout the matrix, and these missing areas generated questions that were used in the parent and teacher interviews. During the process of analysis I took descriptive and analytical notes, (Glesne, 1999) and created memos

containing thoughts, reflections, and questions that emerged from the files. I returned to the questions repeatedly to seek out answers to them, but because of the time limits of the data collection, there were a few questions that remained unanswered.

Group interviews. After transcribing the group interview contents, I used a grounded method of analysis (Charmaz, 2006) to develop a large set of initial codes (Saldaña, 2016) that varied substantially from the a priori codes, stuck "closely to the data" collected (p. 47), and related specifically to the interviews. The collective nature of the group interviews enabled the participants to either describe common experiences with their colleagues from varying perspectives or to focus on their own individual interactions with the student participants. Participants' responses were at times influenced by the other member of the group. I therefore had to be purposeful in noting if specific codes were representative of perspectives expressed by the diad, were areas of discrepancy among the two educators, or were based upon experiences of individual participants (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

After completing my initial set of codes using HyperResearch, and creating reports through the program, I used those reports as well as a partially ordered display (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to manipulate, combine, and refine my codes to locate salient "major code clumps" (Glesne, 1999, p. 135), within each group interview. This took many iterations of combining and recombining the codes, and then returning to the raw data to affirm or invalidate the connections among them. This methodology allowed me to employ "the tactic of seeing patterns or themes, as well as subsuming particulars into the general" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 104). Through this process I attempted to identify, disqualify, and relate groups of codes to each other and to the codes that were previously developed. This process resulted in a consolidated set of group interview codes.

Observations. The observations were analyzed using a process of descriptive coding (Glesne, 1999) to create a picture of the experiences of each participant student and to, when appropriate, develop a description of the overall ecology of the classroom or the learning environment (Shapiro, 1994). Student behaviors, interactions, and levels of engagement were analyzed as well as the pedagogical practices of the teacher(s) and the students' interactions with her/them. Codes and subcodes were developed based on a careful and iterative analysis of the observation notes that addressed the behavior of each participant student, his teacher(s), and the interactions of the members of the group in each individual observation. After the a priori codes were abandoned, a grounded approach (Charmaz, 2006) was utilized, "actively naming the data" (p. 47) to create all of the possible initial codes for each observation and then break down those codes into further subcodes to deepen the analysis of what was observed (Glesne, 1999). Once all codes were developed for each individual observation, all of the observations were analyzed together in order to develop a more complete picture of each student's academic experiences in reading. The codes that addressed the patterns in student and teacher behavior were then, upon further analysis, combined, broken down, restructured, and eliminated (Glesne, 1999; Saldaña, 2016). In this later stage codes were combined into "major code clumps" (Glesne, 1999, p. 135), based on their relationships with each other and the raw data. This was accomplished by performing the initial coding within the HyperResearch program, running dozens of reports within the program, and then, after reading those reports, recoding the raw data by hand in order to locate the groups of related codes within them. The goal of the analysis was to understand the participants' current intervention and instructional landscape and to, when appropriate, relate it to their struggles with reading achievement. It was a cyclical and iterative process during which I

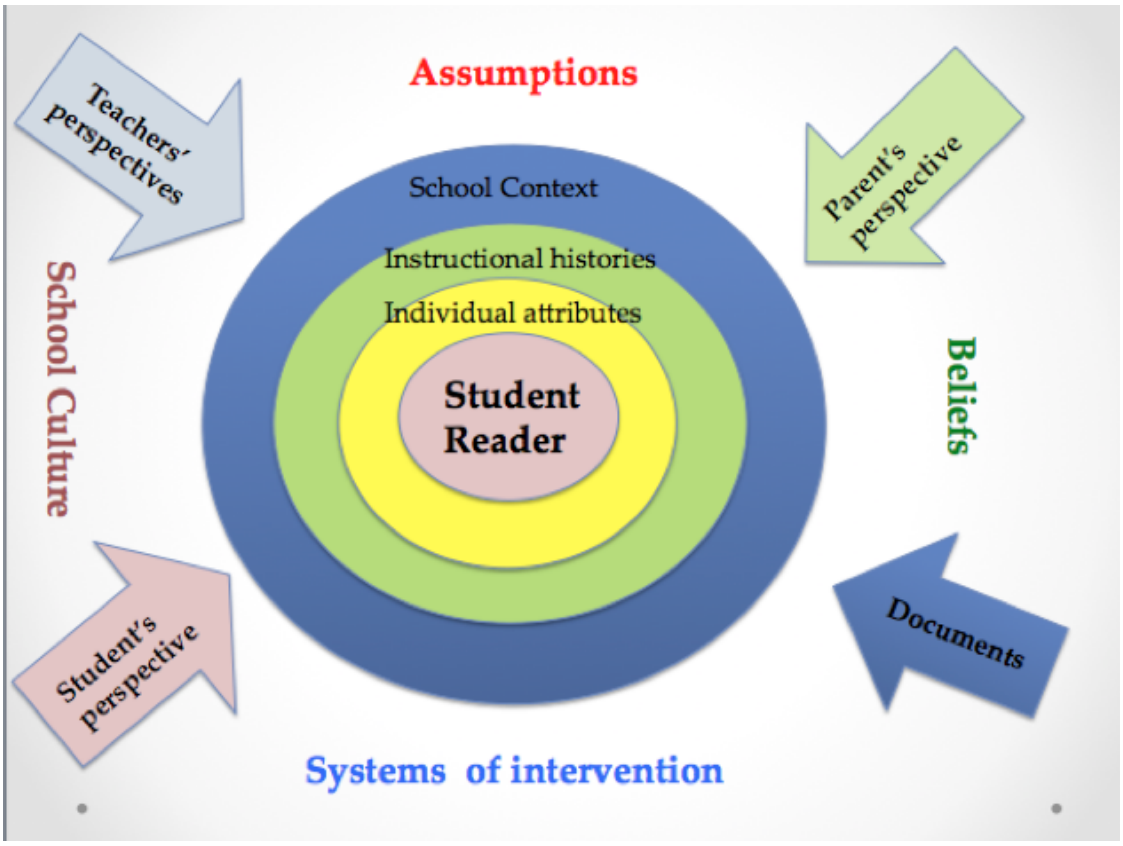
repeatedly returned to the raw data to check the validity of the emerging codes and meaningful code clumps (Glesne, 1999).

Interviews. The parent and student interviews were transcribed in full and analyzed by a process of two cycle coding to interpret their contents (Saldaña, 2016). The student interviews were coded independently during the first cycle of coding, and were not interpreted together until the second cycle of analysis. After the a priori codes were abandoned, the first group of codes emerged organically from the patterns in the interview data (Charmaz, 2014). Similar to the process that was conducted with the observation and group interview data, the initial cycle of coding was conducted on the HyperResearch program, followed by second cycle coding that occurred both through the program and by hand. After completing the first cycle of coding I re-analyzed the raw data to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and or theoretical organization" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234) of the codes that I developed during the first cycle, ultimately establishing second cycle codes (Saldaña, 2016). This occurred after multiple iterations of combining, separating, and manipulating the codes, and reflecting on their relationships to each other and to the raw data from which they originated. Following the creation of the second cycle codes that addressed both the student and parent interviews together, I analyzed, combined, and restructured the codes together with the teacher interview and observation data in order to locate relevant themes within them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of creating themes was iterative as I repeatedly returned to the codes and to the raw data from the multiple data sources to check the validity of the emerging themes and to develop meaningful and succinct language that had deep semantic connections to the data to describe those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Case Level Analyses

After analyzing each individual data source and then the observation and interview data together for each single student, I combined the data from all of the sources to triangulate the emergent findings and to construct a more complete portrait of each participant as a reader (Yin, 2014). Each case was, therefore, inclusive of all the data sources related to each individual child and was representative of the perspectives of the student and his teachers and parents. Using both the reports that I created using the HyperResearch program, and an extensive manual coding process, I utilized an iterative process to identify first cycle and second cycle codes for each case (Saldaña, 2016). Then, after further manipulation of the groups of codes, I created a thematic map through which I attempted to conceptually relate the themes to the relevant research on the topic and to the study's research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). In a similar manner to the way that individual data sources were analyzed, codes and themes from each data source were combined, manipulated, and analyzed in relationship to each other and to the research in order to identify themes that were representative of the data sources as a whole. Although this process initially resulted in a plethora of themes, they were quickly eliminated as it became apparent through the use of an extensive manual process of creating thematic maps that they did not encapsulate the data from multiple data sources or were not truly representative of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). These themes that were ultimately selected related only to each individual learner and represent the components of the study illustrated in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7
Relationships Among Themes



As is apparent from the figure, although the themes were inclusive of the beliefs, perspectives, and roles of all of the participants, as well as the educational histories and school and classroom cultures reflected in the data, the student participants and their experiences as readers were at the center of each theme. Themes that were not closely related to the students or were tangential to their experiences were abandoned during analysis.

Analytic Memos

Throughout the process of data analysis I took detailed analytic memos (Glesne, 1999) to document my thought processes while coding and to note methodological processes that struck me as noteworthy while I was interpreting my data. I took analytic notes at any point that I felt the needed to record my hunches, reflections, and emotions related to data collection and analysis. These notes constituted a digital notebook of my experiences as a researcher. They

were essential in documenting my thought process as they changed and developed through the cycles of coding. I returned to these notes when I began to describe my analysis in print and they served as a tool to aid in my understanding of the retrospective history of my analytic plan. I also used them to make sure that themes that I chose were truly representative of the data, and not of my own preconceived notions (Charmaz, 2006).

Cross-Case Analysis

After concluding my single case analyses I conducted a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014) to analyze the three cases as a group. I looked across my cases to identify cross-cutting themes that existed in all three cases as well as areas of difference among them (Yin, 2014). Following a modified version of the model utilized in Consensual Qualitative Analysis (Hill, Thompson, & Nut Williams, 1997) as well as the methodology for cross-case analysis outlined by Stake (2006) and proceeding with one case at a time, I identified the themes that emerged from each individual case and searched for evidence or a lack thereof in each subsequent case. Themes that span the cases were only justified if there was evidence to support them in each of the three cases. No new themes emerged in this process but some themes were modified slightly. The cross-case analysis did not result in a return to the analysis of any individual student case, although the codes from each case were revisited throughout the cross-case analysis in order to scrutinize the cross-cutting themes that were developing. The cross-case analysis revealed both the similarities among the three cases as well as the nuanced differences among all of the participants.

Validity and Reliability

It is incumbent on qualitative researchers to be transparent in their data collection and analysis techniques and to publicly disclose the ways in which they have addressed issues related

to reliability and validity (Anfara et al., 2002). It was therefore essential that these areas are addressed in this study's research design and analytic plan.

The instruments chosen for this study were informed by the existing literature in the field as well as the gaps within it, and were carefully connected to each research question as well as to the overall design of the study. Each instrument and its associated data collection process, was utilized in the same manner within each individual case and across the three cases to ensure consistency and to honor the replication design upon which the study was based. Likewise, each data analysis procedure was followed in the same way across each of the three cases. The dissertation proposal served as a user's guide to each instrument to insure consistency and reliability throughout the study, but was viewed as a living document that could be modified in response to the data.

Careful attention was paid to issues of construct validity. Multiple sources of evidence were used to "encourage convergent lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2014, p. 47), and to make sure that each theme was properly triangulated. No theme was the result of a single data source at any point during the study. During the analysis stage I actively addressed alternative explanations for observed phenomena and incorporated this practice into both the initial and the second coding cycles, as well as for the theme analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

Although the study's procedures could be repeated by another researcher, the exploratory nature of the work as well as my positionality certainly impacted the findings. It would, therefore, be unreasonable to expect a replication of this study to result in the same findings as I found in my own analysis of the data. Additionally, each case is unique and the findings of this study were not designed to be generalized to the overall population of struggling readers. The process that I undertook to complete the study, however, is generalizable. The questions asked in

this study and the data collection methods usable can be utilized by any educator who is looking to deepen his/her understanding of an individual child who may be struggling in school. Additionally, the overall findings may inform future child-centered investigations in school settings.

Positionality

Qualitative analysis is highly influenced by a researcher's positionality, or personal perspective on the issues that he or she is attempting to study (Saldaña, 2016). This research, was therefore, highly influenced by my background and beliefs about students and the teaching of reading. I am a white, middle-aged woman who grew up in a homogeneous middle class community. I did not understand the privileges that I experienced during my childhood and the systems of inequality that enabled me to grow up with that lack of understanding until I was an adult. My reading development was very typical, and was not marked by either extraordinary success or difficulties developing basic skills. I was deeply impacted, however, by my brother who had a learning disability in reading. He was educated in a substantially separate classroom as a young child, and later participated in a learner-centered program of cognitive rehabilitation after the dissection of a brain tumor at the age of 25. Although I am often critical of a medical model of education (Poplin, 1988), I was and continue to be impressed by the way in which his life was positively influenced by the individualized systems of support and remediation that he received after his surgery.

I received my Master's Degree at a graduate school whose philosophy was both progressive and child-centered. Through my courses and my later work in that graduate program I developed a strong belief in the value of child-centered learning. I believe that curriculum should emerge from the students, and that remediation should be based on the strengths and

needs of individual learners. I have always been troubled by the practice of keeping students in interventions when they have been shown to be ineffective, and I reject the practice of valuing the fidelity of instruction over individual student's needs.

Before beginning my doctoral studies I was a general education teacher and then a special educator for fifteen years in elementary school settings. Reading instruction was at the core of my work with students, and I often followed students through early elementary school until their reading skills were solidly developed. There was one student, however, who despite three years of intense reading instruction, was not able to grow at a rate that enabled her to access her curriculum, even with instructional accommodations. This student has greatly influenced my practice and has stayed with me throughout my years in my doctoral program. Figuring out where I went wrong, and what lessons can be learned from that experience has been on my mind while developing this study and is in many ways my inspiration for doing this work. I am currently the assistant principal of a suburban public school that contains two programs for children who have difficulty regulating their behavior. I interact regularly with these students during times of success and struggle, and have been deeply impacted by their educational and emotional journeys, as well as the influence of school culture and academic expectations on their progress.

Finally, I am the mother of four children who attend a faith-based school, two of whom receive academic support, and one who has a similar profile to one of the students in the study. I have been intimately involved in designing systems of support for my daughter at her school, and through that process, formed strong opinions about the benefits and drawbacks of being a child with special needs in a faith-based school. Throughout the data collection and analysis I found myself drawing parallels to my children's experiences; this may have clouded my judgment

throughout the study. All of the beliefs and experiences described here have certainly impacted my construction of this study and undoubtedly influenced my interpretation of the data.

Chapter 4
Case Descriptions

In the end, we'll all become stories - Margaret Atwood.

As Margaret Atwood so poignantly expressed, each of us has a story to be told. With that in mind, this chapter consists of three stories written in the form of case descriptions - one for each participant, Ryan, Daniel, and Cameron. Each of the three students is unique both in terms of his internal characteristics and his past and previous experiences in reading; the goal of this chapter is to illuminate each participant's personal attributes and individual reading history. Since case study research is highly contextual (Yin, 2105), the chapter begins with an overview of Ryan and Daniel's school and classroom context including both general information about their school and a more specific description of their classroom. The description of Cameron's school and classroom setting appears later in the chapter. The remainder of the chapter contains the intrinsic and environmental factors that have influenced the reading lives of each of the three participants, organized by category.

Early in each case each learner's neuropsychological profile is described in detail; excerpts from each student's neuropsychological reports are included, as are relevant scores, presented as scaled scores, standard scores, or percentiles, exactly as they appear in their reports. All three students were also evaluated through their districts in order to give them the option of receiving services through their public school systems. Excerpts from that testing as well as the resulting IEPs are also included in the chapter. The participants' voices are central to each case and are quite prominent in each description. In the case of the three students, the interviewer's voice was sometimes necessary to fully understand the nature of the conversation, and at times appears alongside their own.

Following their cognitive profiles, each case description addresses each individual learner's educational history, beliefs about reading, and current academic and behavioral performance during reading instruction in the classroom. These sections vary slightly from student to student, but are organized to demonstrate the way that earlier topics influence the ones that follow them. In other words, the students' intrinsic attributes and past experiences intentionally precede their current beliefs about reading and reading performance to demonstrate the relationship among these concepts.

The first two case description are those of Ryan and Daniel. Because they were in the same third grade classroom, the description of the context applies to both students. Following a description of his school and classroom, Cameron's case description is the third of the group.

Ryan and Daniel

Context

Ryan and Daniel were students in Ms. Mulkahey's third grade class as St. Gemma's, a Catholic school in an urban and residential neighborhood of a major city in the Northeast of the United States. During the 2016 - 2017 school year St. Gemma's enrolled 415 students representing Pre-K through 8th grade (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2017). Students come from the neighborhood surrounding the school and other areas of the city, as well as suburban and urban areas in its vicinity. The school is known for its close partnership with the education program of a local university. Approximately 90% of the teachers in St. Gemma's have received their Master's Degrees through that university and the staff participate in 100 hours of professional development with university faculty and staff each year (St. Gemma's School's Website, 2017).

Ms. Mulkahey's classroom, which was located on the second floor of St. Gemma's , is a square room containing eighteen student desks clustered into groups of three and four as well as two individual desks facing the walls of the room. At the time of the data collection there was a large rug in one section of the room at which students assembled for classroom meetings and read alouds, as well as two tables at which small group instruction took place. Books in vertical bookshelves lined a section of one side of the classroom, and classroom materials were visible on shelves against two additional walls in the room; a Smart Board hung above the meeting area with a computer next to it. The walls were covered in commercial materials such as posters, as well as examples of classroom curricula including a hundreds chart and the schedule for reading centers.

Ms. Mulkaney is a Caucasian woman in her mid- thirties. During the observations she was at times accompanied by an older Assistant Teacher who moved around the room helping individual children with their small group and independent work. At the time of data collection Ms. Mulkaney's class was made up of eighteen children including six girls and twelve boys who came to school each day dressed in a variety of uniforms. Although more than half of students in Ryan and Daniel's class were Caucasian, there were also students of Asian, Latino, African-American, and Indian descent. Students appeared to move freely about the classroom during observations, and were observed working individually, in small groups, and as a whole class. Teachers were often observed to be redirecting students during independent work time, and there were at least two observations during which approximately half of the students in the classroom were demonstrating off-task behavior. There were other periods, however, when the majority of students were observed following group expectations. The students in Ms. Mulkaney's class participated in Spanish lessons in their classroom twice a week with a Spanish teacher. In line

with Catholic teachings, prayers were said before meals and snacks, and religion was taught in addition to the grade-level secular curriculum.

The reading program in St. Gemma's is the *Voices in Reading Program* (Zaner-Bloser, 2004), though *Voices* does not represent the totality of the third grade reading curriculum. Academic instruction includes reading stations in which students read and write independently and in small groups while taking turns working directly with a teacher, as well as whole class read alouds of more sophisticated chapter books. During three of the observations students from both third grade classrooms combined to work in small groups with one of the two classroom teachers. Ms. D., the teacher from the other classroom, worked with the students who were in need of more intensive support, and was therefore the leader of both Ryan and Daniel's small reading groups. She administered the *Levelled Literacy Intervention Curriculum* (LLI; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009), a small group format supplimentary intervention program (LLI Website, 2018), which was the main system of reading support for students at St. Gemma's. While children worked in groups and individually with teachers, other learners used iPads, worked or read independently, completed worksheets, and worked on class assignments.

Ryan

Ryan was a nine year old boy of mixed Asian and Caucasian descent. He lived in Arnoldsville, a neighboring city to St. Gemma's, with his mother who worked in business development, his father who ran a small business, and his younger brother who was eight years old at the time of data collection. He was average height and weight for his age and had brown eyes and thick dark brown hair through which he often ran his fingers. He enjoyed creating crafts and transforming materials into structures and intricate works of art. Ryan had a diagnosis of a Special Learning Disability in Reading which came as a result of testing that was conducted

through the Arnoldsville Public Schools and a more specific Double Deficit Dyslexia diagnosis that he received through a private neuropsychological evaluation that was performed in 2015. The private evaluator also diagnosed Ryan with Autism Spectrum Disorder, a diagnosis that Ryan's teachers were not aware of and that Ryan's parents did not mention in any of their conversations with the school or the researcher.

Cognitive Profile

The results of Ryan's cognitive battery of tests conducted through a private neuropsychological evaluation in 2015 indicated that he had average or above average abilities in all areas assessed; his scores on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V; Wechsler, 2014) fell in the average or above range in all of its categories. The neuropsychologist reported that he was most successful on the Block Design subtest that measured abstract visual construction, the Figure Weights subtest of nonverbal abstract reasoning, the Matrix Reasoning subtest of quantitative and analogue reasoning, and Similarities, a verbal reasoning task. These subtests measured skills in a variety of domains and therefore demonstrated his diverse array of cognitive strengths. His scaled scores on these subtests were at least three points above the mean, with his score on Figure Weights standing out for its position five points above average. Ryan's scores in the Verbal Comprehension, Working Memory, Visual Spatial Skills, and Fluid Reasoning clusters all fell in the average or high average range. When taken as a whole, his WISC- V scores paint a picture of a child with intact cognitive abilities.

Ryan's scores on his public and private evaluations that were more closely related to academic functioning, however, revealed a different story. He scored one standard deviation below the mean on a test of phonological awareness, and in the seventh, and ninth percentiles on subtests on the Rapid Automatized Naming and Rapid Alternating Stimulus Test (RAN/RAS;

Wolf & Deckla, 2005). His accuracy and fluency scores on the Gray Oral Reading Tests (GORT-5; Wiederholt, Bryant, 2012) conducted through his district in 2016 fell in the ninth percentile, and his score on the Initial Letter Fluency Test of the NEPSY-II (Korkman, Kirk & Kemp, 2007) was a scaled score of six. His scores on the Test of Word Reading Efficiency fell in seventeenth and thirty sixth percentile, and his Broad Reading Score in the Woodcock Johnson was in the twenty-fifth percentile. Based on all of these factors, the author of his private neuropsychological evaluation concluded that,

> The Results of this evaluation reveal a youngster whose overall level of intellectual functioning is within the 'very high' range and who exhibits very well developed fluid reasoning skills, and strong vocabulary, verbal reasoning, and visual spatial abilities. However, Ryan exhibits a patterns of language and academic dysfunction that is consistent with a Double Deficit Dyslexic disorder (Neuropsychologist, 2015, p. 9).

The evaluator determined that the significant discrepancy between Ryan's cognitive abilities and academic achievement was the result of a learning disability and recommended daily specialized instruction using a "direct structured, research-based multisensory reading program" (Neuropsychologist, 2015, p. 10). This recommendation was echoed in his IEP which labelled him with the disability category of Specific Learning Disability and indicated that he requires direct instruction in reading four times a week outside of the general education classroom in order to access the curriculum.

Ryan's curriculum-based measures mirrored the results of his evaluations but showed some evidence of growth during third grade. Through their use of the *Benchmark Assessment System* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008), Ryan's teachers concluded that Ryan was able to read and comprehend connected texts at a first grade level at the end of second grade, and demonstrated

an ability to read more challenging first grade texts at the conclusion of second grade. In both measures he was both inaccurate and dysfluent in his reading. His connected reading improved during the following year as he was able to accurately decode texts at a mid-third grade level late in third grade. His fluency, however, continued to lag significantly behind grade level expectations, and he was reported to read largely, “in two word phrases."

Throughout his standardized testing Ryan’s scores on timed measures that predict reading fluency such as Rapid Automatic Naming, Sight Word Recognition, and Initial Letter Fluency were all below or significantly below average. His connected reading was also noted to be dysfluent and many of his skills lacked automaticity. His processing speed, however, when absent from the any aspect of reading was in the above range. Ryan’s teachers and parents, in their descriptions, seemed to disagree with this finding. All of the adult participants in the study commented on Ryan’s difficulties with fluency as well as his struggles to quickly and efficiently process information presented auditorily. When describing Ryan’s experiences with the Spanish immersion program at his school, his parents noted his frustrations stating, “his biggest source of frustration is any other course that involves language processing. Spanish, absolutely vehemently hates it.” They further explained that Ryan struggles with audiobooks in which information is presented verbally and is expected to be understood at a fairly rapid pace. His parents explained that Ryan adores shows like *Nova* that are more visual in their presentation because “it's that visual and the narrative together." They stated, that listening to a story on an iPad, “doesn't seem to change his processing of the story. It's a different way for him to absorb the intake but I haven't seen any variation in how he then translates that and articulates it.” In these examples and others, Ryan’s parents argued that their son struggles to take in information efficiently without visual supports. This, however, was not a finding of Ryan’s neuropsychological report.

Along the same lines, both Ryan and his teachers discussed their concerns with Ryan's ability to take in school-related input in a timely and efficient manner. When asked about his thoughts about school, Ryan immediately noted that music and Spanish were among his least favorite activities at school. His teachers repeatedly mentioned their need to give him more time to process information and to produce answers, particularly in the context of reading. His reading teacher, Ms. D., when describing his performance in her class noted,

> And so I feel like with Ryan I have to give him extra wait time, because I think in the end he does kind of get it. Like the word, connection. That was maybe last month. Con-nec ... And he got it. And I was almost gonna say it, but then he got it, and I was like oh yeah. So I find with Ryan I have to give double the wait time.

She was observed providing Ryan with long periods of wait time during her instruction in order to allow him extra seconds to figure out words and concepts related to his reading. This point was echoed by Ryan's classroom teacher who, in describing her read alouds to the class noted, "I think having the repetition and the familiarity is actually something that's actually very good for him right now so that he understands ... He can remember particular components from the story and then link them together after the fact." She, like many of the other stakeholders in Ryan's reading life, believed that he benefits from repetition, meaningful connections, and visual supports, to process academic information. This perceived difficulty processing complex verbal interactions may explain some of the personality traits described by Ryan's parents and teachers.

Personality Traits

Ryan's mother and father described him as "incredibly conscientious (and) caring of other people." They provided a vivid description of a child who had a kind and gentle nature and

possessed a thoughtful and nurturing manner. They told stories from his early years in which he was, “very protective of little kids." They explained that,

> Ever since he was in daycare..if there was a child always crying they put Ryan on the job. He'd just take care of them and just settle them down. He's very much like the caregiver type of mentality and nurturing...For small children and animals he's incredibly nurturing and gentle and it's pretty impressive to watch.

Ryan’s parents eagerly shared examples of his attention to the needs of others, his protective nature, and his kind and gentle heart. During the researcher’s visit, Ryan was observed to be very helpful to his teachers, and was, in fact, the student who was given the role of welcoming me to the school and helping me to understand the layout of the school and the classroom.

When shifting to his current social interactions Ryan’s parents painted a slightly different picture. They explained that although he “gets joy” from his social interactions, and “is a very social interactive person”, he sometimes has difficulty making friends and relating to the students at school. They explained that,

> He doesn't connect with the kids on the level of sport(s) or anything like that. He's not interested in soccer. He's not interested in football, he's not interested in baseball - that kind of stuff. He will do it in order to be able to engage with the other students, however he hasn't necessarily found somebody that he considers a peer. We go back to some of his friends from his former school and have play dates and whatnot. I think he understands the lines a little bit more in an ... I'm sorry I won't say in an academic sense.

Ryan’s parents believed that although Ryan made progress in his ability to interact and play with his peers, he needs to connect with people on an “intellectual” basis in order to form deep connections with them. They told the story of a child of a professor at a previous school that was

a good match for Ryan but moved away, leaving him without a really close friend with whom he had attributes in common. His teachers, in contrast, described him as a boy with “a lot of friends” who is “very kind” to others. They said that he is social with many children in the classroom and is very helpful to his peers and teachers. During classroom observations Ryan was observed throwing away the garbage of other students and sharpening pencils for his peers. He also was helpful to any adults in the classroom that required assistance.

In describing Ryan’s ability to interact with others as well as the way that he interprets the world, Ryan’s parents described his as “concrete rationale." As an example, they detailed his ability to build with wood and sew as well as his memory for details. They explained,

> Like you know he isn't going to go into role playing creative space by himself in order to be able to say oh, I'm an army guy or I'm a firefighter or I'm a, sometimes like little boys do or kids do. He will participate in that if somebody else has already started to do it, so as a social aspect he'll engage in it. Just kind of like the way that his brain works it's literally more about building, architecture, you know, math, than it is about creative design….It is easier for him to be able to build something than to draw a picture. He's kind of process oriented. He will come in my ... I've started a company and he will come in and tell me how to do my business and run a warehouse and...he is absolutely 100% right.

This “concrete” aspect of his personality was central to their belief that he sees the world through a practical analytic lens as opposed to a more creative one. This attribute was evident in his classroom observations. On multiple occasions he was observed quietly interacting with his peers by performing a task for them or by playing with materials on or near their work spaces; he did not, however, participate in the creative play-based scenarios that sometimes occurred in the

classroom, and he rarely initiated reciprocal or extended conversations with his peers. He also struggled to answer inferential questions during his small group discussions about a text. Despite these comments and observations neither Ryan's parents or his teachers mentioned the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder that was given as part of neuropsychological evaluation. When asked, Ryan's teachers said that they were unaware of the diagnosis.

Educational History

Ryan's reading history is long and complex and involves multiple stakeholders and participants. It was also informed by his placement in two different Catholic Schools beginning in kindergarten. Ryan began his schooling in a daycare center that his parents spoke about very highly for its "progressive curriculum and creative, hands-on approach", and then moved to what his parents identified as a very traditional Catholic School in their neighborhood in Arnoldsville. Ryan's parents described this school as a place in which there was "no artwork on the walls" and instruction was based on "rote memorization" in which "you do it, and you do it, and you do it." Ryan's parents retold experiences in which Ryan's teacher, who did not have a background in "early childhood", asked him when he was confused about a topic, "to go to the board and figure it out...in front of everyone." They explained that he "wasn't given any tools or anything" to work through problems that were difficult for him and he began to feel "dumb" and ask questions about why the people around him could read, and he couldn't. His teacher at the time did not give his parents ideas of ways to support him, but instead suggested that he be held back in kindergarten; they disagreed. They were so upset with Ryan's teacher's behavior that they contemplating removing him from the school in the spring of kindergarten. After talking to Ryan's pediatrician they decided to delay the decision for another year.

The following year, when he was still struggling in reading, Ryan's parents decided to have him evaluated through Arnoldsville public school system. Ryan was diagnosed with a learning disability in reading and began to be tutored using an *Orton Gillingham* approach once a week. His parents also began investigating other school programs for him, and eventually selected St. Gemma's after learning about their university partnership and overall approach to education. They enrolled him in St. Gemma's and asked one of the teachers to tutor him during the summer to help him acclimate to the changing curriculum and culture. They felt that this was a beneficial experience for him, and report that they have been generally satisfied with St. Gemma's, explaining that Ryan has felt much happier since making the change to the new school. He has continued with weekly tutoring in Orton Gillingham since first grade, which his parents and teachers described as having "had an impact" on his reading.

Students who require extra assistance in reading at St. Gemma's participate in small group instruction during their reading center time that uses the *Leveled Literacy Intervention Curriculum* (LLI; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). According to Ryan's teachers he participated in this program for the entirety of second grade and for the majority of his third grade year. They believe that the small group direct instruction positively affected his reading achievement, and Ryan agreed in his interview that he is a better reader than he was in the past. Despite Ryan's success in the program, his reading teacher reflected that in the second half of third grade it was time to make a change to support his emotional well-being. She explained that, "a few months ago we used regular books, and I think they loved that. They felt like they were part of the class. And so we stopped doing LLI like two months ago." She felt that for the sake of Ryan and his peers' self esteem it was important to begin to include more typical-looking books in their instruction.

Despite their overall happiness with his progress since arriving at St. Gemma's, Ryan's parents and teachers all commented on the impact of the Catholic School setting on his access to reading intervention, both noting that he is not getting all of the services delineated on his IEP. His teacher reflected on this issue stating, "I'm sure he's probably supposed to have more than he gets, because of the school that we're in, we don't have those specialists to help. So that's kind of the downside." She explained that students who require specialized instruction generally either receive after school tutoring or go outside of the building, often to their public school systems to get the services that they require. She reflected that although Ryan's after school tutoring has helped, she wished that they had a phonics program as part of the general education curriculum, and an in house special education teacher to work with students during the school day. Both, she explained, will hopefully be implemented in the future at St. Gemma's.

Ryan's parents who expressed their overall satisfaction with the school and Ryan's experience at St. Gemma's also spoke at length about their feelings of internal conflict related to his school placement. Ryan's mother explained,

> it's the paradox of choice, right? We do have a choice and we are in a position where we have the capability to provide options for him. Where some families are not and so that puts a responsibility on us to be able to do as much as we can, you know. And of course we want to, so we just have to keep experimenting and seeing what hits….we want to do what's best for him. We'd move in heartbeat to the right school system but it seems to be right now Arnoldsville is not the one for us based on placements and lotteries and all this other kind of stuff. It is just try to figure out the mechanics of that. There's everything from leaving an old school, leaving friends, groups, moving to something new, financially, et cetera, et cetera.

Ryan's parents repeatedly expressed their struggles with living in an urban district and the complexities associated with that location. They also reflected on their feelings of guilt related to the role financial factors played in their decision to enroll Ryan in a private school that does not have a special education program. They responded to this struggle by working tirelessly to support the school in their education of Ryan, and by always remaining vigilant about his progress. Ryan's parents expressed that if necessary they would move him to a school for students with Dyslexia, but were not yet at that point in their decision-making process. They, instead, were determined to work closely with the school and to remain aware of Ryan's progress as he grows and faces new academic challenges.

In order to help Ryan as much as possible in his current setting, his parents spoke about the work that they have done as parents to put interventions and accommodations in the place for him. They have tried to take advantage of storybooks online, which they used until Ryan found them to be "too babyish." They expressed interest in possibly working with a behavioral optometrist to address issues potentially related to tracking. They have also taken advantage of assistive technology including "Dyslexia Font" and speech to text software. Ryan's mother explained that in working with the teachers,

> I asked if we could get the lesson plans ahead of time, get the materials ahead of time so that I could use just an online font translation app to be able to translate the fonts into something which is a little more, you know, dyslexia friendly. The bigger, you know the shapes of the fonts make a difference. There are other applications where it actually color codes because, again, from the visual therapy perspective there is line of research that says being able to color code the text can make a difference in terms of being able to differentiate high/low resolution. Be able to see the text differently. Try things like that.

Those are the kinds of things. It's all feels very experimental still to me but I feel like we have to do that.

Ryan's parents immersed themselves in research related to Dyslexia in order to familiarize themselves with all of the options that they can take advantage of at home to enable Ryan to make progress. His mother explained, "I mean, we want to be able to give him whatever he needs because, to be able to really leverage his full potential."

Beliefs About Reading

Ryan's past and present experiences have informed his feelings about reading as well as his reading-related behavior in school. Interviews with Ryan, his parents and teachers, as well as classroom observations revealed Ryan's feelings towards and behavior during reading instruction as well as his understanding of his learning challenges. Ryan's parents described a child who has always been very aware of his struggles in school. In recalling Ryan's early experiences in kindergarten and first grade, his mother said that Ryan would come home and ask, " Why can all my friends read? Why can my brother read?" They explained that Ryan is very aware of his peers' academic performance and how his progress compares to theirs, and even at a young age, would describe himself as dumb when he couldn't perform at the level of his classmates. His current teachers described Ryan as hard working, but sensitive to the behavior and achievement of his classmates. They explained that they try hard to avoid making Ryan "nervous" or "afraid" while he is reading and writing so that he will feel confident and be able to complete his work.

In reflecting on his school performance, Ryan expressed that his favorite academic subject in school is math because, "It's pretty easy for me." He described Spanish, ELA groups, and music as his less prefered activities. When asked about how he reads books, he explained,

> I used to feel like, I tried to not do the reading and just pretend looking at the book.... Now I just read books that I like to read, but if I don't only, the really only thing I read (sic) is stories of *Geronimo Stilton*...So if I'm reading a different book….I learn just to look through the pages.

When asked if his description meant that he sometimes pretended to read, Ryan agreed, adding that books are, “pretty hard." Given Ryan’s parents recollections of his comparing his reading ability to that of his peers, pretending to read may have been a means to look like those around him. These comments echoed those of his parents and teachers who noted his deep level of care for how others perceive his achievement and fear of appearing incapable or not as smart as his classmates.

Reading Behavior

A large component of Ryan’s classroom reading instruction consisted of Reading Center Time during which students read or worked independently or in small groups and took turns participating in small teacher-led instructional groups. During these centers, Ryan was observed engaging in a range of behaviors other than completing required assignments or following group expectations; he was, in fact, rarely observed working independently during language arts instructional time. His behaviors included repeated staring into space for several minutes at time, playing extensively with his and his classmates’ pencils, markers, and other supplies, and making art projects out of pencils by digging one into the other. He took multiple trips to the pencil sharpener to fix his dull pencils and those of his peers, and he frequented the bathroom and the water fountain and returned from those trips walking slowly and deliberately back to his spot. He put his head down on his desk for two or more minutes at a time, played quietly with his classmates, and seemed to sit still looking at his materials but not attempting to use them. These

periods of what could be described as avoidant behavior were as short as two minutes, but were often as long as ten minutes in duration.

When in situations in which the class was reading together, such as in a lesson about a *Scholastic News* article, Ryan could be observed glancing briefly at the anchor text, but mainly looking around the room, at his hand or wrist, or at the ceiling. When asked to read aloud, Ryan was observed on multiple occasions nervously putting his hands through his hair as he read somewhat reluctantly to the class.

One deviation from Ryan's avoidant behavior was when he worked in close proximity to a teacher; this seemed to help him work more efficiently. This occurred on rare occasions in the main classroom, but was most evident in his reading intervention group. Ryan's reading support group met in the other third grade teacher, Ms. D.'s classroom. Although Ryan did demonstrate some of the avoidant behaviors observed in the general education classroom in his group such as making the Vulcan Symbol while people were speaking, his behavior overall, was much more focused and productive. During reading group Ryan was observed raising his hand to answer questions about a text, responding immediately to directions, beginning an assignment as soon as it was given to him, and participating actively in group discussions. In a conversation about past tense, Ryan provided multiple examples of words that ended with "ed", and responded by saying "oo" to another classmate's examples. Ryan also was observed taking a risk by providing the first sound of the word "prairie" when he couldn't recall the word while reading aloud.

When asked about his performance in his small reading group, his teacher responded that she believes that Ryan responds to "tons of positive reinforcement" including prizes, fake money, and compliments. She also explained that she gives Ryan "extra wait time" in order to give him the time "to build up his confidence." Ryan's behavior during small group reading

instruction differed significantly from his behavior during whole group work time and instruction. Ryan's parents explained that they chose St. Gemma's partially because of their commitment to small group work. Ryan, on the other hand, explained that reading groups were "too long." His behavior indicated that they may have been a place in which he was able to focus on his work and experience some success.

Daniel, another student in the study, was a member of Ryan's classroom and reading group, and therefore shared many experiences with him. I now turn my attention away from Ryan to Daniel's story. As with Ryan I begin with a brief introduction to Daniel followed by a more detailed description of his cognitive profile.

Daniel

Daniel was a ten year old Caucasian boy of Italian descent who, like Ryan, was a student in Ms. Mulkahey's third grade classroom. During the observation period he was enrolled in his second year in third grade; he was retained when he transferred to St. Gemma's in the fall of 2016. Daniel, like Ryan, lived in Arnoldsville with his mother who was an attorney, father who was a police sergeant, and brother who was sixteen months his senior. Daniel had blond hair and blue eyes and was large for his age both in height and in stature. He enjoyed travel and Italian cooking, and had a close relationship with both his immediate and his extended family, including his uncle who is a chef. Daniel had a diagnosis of a Developmental Dyslexia that he received from a private neuropsychological evaluation at a well-known center for learning at a local research hospital. The disability category on his IEP was Specific Learning Disability. When asked, Daniel's parents and teachers identified his difficulties with reading and math as his main areas of academic struggle.

Cognitive Profile

The results of Daniel's neuropsychological evaluation indicated that his cognitive abilities were quite variable, with scores falling from the high average to significantly below average range. He demonstrated high average abilities on the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children (WISC-V; Wechsler, 2014) in both his verbal and his visual spatial abilities, and had "individual strengths and skills in the high average range as compared to same-aged peers on measures of verbal comprehension and his understanding of spatial relationships" (Neuropsychologist, 2017, p. 6). His verbal comprehension composite score was in the 86th percentile, and his visual-spatial composite score was in the 77th percentile, both above average for his grade and age. Daniel's performance on the other subtests of the WISC, however, were not as robust. For example, though his overall score in the working memory category fell in the low end of the average range, there was a great deal of variation on his performance with both his highest and lowest subtest scores falling within the working memory cluster. Daniel experienced a great deal of difficulty with the Fluid Reasoning Cluster that measured his ability to "solve abstract problems using visual cues to identify and apply rules" (Neuropsychologist, 2017, p 5). His scores in this category fell in the fifth percentile when compared to his peers, and his evaluator noted that both subtests in this area were challenging for him.

Throughout his neuropsychological testing Daniel struggled to complete tasks of visual motor integration and executive functioning. In these areas his evaluator noted that Daniel often chose speed over accuracy, and at times, took an overly conservative approach to completing tasks. Daniel consistently experienced difficulty with subtests that required organization and planning as well as a flexible approach to problem solving; his evaluator commented that he sometimes took a "haphazard approach" to problem solving and "demonstrates rigid or concrete patterns of thinking/learning" (Neuropsychologist, 2017, p 10).

In tasks that closely related to reading, Daniel's scores again ranged from the high average range to the significantly below average range. His ability to read commonly used words, when compared to his grade level peers was in the high average range as was his ability to blend words in isolation. His advanced age for his grade, however, may have impacted his scores in those areas. His phonological memory was in the very low range and his spelling score was low average. Daniel also struggled with both accuracy and fluency while reading connected texts in the Gray Oral Reading Tests (GORT- 5; Wiederholt, Bryant, 2012), his evaluator noting that many of his errors were the result of "inattention to detail" (Neuropsychologist 2017, p. 12). When taken as a group, his performance on his reading-related tasks indicated that there were gaps in his reading skills that interfered with his overall fluency and accuracy while reading connected texts. This led his neuropsychologist to conclude that Daniel "meets the criteria for a language-based learning disability, specifically Developmental Dyslexia with weaknesses in decoding, reading fluency, and accuracy, and associated challenges with spelling" (2017, p. 13). She also noted that he struggled with executive functioning and demonstrated "vulnerabilities" in working memory, and all of these areas of difficulty impacted his psychological functioning and overall self-esteem.

Personality Traits

Daniel's parents described him as "as a fairly happy easy going...kid." His mother explained that Daniel, at times possessed a high level of sophistication, stating that he,

> loves his family, his brother and his cousins and loves to be with his family more than anyone else. He loves things like traveling with his family. My husband is a big traveler, he'd particularly love to go to Italy, but who wouldn't. Enjoys Italian food and the finer things of life I would say on occasion.

His parents and teachers described him as loving good food, his parents noting that he enjoyed culinary delicacies that other children his age are not willing to try. He was observed on multiple occasions consuming sophisticated, intricately prepared sandwiches and pastries while others around him ate more typical third grade foods such as crackers and fruit.

Despite his propensity to enjoy certain aspects of life, Daniel's teachers and his parents spoke repeatedly about his low self-esteem, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes. They, in fact, described these traits as central components of his personality that regularly impacted his behavior as well as decisions that he made when surrounded by his peers. His mother explained,

> Daniel is the type of kid that he doesn't like anything actually, until he is able to do it. It's not just with reading. His first year of swimming lessons he had to sit on the bench for the entire session and watch until he figured out he can do it. Then once he can do it he gets in at the end of the season and can do something. His first year of soccer he sat on the sidelines and watched until he could do it. Basketball, same thing. It's not until after a few years of doing it that he starts to enjoy it, until he actually feels that he can accomplish something…..I think it's that he feels like he doesn't want anyone to see him not doing a good job. That he doesn't enjoy it 'til he can do it well.

Daniel's mother repeatedly painted a portrait of a child whose fear of making mistakes limited his willingness to try new activities and take risks in front of others. This is an attribute that his teachers noticed as well when they reflected on Daniel's inability to attempt tasks that are challenging for him. Ms. Mulkahey commented,

> He does have a tendency for some anxiety for certain things, like when things are new or things are difficult…….where if he's still down on himself, if he doesn't have the

> confidence he's not gonna try and if he doesn't try then he's not gonna get it. It's a vicious cycle with him where if he doesn't know he can read a word he won't read it.

According to Daniel's teachers this unwillingness to perform a skill until he has mastered it interfered with his ability to practice his reading and writing, and to fully develop his skills in several academic areas. They also found that it impacted their day-to-day interactions with him in the classroom. They explained that Daniel can sometimes be "combative" if they question something that they see on his classwork. As a result, his reading teacher noted that in order to build his self-confidence, "Sometimes I'll just say, 'great job' even if I can't read it, to make him feel better. I don't know if I'm doing the right thing, but I feel like Daniel needs a lot of, 'hey, you're doing great'." His teachers described their day-to-day conscious effort to be extremely careful about how they respond to Daniel's academic performance because any negative feedback can limit his ability to complete work and put forth effort in the classroom. Daniel's mother concurred with this understanding, providing the example of Daniel's total inability to handle a voice being raised to him. She explained,

> He's the type of kid who can't handle when a voice is raised to him, really. He has a brother, as I told you, 16 months apart. If I say 10 times to, 'Put your shoes on, put your shoes on', he's ignoring me and doesn't put his shoes on, finally I say (impatiently) 'Put your shoes on'.....He says, 'What's wrong mom? I didn't even hear you. What's going on?' If I raise my voice to Daniel, 'Put your shoes on', he will be in tears. He just can't handle that sort of tone, I think it is.

Daniel's parents and teachers explained that Daniel can not handle criticism and worked very hard each day to "not be different" from others; this behavior, unfortunately, sometimes interfered with his willingness to accept the assistance and constructive feedback that he needed

to be able to better access the curriculum. They provided the example of his refusal to use a learning tool that he required to assist him with tracking because he did not want to look different from his peers. Similarly, in order to protect his self-esteem they decided to keep his retention a secret from his classmates; they felt that providing him opportunities to experience success without others knowing that he had been exposed to some of the academic material twice would help to build his confidence.

Daniel's self esteem and risk-averse nature was evident in his classroom behavior as well. During a discussion about a writing assignment about the value of test-taking, Daniel described tests as something on which he, "always does bad." When Ms. Mulkahey tried to explain to him that he could, in fact, do well on a test, he did not appear to be open to an alternative perspective responding that he "always feels bad" when he takes a test. Similarly, when the researcher asked Daniel how he was doing one morning when I walked by his desk, he responded without hesitation or any sign of sadness, "everything is horrible", to which the child next to him clarified that when he says "horrible, he doesn't really mean it." He also explained during an interview that the reason that he likes gym, as opposed to other parts of school, is because, "I'm good at it."

Daniel's desire to fit in and avoid taking risks was also apparent in his interactions with his peers. Daniel was often observed sitting or standing alone, even during less structured parts of the school day; when he was with his classmates, his interactions were often quiet and measured. Daniel did not speak to any of his peers during an entire snack period during which the rest of the class conversed and joked with each other. When he did communicate with his classmates, he often interacted non-verbally, passing snacks and materials around quietly or making non-verbal jokes. I only observed Daniel smiling and laughing with his friends once

during all of the observations, but did notice several instances in which he engaged peers in quiet, non-verbal interactions during academic center periods or free time. His teachers explained that Daniel can appear stubborn, and this can interfere with his relationships with his peers.

Educational History

Like Ryan, Daniel's educational history is quite complicated and was informed by the community in which he lives, his placement in a Catholic School, and his evolving diagnoses. When Daniel was three years old he was chosen by lottery to attend a public Montessori school in Arnoldsville. His mother described this to be a highly coveted position, particularly because there was a private Montessori school "down the block that cost 26,000 dollars per year." His parents questioned at the time whether Daniel was ready for school, but felt that they couldn't give up their spot in a free quality program.

Since he attended a public school Daniel was able to receive special education services within the building, and after what his mother described as a "partial evaluation" at four years old he began working with occupational therapist. Although his early years in Neighborhood Montessori were relatively successful, his parents considered holding him back after the equivalent of his kindergarten year, but as a result of Daniel's issues with self-esteem as well as the multi-age structure of the school, they allowed him to graduate from the three, four, and five year old classroom together with his agemates.

Daniel continued to exhibit some difficulty in school, and his parents requested a formal evaluation in first grade. When that evaluation resulted in a finding of no special needs, his parents demanded a second evaluation in second grade. This evaluation found evidence of a learning disability in reading, which according to his mother, the evaluator indicated they had

overlooked the previous year. After the evaluation, Daniel went on an IEP, and began receiving direct services both in and out of the classroom three days a week.

Third grade, unfortunately, was an extremely difficult year for Daniel, and ultimately influenced his parents' decision to move him to St. Gemma's. In the Neighborhood Montessori Program, children are given the freedom, " to choose their own tasks, work at their own pace and move ahead as the desire to know more and something different becomes important." (Neighborhood Montessori School Website, 2017). Daniel's mother explained that during the course of third grade Daniel began to select learning activities that were significantly below his grade level, prohibiting him from growing academically. They tried a behavior system to encourage him to choose more challenging activities, but Daniel did not respond to that program. Over time Daniel became less and less happy at Neighborhood Montessori and eventually began to develop somatic symptoms to related to learning. His team met and offered him more services to help remediate his skills, but his symptoms did not improve. His mother explained that,

> During that time period I was more focused, really because he became so unhappy he actually was making himself throw up and refusing to go to school and trying to get out of school by actually making himself throw up. There became kind of this more major concern about his personal wellbeing, rather than his academics at that point.

In order to maintain his mental health, at the end of third grade, Daniel's parents made the decision to remove him from the public school system and place him in St. Gemma's. They also decided to have him enter as an incoming third grader, even though it would mean repeating a grade, in order to allow him to be more successful at his new school. Knowing that he was leaving the special education protections of the public school system Daniel's parents put themselves on the waitlist at a major research hospital for a neuropsychological evaluation which

he was able to participate in during the month of March. In the meanwhile, the teachers at St. Gemma's worked to the best of their ability to support him using the general education systems that they had in place in third grade.

Since receiving the results of his neuropsychological reports, Daniel's parents have worked tirelessly to put supports into place to supplement his education at St. Gemma's and to make up for the missed hours of instruction on his IEP. They found him an *Orton Gillingham* tutor to work with him twice a week at the school and over the summer, even when they are out of the city. They also took him to see a behavioral optometrist to have him evaluated for ocular therapy to address his issues tracking connected text, and committed to a regimented program in which he agreed to practice his tracking every day for six weeks. Daniel's parents are dedicated to finding and utilizing all of the possible supports available to him, because they realize that "we removed him from the public school setting which has services, to a private school setting where he has no services." This was clearly a difficult decision for them, and is one that has weighed heavily on their minds and hearts.

Teachers

While recounting his educational history both Daniel and his mother reflected on Daniel's relationships with his teachers, and the importance of those connections to his self esteem and achievement. In recalling his relationship with his teacher in his Montessori School, his mother noted that Daniel has no tolerance for teachers expressing frustration towards him. She explained, "His last teacher was getting really frustrated with him and was unkind to him….To this day, if you bring up his name, he says he hates him. He never wanted to go back, didn't want to see him. Didn't even want to say goodbye…..he couldn't handle it anymore." She pointed out Daniel's strong and salient feelings towards his previous third grade teacher and how

overwhelming those feelings were and continued to be for him. In helping to clarify this point, she continued,

> if he has negativity at all to him, he's gonna shut down to it. So if someone gets kind of angry at him or frustrated with him for not trying, he kind of shuts down to the person and to learning. He needs this kind of support and encouragement to kind of cajole him and encourage him to continue even when things get difficult.

Daniel's mother's explanation brought to the forefront the power of Daniel's relationships with his teachers, and as well as his high level of sensitivity when he felt that an adult authority figure had negative feelings towards him. Daniel echoed those sentiments when he reflected on his relationships with his previous teachers. In his description of his switch from Neighborhood Montessori to St. Gemma's, he stated, " It was a good switch because I hated my old school…...because the teachers were mean...they were like telling me if I didn't finish something then they would make me do it over the weekend or they would make me do it over summer vacation." Almost a year after his switch to St. Gemma's, Daniel held onto his strong negative feelings towards those teachers and was willing to share them openly and freely with the researcher.

His teachers at St. Gemma's, who expressed their awareness of Daniel's relationships with his previous educators, worked hard to cultivate positive and supportive relationships with him. His parents described Ms. Mulkahey as, "a godsend (who) had such kindness that he started to enjoy being in school and learning again." His parents spoke repeatedly about his current teacher's "kindness, encouragement, and support" and the way that those traits enabled Daniel to begin to access classroom learning after having removed himself from it. His teachers, in part,

spoke about the effort that they put into forming positive relationships with Daniel. Ms. D, his reading teacher, explained,

> I found that at the beginning of the year being strict with them wasn't working. Daniel, come on now, you didn't do that. He would go more inward, but then I tried praising him more and that seems to work better, at least with reading. 'Good job Daniel, oh that's great.' He seems to respond well to that. He likes competition. He likes to win. He is very funny and he has a good sense of humor. He will ... He likes to joke with the kids and be funny….I see a lot of bright lights in there, so I'm trying to draw it out.

Ms. D.'s comments reflected not only the significant effort that she put forth to understand and support Daniel, but also his high level of fragility related to his academic performance and high level of reinforcement that he required to experience a sense of pride and accomplishment in school. His teachers reflected that they worked tirelessly to create opportunities for him to experience, "anything that he can see as success in a tangible way." They reported using stickers, chance tickets, prizes and other systems of reinforcement to keep him engaged in his work. His teacher explained, "He loves the praise and the stickers. I want the kids leaving with a smile. 'Gee, I did good today.' Even if they didn't deserve the sticker, I just give them one." His teachers mentioned on several occasions that they actively sought out opportunities to reward Daniel's performance, no matter how he actually performed in their classes. This was observed during a reading intervention period during which Daniel was showered with praise and stickers for remaining focused on his work for a four minute period.

When asked about the role of teachers in the process of learning to read Daniel commented that the role of a teacher is "help kids if they get a word wrong." He further explained, "So it's basically just if you get a question wrong, then the teacher will tell you, and if

you get a word wrong, the teacher will tell you so you get better at reading. And sometimes, the teacher reads with you and just basically help you read." Daniel seemed to admit that teachers contribute to teaching students to read, but defined their day-to-day role in his academic life as corrective and reparative instead of as instructive. These feelings may have also related to his negative beliefs about the reading curriculum and his passive role in his own learning.

Beliefs About Reading

Daniel's feelings about reading, although generally negative, seemed to vary based on the format of reading instruction. They were also informed by his past negative experiences. Two segments of his interviews most clearly illuminated his feelings towards the act of reading. First after discussing the positive attributes of school, he was asked about his less prefered activities. He responded by stating the following,

Interviewer:	Okay. Is there anything you don't like about school?
Daniel :	Reading.
Interviewer:	How come?
Daniel :	Because I don't like it.
Interviewer:	Is there anything about it in particular you don't like?
Daniel :	That whenever we do reading groups, it's long books, and I don't like long books.
Interviewer:	So are there types of books that you like?
Daniel :	Short ones.
Interviewer:	So like, what types of books, for example, do you like? What's a book you might like?
Daniel :	*Diary of a Wimpy Kid.*
Interviewer:	That's a long book.
Daniel :	I know, but I don't read the paragraphs, I just read what they're saying. If they're not saying anything, I just turn the page.

Here Daniel described not only his negative feelings towards the act of reading, but his strategy of pretending to read in class when he felt overwhelmed by the quantity of text that was in front of him. Daniel also seemed to express his belief that reading is a task that has be completed, not

a source of any enjoyment or pride. This concept was further illustrated by another segment of his interview. When asked how he would describe reading and his reading instruction at school he remarked,

> **Daniel:** That, well, like Nike says, "Just do it."
> ***Interviewer:*** So what does that mean?
> ***Daniel :*** Just read and get it over with.
> ***Interviewer:*** That's what you should do for kids or teachers?
> ***Daniel :*** Kids. Kids should just read and get it over with.
> ***Interviewer :*** Why just get it over with?
> ***Daniel:*** Because the longer that you read for, then the harder that gets and the more struggling that you'll have to do.
> ***Interviewer :*** So you mean if you read less, it's gonna be harder, or if you read more it's gonna be harder? Which one?
> ***Daniel:*** If you read more, it's gonna be harder, but if you read less, just get it over with.

Daniel's statements, which on the surface may have seemed positive, were actually quite a negative reflection on his beliefs about the act of reading. He described reading as a chore brought upon children by teachers and parents and a path to disappointment, not a means of enjoyment or a method of improving his ability or skill. Daniel was very open about his struggles with reading, distinguishing himself from the other participants in the study by openly discussing his diagnosis with the researcher without being asked about it. He explained that because he has Dyslexia he needs help in reading. Daniel's teacher reflected on his understanding of his diagnosis stating,

> He has currently been diagnosed as Dyslexic. That happened a couple of months ago. His mom was working to get that testing done, but wasn't sure if that's something that should be done. She finally went through with it and they found out that yes he was. He has been told that he's Dyslexic. I think it has really changed his personality because he's like, 'Now I understand why I'm struggling with these things that

other kids aren't struggling with.' I think that's made a huge difference to him. His mom handled it very well. She told him about famous people who are Dyslexic that have been successful. At the same time, he sometimes uses it now as an excuse. We got to get him to understand that he can still do things right. It just might take a little longer.

I think reading is still slow for him. It's going to be something that he has an aversion to a little bit, doesn't really want to but I think he's a stronger reader than he had been. I think it's getting better. I can see a change since he came. For sure.

Daniel's teachers believed that Daniel's knowledge of his disability changed both his understanding of himself as a reader and his overall confidence about his academic abilities. This awareness may have shifted his ability to accept that he was a capable student despite any obstacles that may have stood in his way. It may have also influenced his openness to some small aspects of his reading instruction. When asked about the act of reading as a whole Daniel's answers were quite negative, but his responses to questions about reading intervention and his tutor were slightly more positive. When told to reflect upon a reading intervention that was just observed by the researcher he spoke about his teacher's role in correcting his errors, but also stated that his teacher was there was "to help him." He was even more positive when discussing his Orton Gillingham Tutor. After stating that reading is "boring" and that there were no parts of reading instruction that he enjoys, he commented that his tutor was "good." He then participated in the following conversation:

Interviewer: Why is the tutor good?
Daniel: Because we play fun games.
Interviewer: Oh, okay. What does it feel like ... when you read now, how do you feel? Like, do you feel proud that you've become such a good reader? Do you feel upset? Do you feel bored? How do you feel?
Daniel: I feel like I'm doing better at reading.
Interviewer: Awesome. So here's my question. Why do you feel like you're doing better

at reading?

Daneil: Because of the tutor. She does games…. like she makes games.

Despite many negative comments about reading, Daniel spoke positively about his time with his tutor. This shift may have reflected the activities done during his time with her, or may have been indicative of his growing understanding of his need for his tutor and the impact of the work that she is doing with him. His teachers seemed to believe that both reasons were true.

Reading Behavior

Daniel's behavior during reading instruction in his classroom and during reading intervention periods seemed to reflect the beliefs that he described in conversations with the researcher. Daniel was observed during a range of reading centers and activities in his general education classroom; during these periods he rarely actively engaged in reading instruction. He was, however, observed eating, drawing, walking around the classroom, playing with classroom materials, and doing math on an iPad when he was asked to work independently on reading activities. The only time that he worked for more than five uninterrupted minutes on a reading activity was when he read a graphic novel while other students completed a standardized test. On one day Daniel tried to hold his breath to show his peers that he could turn his face red, spent more than eight minutes returning from the bathroom and three minutes walking to his desk to retrieve headphones for his iPad. Even when his teacher read a book to the class, Daniel sat in the back of the classroom separate from the other students, and when asked to move closer to the class, faced in the opposite direction from the teacher who was reading and played with classroom materials.

Daniel's behavior was, at times, different during reading intervention periods, and reflected his evolving and more positive feelings about his struggles with reading and his need for intervention. During reading intervention periods Daniel was observed attempting to provide

a definition of a word in front of his group, assisting a peer, working on a structured assignment about a text, and answering specific questions from his teacher. At one point he raised his hand and stated an incorrect answer to a question posed verbally, possibly indicating his willingness to take risks when he was not completely certain of an answer. He also, with teacher scaffolding to work collaboratively, worked together with a peer to complete an assignment.

Despite his more frequent on-task behavior during reading intervention, Daniel was, at times observed playing with materials and providing answers to complex questions that seemed to take the conversation off track. After completing the book *Charlotte's Web,* Ms. D. asked Daniel to state why he would recommend the book to others. When he could not complete a sentence frame to answer that question, she asked him how the book made him feel, to which he replied, "like I always feel." She then continued by inquiring if the book had a message, to which he responded, "no." After seemingly noticing his resistance and lack of comfort, she simplified the question by asking if he had a favorite character, to which he replied, "Avery because he has a gun and a hunting knife." When another child noted, "that is violent." He said, "I like violence." In this instance it appeared that he attempted to use humor and off track responses to shift the conversation away from its original topic, and to avoid struggling in front of his classmates. The teacher did not respond to his final remark, and continued on with the conversation as planned.

Despite some periods of off task behavior, his overall focus and engagement during intervention periods was higher than it was during the general classroom reading instructional time. He was more on task, willing to take more risks, and at times observed to be actively utilizing reading behaviors. During these periods he also appeared slightly more willing to put forth the effort needed to achieve.

The other child in the study, Cameron, attended a different Catholic school in the same city as Ryan and Daniel, but like them, was identified by his school staff as a struggling reader. The remainder of this chapter will focus on Cameron's story. I will discuss his school and classroom contexts as well as his his intrinsic characteristics, beliefs, and experiences.

Cameron

Educational Context

Cameron was a student at the East End Catholic School (EECS), a parochial school in a major northeast city. In 2016, EECS had 251 students ranging in age from pre-k to sixth grade (Massachusetts Department of Education Website, 2017). EECS is dedicated to faith-based education describing its curriculum as, "inspired by the traditions of our Catholic Faith" (East End Catholic School Website, 2017); the school is closely connected to two parishes in its neighborhood where the students go for special events and Masses. The school is part of a well-known literacy collaborative run by a local university and has a close connection with a Catholic University just outside of the city in which it is located; approximately 60% of the teachers have Master's Degrees from these two universities as well as others in the area. Through their relationships with the Catholic University, EECS was recently able to fund a learning specialist position to support students who require academic support in and out of the classroom.

Cameron entered third grade in October after beginning the year in fourth grade and being asked to move back a grade in October. Cameron's third grade classroom was a square room located on the second floor of EECS; it had a big picture window that filled the classroom with light when its blinds were open. The sixteen desks in the classroom were arranged in a horseshoe facing the Smartboard at the front of the room, with Cameron's desk in the bottom section of the formation, facing the board. A table for small group instruction was on one side of

the room and four shelves of books were located in the opposite corner. There was a meeting area surrounded by bookshelves next to the window, and the classroom walls were covered by posters of significant figures in American History that were created by the students as well as commercial posters describing types of writing and vocabulary connected to their curriculum units. One wall of the classroom opened up to reveal students' backpacks and belongings behind it.

The classroom was made up of eleven boys and five girls. All were Caucasian and arrived at school each day dressed in a variety of school uniforms. Cameron's classroom teacher, Ms. Kelly, was in her sixth year of teaching, explaining that she decided to become an educator after raising her own children. She was at times, joined in the classroom by Ms. McDonald, the learning specialist who also worked with Cameron in her office on a lower floor of the building.

The school uses the basal program *Reading Street* (Wilson, Afflerbach, & Pearson, 2013) as the centerpiece of its reading curriculum. Reading instruction took place as a whole class, in small groups, in pairs and individually, generally surrounding an anchor text. The students remained in their classroom for most academic subjects, but switched with the other third grade classroom for science, and were joined in their classroom by the school's Spanish teacher once a week.

Cameron

Cameron was a ten year old Caucasian boy who lived in the East End, not far from EESC, with his mother, father, grandfather and older sister. His mother worked as a nurse at a local hospital and his father was a diesel technician. He was small for his age both in height and stature, and had short blond hair and blue eyes. He loved playing with toys alone and with his peers, and participated in a baseball team in the spring and a hockey league in the winter. He had

a diagnosis of a Language-Based Learning Disability that he received through an independent neuropsychological evaluation in November of 2016. The disability category on his IEP was listed as Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading.

Cognitive Profile

Cameron had a great deal of testing both through the public school system of his city and through outside evaluators. The evaluation that was conducted through his district in April of 2016 revealed significant difficulties in reading and low average cognitive abilities. His cognitive performance as measured by the WISC-IV (Wechsler, 1991), fell in the low average range with his strongest composite score being in the area of visual spatial skills and his lowest scores being in the area of verbal comprehension and working memory. Academic testing resulted in scores in the low average range in mathematics and writing and a score in the "very low" range in reading skills (Individualized Educational Program, 2016).

In November of 2016 Cameron had a neuropsychological evaluation performed through an independent developmental center outside of the city. The results of that testing indicated that his cognitive abilities according to the Differential Ability Scale (DAS-II; Elliot, 2012) fell in the 23rd percentile on the verbal scale, 18th percentile for the non-verbal reasoning scale and 53rd percentile for the spatial scale. These results were deemed to be generally equivalent to the evaluation performed through his district. The evaluator also analyzed Cameron's auditory memory. Results of these subtests indicated that he struggled to recall information both directly after it was presented to him and after a period of delay, but did benefit from structure such as multiple choice in both conditions.

Cameron's academic testing exposed the significance of his struggles with reading. His overall phonological awareness, assessed through the Comprehensive Test of Phonological

Processing (CTOPP -2; Wagner, Torgeson, Rashotte, Pearson, 2013), fell in the sixth percentile, his fluency and accuracy on the Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT -5; Wiederholt, Bryant, 2012) put him at an age equivalent of 6.6, and his word reading on the Wechsler Individual Achievement Tests (WIAT -3; Wechsler 2009) was in the low average range. Additionally, his scores on the test of Rapid Automatized Naming and Rapid Alternating Stimulus (RAN/RAS; Wolf & Deckla, 2005) were in the 1st and 9th percentiles respectively. Cameron's curriculum based measures in reading indicated that his reading of connected texts was equivalent to the early second grade at the beginning of his second year in third grade. His accuracy progressed to a mid-second grade level later in the year, but his reading was reported to be dysfluent and he had limited comprehension of what he had read.

The neuropsychologists also investigated Cameron's executive functioning skills and emotional well-being, and though they found some relative weaknesses in his organizational skills, determined that he had no significant concerns in these areas. As a result of all of these factors, the evaluators concluded that Cameron "displayed vulnerabilities in the processing of language-based information" and exhibits characteristics "consistent with the profile seen in students with Language Based Learning Disability" (Neuropsychologist Report, 2016, p.12). They explained that Cameron "meets the criteria for a Double-Deficit Reading Disorder" and that this diagnosis has significantly impacted his skill development in reading and writing. They described executive functioning as an "area of vulnerability" (Neuropsychologist, 2016, p. 12) but did not diagnosis him with an attentional deficit, describing his attentional difficulties as "secondary to his language challenges" (Neuropsychologist, 2016, p.12). They recommended that Cameron receive daily phonics instruction, active instruction in comprehension, and "a

stronger focus on the development of writing abilities" (Neuropsychologist, 2016, p.14); they also recommended a group of classroom strategies to assist with executive functioning.

As a result of the neuropsychological evaluation, Cameron's parents requested a speech and language evaluation through his district. Despite his overall score on the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF -5; Semel, Wigg, Secord, 2013) falling in the 14th percentile, several subtest scores between the 9th and 16th percentiles, and his highest score on the entire evaluation falling in the 37th percentile, the evaluator felt that Cameron, "possessed the language and communication capabilities necessary to access and use the classroom curriculum" (Speech/Language Pathologist, 2017, p. 8), and indicated that his weaknesses were the result of his difficulties with attention.

This difference in opinion among Cameron's evaluators related to the impact of his language abilities and attention on his ability to access the curriculum was discussed repeatedly by his teachers during their interviews and conversations with the researcher. In these discussions they disagreed with the finding that attention was not a primary concern in his learning. They explained,

> he gets very distracted….He's not hyper, it's just inattentive...We had said focus causes the problem…..But they're saying no, no, it's that he can't do it and that's why he can't focus ...But I think there is a focus ... An attention issue…. It's two sided, which yeah ... Because in the private report you'll read that they think it's purely because he's not doing well, but we're seeing, no, that he's not focused …You know, but left to himself either he'll start to read it and then look out the window at a bird, or something.

Cameron's teachers acknowledged the complexity of his profile and his difficulties with language, but felt strongly that his quiet inattentiveness also interfered with his ability to access

the curriculum. They reported that he often looked out the window or around the classroom when he is expected to be working independently or participating in class discussions. They shared that they had developed a behavior plan for him in which he could earn five stars for focusing on and participating appropriately in class expectations and were having trouble finding opportunities in which his level of focus met the threshold for receiving a reward.

Unlike his teachers, Cameron's mother did not comment on his attentional abilities, but when asked about his difficulties with language, his mother, though not steadfast in her beliefs, expressed no concerns about his language abilities, explaining,

> I didn't really find many speech and language issues, and I'm talking for the most part about speaking, I guess the speech and language does have to do with the reading and all of those, but I haven't noticed any speech and language or hearing issues, per se. But there might be speech and language in the other way than what I'm thinking.

Her opinion that his language abilities, when analyzed separately from his reading, were intact, may have reflected her deep understanding of her son or may have represented her interpretation of the meaning of "speech and language" which may have differed from that of the educators. Additionally, in her interview she did not express frustration with the findings of Cameron's speech and language evaluation, but his teachers reported that there were areas of disagreement between the parents and the district during the meeting that followed the speech and language report when the district did not offer to provide Cameron with direct service in Speech and Language.

Observationally, Cameron's longer language samples were sometimes difficult for the researcher to understand. For example, while discussing his opinions about books during an interview the following occurred,

Cameron: The only books I like to read are *Who Was, Who Is, Where Is*. I like those books because they tell you tons of information, and they had a gold mine and Canada Falls. They had a gold mine before everything. They say it is too dangerous to open the gold because it is too hot…the day we went it was too cold

Interviewer - Did you go there?

Cameron: No, my sister and my friends did.

In this answer to a question about what books he likes to read, Cameron seemed to have difficulty organizing his thoughts, and created a description of his sister's experience that was confusing to the listener. He behaved in a similar manner when describing his hockey team. In this less formal conversation, Cameron began by stating that he was on a hockey team and then attempted to describe one of his games. His sentences did not connect to each other logically and his explanation made it difficult to understand what had occurred during the game. Similarly, Cameron asked the researcher the meaning of the word omelette, despite it being one of his spelling words, and was observed using a great deal of non-verbal communication to relate to his friends during recess.

Personality Traits

When asked to describe Cameron, his mother discussed his vivid imagination and strong visual - spatial abilities. She explained,

> So as far as his strengths, he's very imaginative. And I know that's not social. But he's very imaginative as far as play. He's very imaginative, creative with Legos. You could give him 100 Legos and he'd make something out of these Legos. And he would put together a big boat that might not be 100% correct because you don't have all the right pieces, but you're able to notice that it's a boat, with something. Or it's a plane, or it's some form of building, not just things lumped together. So those, I would say, are his real

strengths, engineering type things. He loves to take things apart, put things together. Is for the most part accurate, and does well with those things. So I feel like those are his strengths.

Cameron's mother highlighted his strengths while at the same time acknowledged that the areas in which he thrives were generally solitary and did not involve interactions with others. His teachers described Cameron in positive terms stating that he was, "a very, very sweet boy. He wants to please, he gets along with everybody." They painted a portrait of a kind and caring individual who treats others with respect and wants to help those around him. Throughout the observation period, Cameron was observed attempting to assist others. When working with a younger student in reading, he repeatedly and emphatically offered to help her with her work. He also voluntarily accompanied the researcher to various places in the building, making sure that I knew where I was going before returning to his class. Ms. Kelly acknowledged this side of him, stating, " I would say he's very helpful. So, he always wants to come in and help, and sometimes I think it might be to avoid the reading and the phonics that I'm trying to help him do. But yeah, helpful." Despite their viewing his helpfulness as a means to try to avoid work, they expressed their appreciation for his kind nature.

Another quality that repeatedly appeared in conversations about his personality was Cameron's immaturity. His mother described his behavior as, "socially, sometimes younger than stated age", and his teachers concurred giving the example of his favorite television show being *Paw Patrol*, a cartoon about superhero puppies that is usually watched by much younger children. They described the "baby voice" that he sometimes used in school, and expressed their hope that he will begin to stop using it. They explained that he often likes to play with younger students because, "maybe he thinks he's not being judged by them." During school observations

Cameron's behavior often appeared younger than his peers. He was observed telling the teacher on a classmate who said a bad word and another who sat in her seat. He also let her know that the "bad word... d-u-m-p" was in a text, and repeatedly asked if he could play when he finished academic assignments.

His play with his peers also, at times, lacked sophistication compared to other children his age. He seemed to avoid organized games at recess, instead running in and out of activities in which groups were engaged. During physical education, he jumped excitedly against the wall when his team scored points in an olympic-type game and avoided the rest of the group who was watching and responding to the action together. In general, his play was observed to be either somewhat silly and unorganized or parallel to more sophisticated activities that often occurred around him.

Educational History

Cameron's educational history was complex and was informed by his enrollment in Catholic Schools as well as the emerging understanding of the nature of his disability over time. It was also filled with multiple changes in program and an array of stakeholders.

Cameron had several ear infections as a child, and required surgery to insert tympanostomy tubes in order to remove fluid from his ears and improve his hearing. His acquisition of single words occurred at typical rate, but he required early intervention services when he struggled to put two words together at two years old. After the conclusion of his speech and language services through Early Intervention, Cameron made effective progress in school until kindergarten when his parents noticed that he was struggling to develop basic early academic skills. They enrolled him in private phonics tutoring which has continued at least two to three times a week continuously since that time period. Cameron attended kindergarten at one

Catholic school and switched to another for first grade. At that point his parents, who continued to be concerned about his progress, requested an independent evaluation. That testing did not show evidence of a learning disability because, as his mother explained, at that age there was not a big enough discrepancy between his performance and that of his peers. The teachers at his school did notice that he was behind his classmates and began to provide him with support outside of his classroom to accompany the Wilson tutor with whom he worked privately after school. His mother expressed concern over the quality of his in school support stating that, "the reading person that was there to help…. would be a nun or a person that was volunteering. So they weren't really a full learning specialist. They were just somebody coming in to read with him." She explained that the school had the very best intentions but did not always meet Cameron's learning needs.

When Cameron was still struggling in second grade, his parents hoped to redo his independent evaluation but were not able to for financial reasons. His mother explained,

> we should have waited until second grade, but I wasn't aware of that until after the fact. So then it put us at a delay, because then they don't really like to…every time you do it, if you do it within less than three years, it's 100% on you, so that's $3500 on you, whereas every three years, they will pay $1500 towards it.

The financial implications of attempting to redo an evaluation after only one year limited Cameron's family's choices, so when they still did not have the answers that they needed in third grade, they requested an evaluation through his district. This evaluation found that he had significant delays in reading and required specialized phonics instruction outside of the classroom. When his parents returned to the school with their new IEP, they offered Cameron increased support outside of the classroom but did not have a learning specialist on staff who

could provide him with specialized instruction or assist him in the classroom. At that point they decided to make the move to EECS, a school that had a full-time learning support teacher on staff.

When Cameron enrolled in EECS his parents asked if he should repeat third grade as part of his transition. EECS did not receive all of Cameron's records during the transfer and the staff that they spoke to in the public school district did not advocate for his repeating third grade. They decided to put him in fourth grade, but within a few weeks, realized that he was not able to keep up with the academic or social demands of his class. They provided him with a few play-based experiences with some younger students, and when that went well, moved him to third grade in mid-October. Cameron's mother in reflecting on the way that the transition occurred openly expressed her frustration, stating,

> I was mad at multiple people about that, the way that happened. Because I wanted to hold him back last year. So (the former school) said, 'Okay, if you want to, fine'. And (the district) was like, 'No no no. There's no reason to keep him back. No no no.' And they didn't even want to initiate that there might be an issue. And so they were like, 'No no no.' And when I went to East End Catholic, I said, 'Here's my idea: I think he should be kept back. I do feel there's an issue, it's a new grade, let's just keep him back now. And when it's brand new, no-one knows whether he's supposed to be starting fourth.' But, 'No no no. We think he's fine. We've read everything, we think he's great.' And then three weeks into the program they're like, 'No, he needs to be kept back. There's a big issue here'. And I was kind of ticked because I was like, "Well, you had everything." Then I come to find out, no, they didn't have anything. I didn't realize that the parent, if I'm

transferring somebody, can ask for their folder to be sent. I didn't realize the IEPs don't go. I didn't realize that it's just their report cards and those things. I didn't realize.

Cameron's mother's anger at the way that the district ignored her request, her lack of knowledge of the methods used to share documentation between schools, and the impact that moving mid-year had on her son, had an impact her future interactions with the district. Following his return to third grade she requested an independent evaluation from a center for child development that had a reputation for both the thoroughness of their evaluations and for their advocacy work. She also reconvened Cameron's IEP team and requested that his IEP be amended to reflect his need for increased services. This request was granted and Cameron was provided specialized phonics instruction five days a week after school.

The amended IEP did not end Cameron's mother's role as a fierce advocate for her son. When the district did not provide Cameron with the tutoring that they had promised she went to the Bureau of Special Education Appeals to report this lack of compliance. Two weeks later the city found him an Orton Gillingham Tutor, the fourth phonics tutor that he had since first grade. She explained her frustration, stating,

> I think if we were maybe in a public school it would have been addressed differently than with us not in a public school. Just because maybe they weren't Gillingham or the Wilson teachers there. So I think that that may have been a little different, potentially, is one thing that I have seen. But that's kind of a drawback within the city. Because we never even got close to a school that ... we were sent all around the different areas as where they would be, we never even got an East End school. And some of them aren't level ones or twos, most of them are threes and fours.

She repeatedly described the lack of connection that her son had to a school staff that had the capability of providing him with services that he needed, as well as with the lack of oversight and commitment on the part of the public school special education leaders to meet the needs of her son. She also expressed her wish that she could have considered the public schools in her areas but felt that they did not meet her expectations for quality and academic rigor.

Throughout her interview Cameron's mother expressed her gratitude to the learning support teacher at EECS, and to the school staff for making a concerted effort to meet her son's needs. Despite her appreciation, she realized after speaking honestly with the learning support teacher, that though he was making some progress, Cameron was still struggling. As a result she made the difficult decision at the conclusion of the study to move him to a private school for children with learning disabilities at the beginning of fourth grade. This was a challenging choice both because it meant creating another transition for Cameron and because his family was not able to afford the new school. They asked the district to help with the tuition, but whatever the outcome of that process, were willing to do whatever was necessary to pay for the school. She explained,

> We'd have to take a loan. But I either pay for it now or I pay for it later, and by pay for it later, you have somebody who is disengaged, angry, frustrated, not feeling well, then doesn't do well in school. I didn't want it to snowball into all of those. And so I figured pay for it now and hopefully, at least I know I've done what I can to help him to be the best that he can do. And if he's, if something goes wrong, at least I can say, I'm not looking back being, Oh, if I had sent him for those two years, maybe it would have been different, this or that. At least I know that I've tried, whatever. To try to make it the best for him.

Cameron's mother was willing to make every possible sacrifice for her son, including taking on the tuition of a school that she couldn't afford in order to help him to succeed and feel good about himself. This was a battle that she planned to continue to fight.

Beliefs about Reading

Cameron's complex educational history influenced his feelings about reading and his ability to experience academic success. When asked about his own reading history, he commented, "I haven't liked reading since first grade, but in K2 I liked it. We just had to scribble. In first grade my first spelling test was a 20 and I still have that test. They gave my mom all of the tests." According to Cameron, his early reading memories were marked by failure; three years later, he continued to experience that sense of shame and struggle. When asked about his feelings about reading he put two thumbs down and said that it was, "boring, boring, boring" and suggested that it could be improved by, "changing studying to playing." When asked, however, what would happen if that occurred, he commented that "kids would be dumb." When pushed to give teachers advice on how they can teach reading more successfully he suggested that teachers should "read books out loud to kids" the way that Ms. Kelly reads to her students.

Cameron's feelings about reading, though generally negative, were slightly more positive when asked directly about reading intervention. He explained that, "I hate everything in my classroom. I like it when I am working down there." When asked to explain the reasons for this shift in belief, he explained that "I get five strikes down there. I get candy", referring to the system of reinforcement utilized by the learning center teacher. This was the only slight hint of optimism in his negative assessment of his experience as a reader at school.

Reading Behavior

Cameron's class used the *Reading Street* (Wilson, Afflerbach, & Pearson, 2013) basal series as the central component of their reading instruction. They worked individually, in small groups, and as a whole class around a single anchor text and other stories related to it. Students practiced reading the text multiple times during a week and then responded to questions and completed assignments about it. Cameron's behavior during reading periods in class was marked by a lack of focus on his instruction, avoidant behaviors, and reliance on his teachers to complete classroom assignments. When asked to work independently or in small groups Cameron was observed playing with classroom tools, assisting others with their materials, walking around the room, and looking away from his peers or his assigned work. He often made creations with scraps of paper, and stood by his peers' desks. On two occasions, when asked to answer questions related to a story, he participated in off-task dialogue with his academic group; topics included Luke Skywalker and the grammatically correct way to say that a person was hanged. Upon hearing this his teacher remarked, "I don't know how you get off on these tangents."

The whole class read together during two observations, one time using "Popcorn Reading" in which one child reads aloud and then chooses another to continue. During one such activity he read first and then began to follow along as another child read, but quickly transitioned to playing with his hair, glancing around the room, and eventually getting up to get a tissue. During a second observation he did not focus on the text being read while others were reading, instead played with his knee and flipped through the pages of the book; two girls near him redirected him to the text when it was his turn to read.

There was very little differentiation of classroom assignments, so when Cameron attempted to complete work related to a text or an assignment he often sought out the help of the classroom teacher to assist him if he was not assigned to sit with her in a small group. In these

cases, Cameron often relied heavily on the teacher to provide him with the exact answers to the questions being asked of him. During one observation, Ms. Kelly was observed locating information for him in the text and helping him to use what she had found to complete his responses. Throughout the observation period he often sought out teachers to report on what his classmates were doing or to find out what “to do next." Ms. Kelly noticed the overwhelming amount of time she spent working with Cameron and a few of his peers, commenting, “they always feel like they're singled out and they’re like, ‘Why are you taking us again?’ And I was like, ‘It's just you're my favorites.” She clearly noticed the disproportionate quantity of time that Cameron required in order to access to the curriculum. Similarly, in an effort to protect Cameron, she noted that she and Ms. McDonald had modified his grades on his report card before sharing them with his family so that they would not see all of the D’s and F’s that she believed that he had legitimately earned.

Reading Intervention

Cameron’s reading intervention took place in Ms.McDonald’s office in the basement of the building across from the cafeteria. His reading group always consisted of a girl in second grade, but at times, also included a boy his own age. Cameron’s behavior in reading intervention shifted after a change in the instructional methodology, but in general was more focused than it was in the classroom. Early in the study Ms. McDonald worked closely with her students to address a variety of phonics skills. Cameron participated in the games that they played and attempted to read the words presented to him, but was often confused by the meanings of unfamiliar words such as veil and creek. His reading was dysfluent and at times inaccurate but he always remained in his seat and generally followed teacher directions. In the midst of lessons he infused several stories from his own life into the instruction, on one occasion sharing a story

about his inability to attend a wedding, and on another discussing the value of heelys shoes. He also, repeatedly, tried to assist the second grade girl with her work, even if he couldn't complete his own. He did not, however, play with materials, make artistic creations, or wander around the classroom as he did in the general education setting.

Halfway through the study, Ms.McDonald asked the researcher for advice on how to increase Cameron's engagement in her instruction. She expressed her confusion about which skills she should focus on in her instruction knowing that he received outside tutoring in phonics and wanted to increase his engagement in his instruction and academic progress. After some discussion, she began to choose phonics skills that were more consistent with the work that he was doing with his Wilson tutor, give him explicit opportunities to carry over skills that he was learning in isolation to his work with connected texts, and utilize his helpful nature as a tool in his learning. She asked Cameron to use highlighting tape to locate salient phonetic elements in books at his level, and then instructed him to practice reading those connected texts in order to gain the fluency needed to teach them to his second grade partner. Cameron responded positively to this change and began to focus more fully on his reading work. He read aloud to his second grade peer with increased fluency and focus, and stopped to ask her meaningful questions at appropriate points in the books. He used terms such as, "What will happen next?", and then responded "You are great at this!" when she made an appropriate prediction. He also used a whiteboard to draw a picture of a part of the story that he did not understand when he first read it. He continually gave positive reinforcement to his "student" and did not lose focus when he had trouble reading challenging words. After these sessions, Cameron received points towards the candy for which he was working, and expressed excitement about that reward. Although he

continued to struggle in the classroom, his attitude and enthusiasm shifted during his intervention periods.

Summary

In their short nine or ten years of life all three of the students in this study experienced significant transitions, public struggles with academic achievement, and a range of relationships with the adults in their school lives. They also developed strong feelings towards reading and began to define to themselves as readers and as students. The next chapter will look across the three cases to address these issues in details and to discuss the themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis that followed the creation of these case descriptions. The three learners will be discussed as a group in terms of their cognitive, academic and behavioral commonalities and differences, their day-to-day reading lives in school, and the impact of their past experiences on their emotional well-being and relationship with the act of reading.

Chapter 5
Findings

In Chapter 4 each individual case was described in detail. I now turn my attention to the results of the cross case analysis, including the participants' common characteristics as well as the nuances and idiosyncrasies that make each student unique. The collection of study data, including the observations, artifacts, and interviews yielded a group of themes that, "Identify what a unit of data is about and/or what is means" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198). In this chapter I describe those themes and each participant's unique role within them. The themes encapsulate the boys' personal characteristics, school behaviors, beliefs about reading, educational histories, and specific academic contexts. They exemplify the participants' areas of commonality, but also demonstrate the ways that their personal set of intrinsic characteristics, environmental factors, and past experiences influenced their feelings about the act of reading and the extent to which they embraced reading in their school lives.

This chapter addresses five overarching themes. These cross-cutting themes were identified by analyzing the codes and themes from each individual case, and then utilizing an iterative process to identify themes that represented the data from all three cases and eliminate those that were limited to only one or two cases (Saldaña, 2016; Stake, 2005). The first theme, **Inadequate Identification as Inadequate Responders**, calls into question the assumption that the participants are, in fact, students who demonstrated an inadequate response to evidence-based instruction. The students' longitudinal histories within their Catholic schools as well as their internal and outside systems of academic support will be presented to support this assertion. The second theme, **Complex Profiles, Single Diagnosis** addresses the lack of consistency among the participants' cognitive profiles, despite their singular disability and common struggle with the

fluent negotiation of grade-level texts. This theme originated largely from the evidence collected through the review of the students' artifacts and educational documentation, but is also representative of their academic behavior in their classrooms. The third theme, **Anxiety and Functioning Outside of the Social and Academic Fabric of the Classroom,** addresses all three participants' atypical social relationships, anxiety, parallel play, and withdrawn behavior. The observation and interview data are cited largely to support this assertion. Next, **Past Traumatic Experiences, Present Pain and Avoidance**, describes the significant impact of salient adverse reading-related events on the participants, and the effect of those experiences on the boys' reading performance and beliefs. This themes also addresses the educational system in which the students functioned and their teachers' attempts to increase their engagement in the classroom. The final theme is **Parent and Teacher Advocacy Within an Imperfect System**. This theme, which originated largely from interviews with parents and teachers as well as the students' academic documentation, describes the stakeholders who have become fierce advocates for their students. This advocacy grew out of the adult participants' awareness of the third graders' position within a system that they believed was not meeting their academic or social-emotional needs.

All five themes come together to illuminate the intrinsic, environmental, and historical events as well as the underlying educational systems that influenced the reading beliefs and behaviors of the students at the time of the study. They are inextricably connected to each other, and as unit, tell the collective and individual reading stories of the three young participants.

Inadequate Identification as Inadequate Responders

This study investigated the reading lives and histories of three third grade boys, Cameron, Ryan, and Daniel, who were selected as participants by the staff of the Catholic Schools that they

attended during the 2016 -2017 school year. All three boys were chosen because their teachers identified them as students who had demonstrated an inadequate response to evidence-based reading intervention based on a set of criteria that were given to them by the researcher. Though it is important to honor the school's belief system and sense of concern for their learners, the students' educational histories call into question their identification as "Inadequate Responders." The research identifies such students as learners who continue to lag behind grade level expectations despite having participated in extensive evidence-based intervention (McMaster et al., 2005). All three participants' histories were marked by transitions and periods of missing or inconsistent intervention that contradict this classification. Some of this lack of consistency was related to each student's placement in more than one elementary school during the years preceding the study.

None of the participants in the study attended the same school from first to third grade; all three students, in fact, switched schools when their parents believed that their needs were not being appropriately served in their previous settings. Cameron's parents decided to enroll him in EECS, his third school since kindergarten, because it had an in-house learning specialist who could provide him with support both in and out of the classroom, and who they viewed as superior to the community helpers who supported him in his previous building. Daniel and Ryan switched schools after troubled relationships with teachers followed by strong emotional responses to those experiences that interfered with their emotional stability and feelings of comfort within their schools. Each child in the study experienced at least one major transition during elementary school that influenced the continuity of his instruction as well as the depth of his relationships with school staff. Meaningful connections with teachers have been shown to be essential for academic engagement and achievement for at-risk students (Decker, Dona, &

Christenson, 2007). Ryan, Daniel, and Cameron were asked repeatedly to establish new relationships with teachers and students, and to learn to trust unknown adults and peers after previous partnerships had been lost or broken. For the participants, who openly opined about the failures of past educators in their lives, new adult relationships may have been viewed with some level or cynicism or distrust. Each new transition, therefore, created a period of time during which staff had to get to know their students and the children and their parents had to learn to trust their teachers. These changes also created gaps in knowledge in the students' educational histories, and a lack of continuity among IEP teams.

Each child's intervention history was also inconsistent and interrupted. None of the three students in the study experienced regular, uninterrupted reading remediation in their early elementary school years, and all of the parents reported periods of time when the goals in their child's IEP were not met. Cameron, who had the most consistent intervention history of the three participants, experienced several breaks in his instruction and transitions in his intervention, including working with four separate phonics tutors since he was five years old. Additionally, even when outside tutoring occurred with regularity, there was a complete lack of connection between the phonics-based intervention that he received through his after school tutors and the reading instruction that took place during the school day. This, at times included multiple cueing systems and divergent foci of instruction. This may have interfered with his ability to generalize what he learned in his intervention to his day-to-day reading life in his classroom, and may have been a source of confusion as he attempted to learn to decode.

Both Ryan and Daniel did not receive anywhere near the amount of intervention delineated in their IEPs and their teachers did not describe any regular form of communication between their outside tutors and their school-based educators. Daniel experienced significant

breaks in his intervention after switching out of the public school system. Ryan, like Cameron, participated in two disconnected systems of intervention, one in school and one with his tutor, with no explicit connection between them. The boy's limited time in evidenced-based intervention as well as the disconnected nature of that remediation does not align with the research on effective intervention for students with learning disabilities in reading (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). Ryan and Daniel's intervention in particular, did not adequately meet the norms for students who require regular, structured, sequential support in reading and certainly did not fulfil the service delivery delineated in their IEPs.

In addition to the lack of specialized services, there was also an observed absence of differentiation and instructional accommodations in both of the classrooms in the study. Although Ryan and Daniel's teacher did mention that she had begun to scribe for Daniel since his Dyslexia diagnosis, there was very little evidence of the use of instructional accommodations in the general education setting. There appeared to be an overall expectation of independence during reading centers in Ryan and Daniel's classroom, and the boys' avoidance of work was not addressed by teachers for extended periods of time. Cameron's classroom used a basal reader with a single anchor text as the centerpiece for a large portion of each week's reading assignments, and the class was expected to memorize a common set of spelling words each week. Assignments observed were generally the same for all students, with teachers providing assistance to produce and locate answers as needed. The teachers spoke about their desire to help the boys to succeed, and seemed open to suggestions and assistance, but lacked a cohesive structure that enabled them to meet their students' special needs and access the language arts curriculum. These missing special education services were apparent to both the students' teachers and to their parents.

Despite all of the roadblocks in their way, it is important to note that Daniel and Ryan made significant progress during their time at St. Gemma's and did appear to demonstrate some response to the learning environment in which they were placed, at least in terms of the accuracy of their connected reading. Although they regularly still demonstrated avoidant behavior, and continued to need support to make effective progress, they were not significantly behind grade level at the time of the study. Their achievement may not have been in line with their peers or with grade-level expectations, but they certainly showed some response to the intervention that they did receive.

The boys' lack of consistent intervention and accommodations and modification seemed to be at least partially connected to the cultural and systemic structures in their schools. St. Gemma's had no learning specialist on staff, and did not have an evidence-based phonics program as part of their early elementary curriculum. Teachers asked questions, sought out assistance, and embraced parents' suggestions in an effort to provide as much support as possible; they were, however, limited by the absence of an on-staff special educator with whom to collaborate and a culture that lacked a long-standing tradition of including all students or integrating special education practices into the mainstream curricula. EECS had a full-time learning specialist on staff, but there seemed to be very little influence of her work on the day-to-day functionings of general education classrooms. Within the classroom, Cameron's teacher provided him with answers to single whole class assignments, instead of either giving him with the tools necessary to complete modified work or differentiating the process and product of classroom assignments. EECS retained learners who did not meet academic expectations, and awarded students grades A through F on their report cards, which, as in Cameron's case, were modified before they were given to parents, when students performed poorly in the vast majority

of their subjects. Teachers repeatedly discussed their desire for their students to experience success and demonstrated their care and compassion for them; they just lacked the tools to bring their hopes to fruition.

The Catholic Schools that the participants attended operated outside of many of the laws defined by the IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Public schools are required to provide students with the tools and supports necessary to access the curriculum in the least restrictive environment possible (IDEA, 2004). This law does not apply to Catholic Schools, and, that condition, together with financial limitations of the Archdiocese, impacted the schools' ability to provide students with all of the supports that they need to be successful. Plus, when school staff, as was the case at both St. Gemma's and EECS, know that they have the option of telling families that a school is not the right place for a child, it limits their inclination to develop the flexibility to make the school fit the student, as opposed to expecting the learner to fit the existing structures and systems of the school (Russo et al, 2011).

Although the participants may not have met the criteria for the official definition of students who demonstrate inadequate response to intervention, they were, in fact, third graders who continually struggled with reading and who stood out to their teachers because of their difficulties. They were also learners who their teachers viewed as worthy of further investigation. So, with that in mind, I turn my attention to what these three young boys had in common, and what made them unique. I will address their intrinsic cognitive attributes as well as the environmental factors that helped them to develop into the students who participated in the study. I will begin to explore these topics by analyzing their neuropsychological and academic evaluations and documentation. These lengthy reports shed light on their areas of commonality and difference, as well as the severity of their disabilities.

Complex Profiles, Single Diagnosis

The three students participated in testing within their districts and through separate outside evaluators. When analyzing those evaluations, it becomes clear that though they were united in their Dyslexia diagnosis, the boys varied substantially in the severity of those diagnoses and in their overall reading performance. Cameron, who had a diagnosis of a Double Deficit Disorder, was the most severely affected of the three boys with measures of phonological awareness and Rapid Automatic Naming falling in the first through ninth percentiles throughout his testing. His test results also indicated that he struggled with receptive and expressive language and had vulnerabilities in attention, memory, and processing speed. He presented with a complex and multifaceted cognitive profile, with reading skills quite significantly behind his age and grade level. Ryan, like Cameron, was diagnosed with a Double Deficit Disorder and though he demonstrated intact cognitive abilities in all of the categories tested, he struggled to complete tests of phonemic awareness and Rapid Automatic Naming. Standardized and curriculum-based measures indicated his difficulty with the individual components of reading as well as his ability to negotiate connected text. His reading skills were below grade level at the time of testing but had progressed to a level that was approaching grade level expectations by the second half of third grade. Daniel was diagnosed with the more general Developmental Dyslexia, and though he presented with a more varied cognitive profile, he demonstrated the least number of attributes of a reading disability. Like the other participants, he struggled with Elision and Non-Word Repetition, two measures of phonemic awareness, and was inaccurate and dysfluent while reading connected texts; he did not however, struggle with subtests the measured single word reading and displayed average level abilities in other measures of phonological awareness.

Although the three boys shared a common Dyslexia diagnosis, the disability presented itself differently in each individual learner.

When analyzing their reading skills outside of the confines are their diagnosis, Cameron again appears to be the most impacted by his disability. His struggles with language and memory as well as the severe nature of his double deficit disorder created a group of stumbling blocks on his path to accurate and fluent reading and meaningful comprehension. Ryan, on the other hand, demonstrated significant difficulties with building blocks of reading such as phonemic awareness and rapid automatic naming, but seemed to be able to use his strong language skills, visual memory, and concept formation to gain meaning from certain groups of texts that were of interest to him or that included picture support. Daniel showed the fewest characteristics of a reading disability, and seemed to, in fact, have average level skills in some of the building blocks of reading. Though other environmental and emotional factors may have influenced his progress, he seemed to be the least impacted by his diagnosis.

Despite their variations in reading achievement, all of the participants struggled to read grade level texts with adequate fluency and prosody. Cameron and Daniel's scores on standardized measures of fluency fell in the significantly below average and low average range, respectively. Ryan's test report indicated that his reading was "very slow paced," and curriculum based measures of fluency indicated that he read in short phrases that did not mimic human speech. Evan as Ryan and Daniel made progress in their overall accuracy and abilities to access more difficult texts, their fluency continued to lag behind grade level expectations. Fluent reading is the product of multiple underlying components working in concert; for children who struggle to read, orchestration only occurs after the lower level processes are developed through direct instruction and practice (Wolf, 2011). These students' fragmented intervention may have

limited their ability to solidify their knowledge of the components of reading; the lack of connection between their intervention and their in-class reading may have decreased their opportunities for structured practice in connected texts, thereby reducing their fluency. Fluency is necessary for the comprehension of texts (Rasinski et al., 2005); their inability to read with appropriate fluency most likely impacted their ability to gain meaning and enjoyment from texts. This may have affected their reading behavior and opinions about print. It also seemed to impact the boys' performance when reading connected texts in the classroom; all of the students struggled to remain on task while reading, and demonstrated a disconnection from the vast majority of print that they were asked to read.

When their neurocognitive profiles were analyzed side-by-side certain commonalities were also apparent. In cognitive testing, all three boys demonstrated relative strengths in the visual spatial domain when it was isolated from their motor skills and executive functioning. Though each child performed at a different level, all of the evaluators noted that their visual-spatial skills fell in the average to significantly above average range, and were not mentioned as areas of concern. All three boys also demonstrated relative weaknesses in their working memories and their executive functioning skills, two areas that are often linked in cognitive evaluations because of the impact of attention on memory (Gazzaley & Nobre, 2012). Interestingly, despite inflated scores on standardized measures of executive functioning as well as parent/student or teacher responses to checklists that indicated that this was an area of concern, none of the participants were diagnosed with an attention disorder. Their difficulties in this area were interpreted as areas of vulnerability or relative weakness secondary to their primary diagnoses. In the classroom, however, they all regularly demonstrated off-task behavior and a lack of focus on academic instruction. It is difficult to determine, however, how much of

that behavior was purely attentional in nature, and how much was the result of a plethora of other cognitive factors, emotions, and self-protective behaviors.

Although the results of the neuropsychological evaluations provided insights into their cognitive attributes, it was the interviews with their parents and teachers, as well as observations that provided vital information about their individual and collective personality traits. These data indicated that the participants, despite their varied educational backgrounds, had several shared experiences and attributes that influenced their day-to-day reading lives. One such attribute was their collective struggle with aspects of their social relationships in the classroom.

Anxiety and Functioning Outside of the Social and Academic Fabric of the Classroom

All three boys were depicted by their parents and teachers as loving and happy, at least some of the time, but were also described as having atypical or limited social relationships that influenced their day-to-day lives with their peers. After calling him as a "very sweet boy", Cameron's classroom teacher detailed his social immaturity, tendency to play with younger students, and interests that were younger than those of many of his peers. His mother concurred, stating that he is "sometimes younger than stated age." During observations he was witnessed tattling on his peers for sitting in their teacher's chair, jumping around or near his classmates who were supporting their team in a more organized fashion, and running in and out of more sophisticated social interactions during recess time. Particularly given his advanced age for his grade, Cameron stood out for his young nature when compared to his classmates.

Although Ryan's teachers portrayed him as a child with "lots of friends", and his parents described him as nurturing, kind, and helpful, both his mother and father painted a picture of a student who had trouble making meaningful connections with other children his own age. They spoke about his "concrete rationale" personality that interfered with his ability to participate in

dramatic and imaginary play, as well as his need to connect to students on an intellectual basis. They detailed his struggles forming close friendships within his school, and lack of interest in the type of play and sporting activities that often bond students together at his age. He was observed quietly interacting near, next to, or at times with his classmates, but avoided pretend games, and rarely used verbal means to initiate play with others.

Daniel's teachers described him as a happy and sophisticated boy who can be stubborn and at times and combative if he feels pressured or anxious; they explained that these attributes impact his interactions with his peers. Despite his loving nature and passion for food and travel, Daniel's anxiety and feelings of insecurity were mentioned as obstacles in his development of social relationships. Observations indicated that Daniel had very few language-based social interactions with his peers in the classroom. He often stayed outside of the group during whole group learning experiences, and although he at times participated in parallel play, he was often on the outskirts of larger group activities.

Both Daniel and Ryan's parents and teachers mentioned their sons' fear of looking different from their peers, and the impact of this anxiety on their interactions with others and performance in the classroom. Daniel's parents recalled stories of his sitting out entire seasons of sports until he could feel successful within the activities; this behavior separated him from his peers. Ryan, in a similar vein, seemed to avoid social risks by taking on the role of an assistant instead of an active participant in social interactions and play scenarios that occurred in the classroom. Even during academic instruction, both boys held back instead of taking risks, and removed themselves from the action instead of placing themselves at the intellectual center of it. Academic and social progress is dependent somewhat upon being willing to take risks; Daniel

and Ryan's fear of taking chances may have interfered with their forward progress and kept them from demonstrating their skills in front of their peers.

When studied as a group, the participants' limited social interactions with their peers often made them look different, or at the very least, somewhat removed from the activities of the classroom. At times during the study, they each seemed to be operating in parallel to their peers, and appeared to lack the confidence to take risks in the classroom, particularly when they perceived tasks to be difficult. This hesitancy spilled into their academic endeavors, as they were often observers when they needed to be participants. Additionally, although all three students appeared to be liked in their classrooms, they seemed to lack a strong work partner with whom they could tackle academic tasks or negotiate difficult situations. Despite being friendly and generally happy boys, they sometimes existed as satellites floating around the core functions of the classroom, instead of as central members of their academic communities.

Past Traumatic Experiences, Present Pain and Avoidance

The students' feelings of isolation and anxiety may have been fueled by past negative experiences in reading that had a lasting impact on them, and were in the forefronts of their memories when they were asked about reading. The students and their families openly shared stories from their reading histories, all identifying negative events and relationships in the past that influenced their emotional development. Cameron, for example, recalled the first spelling test that he failed in first grade, noting that he received a twenty on that exam, and "still has it" to this day. He explained that although he had liked preschool because he could "just scribble", his feelings towards school shifted when that test was returned to him and school expectations became more academic and demanding in nature. Daniel shared that a teacher in his previous school was "mean" to him, stating that he still "hates him" almost a year after his last interaction

with him. In a similar vein, Ryan's parents recalled his struggles in kindergarten in which he was asked to go to the board to complete complex academic tasks without the support needed to access them. They recalled his feeling "dumb" and asking why those around him could read when he was unable to do so himself. All three students and their parents shared these stories without being specifically asked to discuss their negative prior experiences in reading. This indicates the deep emotional impact that this part of their pasts had on their personal reading stories, and the fact that the passing of time and changing of location had not dulled these memories in their minds. All of the students had pasts in which they felt inferior to their classmates and embarrassed by their difficulties learning to read, despite being as young as five years old when some of these events occurred. They were acutely aware of and upset by their past "failings", and these times of challenge undoubtedly influenced their current beliefs about reading.

When asked, all three students, each in his own unique style, described reading as a task to be overcome and not a form of enjoyment or a preferred activity. When told to share his opinion, Cameron responded that it was, "boring, boring, boring", and then added, "write down two borings." He then responded to a question about his classroom reading instruction by putting two thumbs down, and stating that reading is "boring, sleepy, and tiring". Ryan and Daniel expressed similar sentiments about reading. Ryan described reading as "pretty hard", and gave a detailed description of his ability to pretend to read books that do not belong to one particular series. Daniel used Nike's "Just Do It" slogan to express his belief that reading is an activity that one just has to get over with and not a source of pride or enjoyment. He also described reading groups as too long, and expressed his wish that they were shorter in duration.

The students' past struggles with reading influenced their beliefs as well as their tolerance for exposing themselves to challenging or prolonged reading experiences. All three boys had to work hard and put forth concerted and extended effort in order to make it through a book or a language arts assignment. Each expressed frustration with the length of their literacy periods and the amount of time that they were asked to remain focussed during the variety of reading activities that they were required to do each day. It is clear that they knew that they struggled to read, and were troubled by the length of time that they had to spend performing an act that was both a challenge and was a source of significant failure and embarrassment in the past. Their comments revealed a kind of self-protection; their painful history with reading empowered them to try everything in their power avoid it, because for or these young learners, it was easier to label reading as "bad" or "boring" than to admit that it brought about powerful feelings of failure and shame.

In response to these emotions all three participants spent large amount of times avoiding reading, and therefore limiting their time in texts. Observations of all three students during in-class reading instruction revealed a range of avoidant behavior that spanned multiple language arts activities. As a rule, when students were expected to be working independently or in small groups without the direct guiding presence of a teacher, they did not participate in expected academic behavior. Cameron was observed making creations out of scraps of paper, walking around the classroom, assisting students and teachers with a range of on and off-task projects, looking away from class instruction, and standing by his peers' desks. Ryan's behaviors included taking long trips to the bathroom and pencil sharpener, playing with pencils, staring at unspecified locations in the classroom, looking at his materials, and putting his head down on his desk. Daniel also spent long periods of time in the bathroom and took extended snack breaks. He

held his breath to turn his face red, walked around the classroom, played with his materials, drew pictures, and did math on an iPad during a reading period. All of these behaviors occurred when there were expectations for the completion of independent or small group reading assignments. All in all, it was not uncommon at the the conclusion of a reading instructional period for all three participants to have completed little or none of their required work as a result of having spent almost no time reading or writing during the learning block. When other students had spent long periods either reading or completing language arts assignments, these students avoided their work. This decreased both their productivity and their time spent reading and responding to texts. Also, for students who were acutely aware of their reading difficulties, they did not end their reading literacy with accomplishments that they could celebrate or progress that they could measure. This may have further reinforced their feelings of inadequacy.

When teachers discussed the participants' lack of engagement with the reading materials, they all mentioned their use of material reinforcers to help shape the students' behavior. They believed that these methods were successful in enabling their students to more successfully engage with the curriculum. The students were very aware of the systems of reinforcement utilized in their classrooms. During his interview Cameron mentioned the five strike program that enabled him to earn candy as a reward that he participated in with his learning specialist. Ryan's teachers spoke of their use of raffle tickets and fake money as reinforcers. His reading teacher also mentioned her practice of showering him with compliments in addition to the prizes, to enable him to put forth his best effort, and leave his book group feeling happy. She also described her practice of giving Daniel stickers, "even if he doesn't deserve it" to encourage him to remain focussed on his work, and mentioned that she used a great deal of praise in addition to rewards to build his self-confidence.

Although all the teachers expressed their desire to enable their students to engage more fully in the language arts curriculum, they did not mention any attempts,outside of creating behavior plans, to make the curriculum more engaging or accessible to the participants. Although students in St. Gemma's were permitted to choose their own books, Daniel and Ryan seemed disconnected from the vast majority of the in-class reading and writing work that they were assigned during literacy centers, and could not articulate their value. Students at EECS generally worked around a single text or group of texts, and there was very little evidence of more child-centered curriculum. In all of their conversations about utilizing praise and rewards to engage the students in their instruction, the teachers did not generally discuss rethinking their instructional methodology or engaging the students in discussions about how to engage them in the reading curriculum. It is important to note that this study occurred during a limited time period, and I was not privy to teacher planning sessions or all of the teachers' interactions with the students. This type of conversation may have occurred outside of the scope of the study, but was not mentioned by any of the participants' during the observations or interviews associated with this work.

The one exception to this practice occurred when Cameron's learning specialist asked me for advice about how to improve her work with Cameron, who was continuing to struggle despite having participated in extensive intervention. After our work together, she began to give Cameron access to more desirable texts and require him to find the phonetic elements that he had learned in isolation in those books. She also attempted to highlight his generous and helpful nature by asking him to read and discuss his books with a younger learner in his reading group. He responded to this change in methodology with increased engagement and excitement about reading. It is unknown if this improved active interest in the reading material continued after the

study, but in the short-term, he was certainly impacted by the curricular changes his teacher chose to implement.

This change, unlike any others that occurred during the study, altered the process by which reading was taught, as opposed to just the reinforcers that were used to keep the students focused on their instruction. As a result, this instructional modification not only increased Cameron's time on task, but influenced his feelings of pride and enjoyment with the act of reading. It also created a scenario in which he was able to share his skills with others as opposed to needing help to complete assigned work. In this scenario he attended to his work not to earn prizes or candy, but instead, to be able to share his expertise with another student. This stood in contrast to many of the participants' other descriptions of reading that focused on either the required component of reading or the extrinsic reinforcers that were the impetus to complete mandated assignments.

The boys' beliefs about reading were not completely negative, and their related reading behaviors did show some limited signs of variability. When discussing a world without reading, Cameron stated that people would be "dumb" if reading instruction was completely removed from the curriculum. He also reflected somewhat positively about his reading intervention periods because of the system of reinforcement used during that time period, and stated that he liked when books were read aloud to him. Daniel was not able to comment positively on his reading instruction in the classroom, but noted that he enjoyed his time with his reading tutor outside of the classroom, and expressed some positive sentiment towards the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2004) series. Daniel also spoke openly about his Dyslexia diagnosis and his teachers reported that this realization brought about a change in his demeanor during reading work time in the classroom. Finally, although Ryan explained that he liked reading intervention

because he enjoyed that "sometimes she has fake money, and if you get the whole page right, she gives you it," when asked to provide advice for educators to help students with reading, he encouraged teachers to teach students about nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, a topic that he had just learned during his small reading group.

As their statements indicated, despite the students' overall lack of engagement during independent and small group work time, they demonstrated a greater level of involvement in their instruction when they were in close proximity to a teacher. All three students appeared to be more engaged during small group reading instruction than they were during work that occurred while they were present in the larger group setting. Daniel and Ryan were both observed raising their hands, taking risks by attempting to answer a question to which they were not certain of the answer, and beginning work right after they were given directions during their small reading groups. Cameron, though at times tangential and confused during reading intervention work before the change in methodology, was consistently observed to be significantly more on task than he was during his time in the general education class. He remained in his seat, and did not play with materials or attempt to move away from the instruction at any point during his intervention periods.

It appears that the boys' small levelled reading groups were areas in which they were able to feel more comfortable taking risks and demonstrate a greater collection of on task behaviors relative to their work in the classroom. This may have been the result of the "just right" nature of the material being presented, the small group format of the instruction, the relationships with the teachers of those groups, or the clearly defined length of the reading periods. It was a format in which the students were able to actively engage with reading material for limited periods of time, take risks with more challenging material, and spend time in texts. The students were not able to

self-regulate during whole class time instruction, and either did not have access or chose not to utilize accommodations to enable them to access the curriculum. Their twenty to thirty minutes of small group work each day seemed to provide them an opportunity to experience success and show others that they were, in fact, readers.

Parent and Teacher Advocacy Within an Imperfect System

Although the boys were at the center of the study, I also spent time with the people who surrounded them as they developed as readers. All of the participants in the study had adults who advocated on their behalf and seemed to the boys to have their best interests in mind. One set of advocates were their third grade teachers. The participants' teachers expressed their care and concern for the students repeatedly throughout the study and the students responded to this kindness with increased engagement and focus and a greater willingness to put forth effort while reading.

Although all of the participants shared adverse past experiences with previous educators, none of them mentioned a single negative comment about their current educators. All the parents, in fact, spoke positively about their students' third grade teachers, with Daniel's mother calling his teacher a "godsend" because of her, "kindness, encouragement, and support." The students themselves limited their criticism to past educators and the current curriculum, but seemed to intentionally avoid any negative remarks about their present teachers. Daniel's parents commented on his need for positive relationships with his teachers, and the significant impact of those connections on his learning. Although the other sets of parents did not make that explicit connection, the students' comments and behavior may have indicated that this was the case. The teachers' willingness to be in this study was in and of itself an indication of their dedication to these learners, and the time that they dedicated to working with them was another indicator of

their commitment. Finally, the students' omission of them as a source of their frustration stood out as significant in their generally negative commentaries on reading. The boys' behavior changed when they worked closely with their teachers. This may have been the result of the close and mutually respectful connections that they developed together. Or, in the end, Cameron, Ryan, and Daniel may have understood in their own way that their teachers were working as hard as they could within an imperfect system to do all that was possible to help them to grow.

The second group of advocates was the boys' parents. Being a parent of a child with a disability requires the development of a new skill set as well as a growing and ever changing depth of knowledge about that disability (Buchner et al., 2015). These parents demonstrated that being a parent of a child with a disability in private school demands even a greater knowledge-base and willingness to advocate for services that are not readily available or guaranteed by the law.

All three sets of parents were united in wanting what was best for their children and acting on those desires by becoming fierce advocates for their sons. Ryan's parents switched schools, found a tutor to help him with his reading, became experts on Dyslexia, asked the school to share all Ryan's work with them in advance so that they could put it in "Dyslexia Font", and experimented with a variety of assistive technology to help him to access print. They also continually discussed the possibility of moving to a suburban district with a strong public school system. Similarly, Daniel's parents enrolled him in an Ocular Therapy program, found him a tutor that can travel with them when they go to their family's vacation home, and sought out any and all connections to professional who have knowledge of Dyslexia or who might be aware of possible summer and afterschool programs for children with learning disabilities in reading.

Cameron's mother's advocacy developed over time as she became more willing to fight for her son within the public school system. Cameron had two neuropsychological evaluations as well as multiple assessments within the district. At the time of the study he had switched schools three times in order to find a location in which he could receive the services that he required. His mother reconvened his team to request an increase in services, went to the city to alert them when they were out of compliance with his IEP, and, ultimately, made the difficult financial decision to move him a fourth time to a school for children with learning disabilities. This represented an enormous financial risk for her family, but is one that she was willing to make for her son. She, like all of the parents in the study, was committed to do whatever it takes to enable her child to experience success.

All of the parents described their advocacy both as a deep desire to do what is best for their children and an outcome of their feelings of internal conflict at enrolling their children in Catholic schools that they knew could not provide all of the services delineated in their IEPs. All three sets of parents, though appreciative of the kind and committed teachers working with their children, reported feeling acutely aware of the inconsistencies and missing components of their children's special educational programs. As a result of this awareness, all of the parents described their feelings of uncertainty and guilt at having enrolled their children in their particular private faith-based schools. As the parents explained the real-life decisions that caused them to arrive at the schools in which their students were enrolled at the time of the study, they simultaneously struggled out loud with whether or not they were doing what was best for their sons and were truly giving them all they needed to succeed. In the end, they each found their own ways to advocate for their children, whether it was through being assertive with their district, searching for outside services, or becoming experts in the field of learning disabilities.

All of the parents expressed their unending commitment to enabling their children to experience success, and presented themselves as willing to do whatever it takes to enable their sons to reach their full potentials.

Summary

The three participants in this study, despite their varied academic abilities and educational histories, all spent the first half of their elementary school careers embarking on a long, complex,and incomplete, journey to literacy and reading independence. The study's themes that were discussed in this chapter are representative of that journey. All three students, though unique in their presentations and in their responses to the intervention that they did receive, were characterized as inadequate responders to intervention because of their struggles developing grade level skills and fully accessing the reading curriculum. The students' inconsistent and interrupted educational histories, however, call this classification into question. All three participants were heavily influenced by past negative events in reading, that in part, contributed to their anxious and avoidant behavior in the classroom, and their feelings about the act of reading. The students all attended schools that were not legally obligated or financially capable of providing them with the range of the support services that they needed to fully and securely access the curriculum, leaving them with fractured systems of intervention that did not address all of their needs. They all had teachers who worked tirelessly to form meaningful and supportive relationships with them, and it is these educators, as well as the students' parents who became their strongest advocates and who worked relentlessly to help them to reach their full potential.

As a whole, the three students' stories were filled with emotional disappointments, educational obstacles, periods of lost opportunity, and missed connections.They also included deep relationships, unwavering advocacy, total dedication, and deep and unending kindness. It is

this second group of experiences that will hopefully define their second decade of academic life, and propel them to greater academic achievement and happiness in the future.

Chapter 6
Discussion

"Education begins the moment that we see children as innately wise and capable beings. Only then can we play along in their world." - Vince Gowmon

I began this research with the goal of conducting case studies of third grade students who received extensive, continuous, evidenced -based intervention over long periods of time and demonstrated an inadequate response to that instruction (Greulich et al., 2014). I planned to immerse myself in the reading lives of these students, whom I suspected, based on the literature, would have significant learning disabilities in reading along with other areas of deficit that may have impacted their learning (Lam & McMaster, 2014). I anticipated that I would interview teachers who had worked within the context of an RTI system to make data-based decisions and implement evidence-based interventions (Dulaney, 2013), and students who stood out because they did not succeed in well-developed, organized programs of intervention that had been successful for their classmates and peers (Greulich et al., 2014). I expected the findings of this study to focus on the specific interventions that had been chosen for the students and the impact of those decisions on their achievement and behavior (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). *I was wrong.* Much to my surprise I met three third grade students who, though united in their Dyslexia diagnoses, were unique in their cognitive attributes and reading abilities. I discovered that my participants had not experienced continuous evidence-based intervention, but actually a dearth of cohesive instruction throughout early elementary school that was largely the result of the schools that they attended and the system in which they found themselves. I met three young students who were profoundly shaped by the emotional impact of their past experiences in reading, including specific salient events that had a significant influence on their self-confidence and

academic performance. The significant findings in this study surprised me, and it is these unexpected topics, along with the literature that they represent, that will be the focus of this discussion.

The issues discussed in this chapter reflect the study's themes that emerged from the academic histories, words, and behaviors of the participant students, paired with the thoughts, opinions, and reflections of their parents and teachers. They are also informed by the relevant research on elementary school-aged students who struggle to read. Together they not only encapsulate the reading-related experiences and characteristics of the three third graders at the center of the study, but reflect on the profound importance and centrality of the journey to literacy that young learners undertake in their early school years (Sanchez & O'Connor, 2014).

The Students

Ryan, Daniel, and Cameron, the three boys in this study, were united in their identification as inadequate responders but stood out from each other because of their individual profiles. Their unique cognitive attributes and intrinsic characteristics contributed to their individual reading achievement as well as to their response to intervention. Cameron's reading level was significantly below grade level; he was the the most "disabled" of the group with impairments in multiple areas, including language, all of which made it challenging for him to access text. His cognitive profile most aligned with the research on inadequate responders (Cho et al, 2015; Denton et al, 2013), and after having been tutored using the Wilson Reading Program^{R} (Wilson Reading System, 2016) since kindergarten, it could be argued that he showed limited response to the intervention that he did receive. His areas of impairment prohibited him from fully accessing the multiple cueing systems that readers typically activate as they gain meaning from text (Wolf, 2007); the context, the visual and syntactic cues in print, were not

always available to him because he did not have the language skills necessary to compensate for his text-based deficits. His double deficit disorder interfered with both his accuracy and fluency (Wolf & Bowers, 2000), and his deficits in working memory made it difficult for him to sound out words or decode complex sentences (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980). He experienced the greatest amount of intervention of the three participants, but until the end of the study was not given tools to transfer what he had learned in isolation to connected text, a skill that has been shown to be important for accurate decoding (Wanzek and Vaughn, 2009). He also spent years working, though with some starts and stops, in the same system of intervention despite the lack of evidence of his response to it. This type of regimented inflexible approach has been shown to inhibit the progress of those students who demonstrate significant struggles learning to read (Gilbert et al 2013). Cameron's complex disability impacted him substantially, and was one major factor in his academic struggles in third grade.

Ryan, the one student who was the expected age for his grade having not been retained, had a double deficit disorder that is also associated with more significant difficulties in reading (Wolf and Bowers, 2000). Unlike Cameron, he demonstrated intact cognitive abilities and had access to context and syntactic cueing systems that he utilized, though at a slow rate, to gain meaning from text. He was dysfluent in his reading, a skill that may have been impacted by his slow processing speed that was reported by his parents and teachers (Powell et al., 2015). His overall profile as a student with average and above average cognitive abilities but significantly lower achievement in reading met the traditional definition of a child with Dyslexia who would be expected to benefit from structured sequential intervention (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). His parents reported that he did respond to evidence-based phonics intervention when he received it, but his intervention history was interrupted and disconnected. Despite his diagnosis

of having a double deficit disorder, his history and academic progress seemed to disqualify him from being identified as an inadequate responder to intervention (Denton et al., 2013), and it is very possible that if he had experienced consistent intervention beginning early in his school career, he could have solidified the underlying lower-level components of reading with which he struggled (Norton & Wolf, 2011), and could have made significant progress by third grade.

Daniel, the third student in the study, had some attributes associated with Dyslexia, but had a less traditional profile for that diagnosis (Shaywitz et al., 2002). His neuropsychological evaluation highlighted relative weaknesses that may have negatively influenced his reading achievement, but he made significant academic progress by the time of the study. He had visible holes in some measures of phonemic awareness and phonics skills that are indicators of a learning disability in reading (Shaywitz et al., 2002) but not in other cognitive underpinnings of reading such as sound blending and Rapid Automatic Naming (Wolf & Bowers, 2000). Like Ryan, he was generally dysfluent in connected text, but when he was willing to read, he had access to print at a level just below third grade benchmarks. This could cause some to question his Dyslexia diagnosis, particularly if it was made with the consideration of his response to intervention that was suggested in the reauthorization of IDEA (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). He spent very little time in texts, and may have been limited in his progress by his lack of practice and unwillingness to take reading- related risks in his classroom (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2000). He did not have all of the cognitive roadblocks to literacy experienced by the other two students, but like them, he was deeply impacted by past emotional experiences that shaped his development as a reader and influenced his emotional development. It is these past events as well as the memories and feelings related to those instances that helped to shape the reading beliefs and behaviors of all three student participants.

Traumatic Experiences, Sadness, and Withdrawal

The three boys in this study were quite young - nine and ten years old. Despite their developmental levels the student participants and their parents all discussed past adverse experiences with reading and the influence of those negative occurrences on their overall self-esteem. These events may have seemed insignificant to the teachers involved in them or to have occurred at too young of an age to make an impression, but they left an indelible mark on these developing learners. Their experiences reflect the research that has highlighted the ramifications of negative past experiences on the self-image of elementary school students with Dyslexia (Polychroni, Kalliopi, and Anagnostou , 2006), the impact of which is multiplied when appropriate intervention is delayed and students become aware of the increasing difference in achievement between them and their peers (Leopla, Salonen, & Vauras, 2000). Throughout the study, the students' words revealed their unhappiness during most of their reading experiences in the classroom, and their actions detailed the lengths that they took to avoid them. Their parents described times when their children refused to go to school, experienced somatic symptoms, and showed signs of deep sadness. This phenomenon is also well-documented in the research. A collection of studies have found that students with learning disabilities in reading have higher rates of depression and anxiety, and lower self-esteem than do their typically developing peers, and that these factors influence their social interactions with other children their age, making them appear more withdrawn and less interactive (Bonifacci et. al, 2016; Mammarella, et al., 2014; Vallas, 1999). All of these attributes including parallel play, atypical social relationships and withdrawn behavior were quite apparent in the three participants, and their behavior served to further separate them from their peers and limit their full inclusion in their general education

classrooms. This close and symbiotic relationship between their social-emotional status and academic achievement therefore had an enormous impact on their development as readers.

In addition to their feelings of unhappiness, the parents of the participant students spoke of the anxiety that their sons experienced when asked to read, and classroom observations reinforced their parents' descriptions. In addition to the feelings of discomfort related to anxiety, there is also evidence that anxiety impacts students' actual performance on reading measures by impeding attention, executive function, and working memory, all of which are necessary for the fluent reading of texts (Blicher, Feingold, & Shainy, 2017). For the students, the pairing of their feelings of sadness and embarrassment coupled with the cognitive influences of their anxiety may have influenced their reading achievement and contributed to the rate of their reading progres. It may have also impacted their performance on standardized and norm-based measures of reading achievement, particularly in the case of Daniel who exhibited the most significant anxiety of the three students. In general, it made reading a task that they worked tirelessly to avoid.

All three participants demonstrated scores of avoidant behaviors in the classroom and expressed negative feelings towards the majority of reading assignments that they were given to complete. The students described class assignments as too hard, put on them by others, and not in any way connected to their lives. Research has shown that students are motivated to attempt work that they feel is meaningful and within their abilities to undertake independently (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007). All three students felt disconnected from their assignments, and described reading work as boring, difficult, and almost "utilitarian" (Polychroni, Kalliopi, and Anagnostou, 2006, p. 423). They visibly struggled to complete assignments; Cameron, was only able to do so when he had answers given to him. They also could not articulate meaningful

personal connections to most apsects of their reading curriculum. Polychroni et al. (2006) found that students with learning disabilities in reading tend to read on a more surface level, thereby limiting the depth of their understanding and their ability to "get lost in a book." Deeper reading is more enjoyable, but requires a larger cognitive and emotional commitment than does skimming or reading with limited comprehension (Kintsch, 1998). The participants found some texts to which they could connect, but in general, did not seem to make meaningful connections to books that they were asked to read in class. Language arts tasks were also usually rewarded by extrinsic reinforcers, which further solidified that message that reading was not fun or intrinsically rewarding, but was necessary to earn candy or a prize from an adult (Orkin et al., 2017). Efforts to build connections to books and to reading assignments seemed missing from the curriculum, and the surface level reading that Polychroni and her colleagues described seemed to be accepted as a reasonable expectation. Additionally, there were almost no observed modifications of the process by which reading was taught or the products of that instruction, and with the exception of books read aloud to the class, the integration of more engaging materials designed to make reading instruction more intrinsically rewarding seemed to be lacking from the language arts curriculum.

Despite their feelings of negativity, each student found moments of happiness and connectedness when working in close proximity to teachers that cared deeply about them. These relationships seemed to propel them forward and make them feel confident when so many other parts of their day seemed to have the opposite effect on them. In a Meta-Analysis of the relationship between Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) and student engagement and achievement, Roorda et al. (2011), found these connections to have a strong impact on engagement, and a lesser, but still significant impact on student achievement. Relationships

matter, and for students who have to work hard to make it through the day, knowing that someone is there to help them can make all of the difference. As Daniel's mother said, a kind and caring teacher who makes a child feel good about himself can be a "godsend" when a student does not want to get out of bed in the morning. It is impossible to know what the trajectory or their reading lives would have been like if they had developed meaningful connections throughout their early elementary school years; the damage that troubled relationships did cause was readily apparent for these learners, as was the slow process of repair that their third grade teachers worked hard to undertake.

As was stated in Chapter 2, I conducted this research under the assumption that students are complex individuals who do not exist in an academic bubble (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001) and are highly influenced by the schools that they attend and the systems and individuals that work in those institutions. The two Catholic schools in this study were, therefore, at the center of this research; their cultures, structures, and routines had a significant influence on the students' academic programs, their parents' roles in their education, their development as readers, and their emotional well-being.

Catholic Schools

The students' reading lives were influenced not only by their past experiences and personal attributes, but also by their Catholic Schools contexts. The parents in this study struggled openly with their decision to place their children in schools that could not meet their needs, and as a result, became experts on learning disabilities and unrelenting advocates on their sons' behalf. Although this advocacy is common and is often viewed as a necessity among parents of students with special needs (Buchner et al., 2015), it was in this case fueled partially by feelings of guilt and discomfort. The parents of these boys were dedicated to making the best

decisions that they could, informed by their beliefs, geographic locations, and financial circumstances, but struggled with the reality of enrolling their children with special needs in Catholic schools that did not have systems in place to fulfil the goals and objectives included in their IEPs.

The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) established a system of laws to protect students with special needs, and as a result, created a structure that public schools follow in order to make sure that students' needs are being met and their IEPs are faithfully executed (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Private, faith-based schools exist largely outside of these laws and structures, creating a unique challenge when they choose, as was the case for my participants, to accept students with special needs. (Russo et. al, 2011). The lack of laws as well as funding and guidance associated with those laws can create a scenario in which Catholic schools do not have the resources or the capabilities to serve students with special needs (Russo et. al, 2011) in ways commensurate with their public school counterparts.

The lack of special education funding available to the participants' schools was a topic repeatedly addressed by the teachers in this study. In their surveys of Catholic school principals, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) found that the lack of funds required to employ special education teachers and service providers was the number one limiting factor in their ability to meet the needs of students with special needs. The teachers and administrators at both EECS and St. Gemma's discussed the large extent to which funding influenced their ability to provide students with specialized instruction in reading. The second most common finding was a lack teacher training and experience with students with special needs. The teachers in this study appeared to lack the knowledge of instructional accommodations and curricular modifications needed to create a coherent educational program for the participant learners, and did not have easy access

to service providers such as reading specialists or speech/language pathologists with whom to collaborate. Even EECS, which employed a full time special education teacher who provided direct service to students, did not have a unifying special education program that permeated the culture of the school and influenced the way that it operated on a day-to-day basis. Catholic Schools like EECS and St. Gemma's have the ability to decline the enrollment of certain students or to "counsel them out" if they are not successful (Russo et. al, 2011). This option reduces the urgency on teachers and administrators to participate in the iterative process of creating and recreating systems that allow students who are struggling to be successful. It therefore becomes easier for teachers to, as was the case for all of the participants, to plainly state that their schools are not able to meet all of their students' needs.

The students in the study also suffered from inadequate systems of communication within their schools, and between their school staff and the outside service providers. This lack of direct and regular conversation left the students with fragmented educational plans inside of the school, and a complete lack of carryover between work done during outside intervention periods with that completed during the regular school day. Scanlan (2009a) studied the systems of communication, planning, evaluation, and professional development in two Catholic secondary schools that had students with special needs enrolled in them. He found that his two settings were quite different in terms of their internal and external systems of communication as well as in their attempts to problem-solve for children. One school, which had a culture of collaboration and group-oriented thought, discussed student achievement together as a staff and came up with collective solutions to address students' learning issues. The other building, which valued individuality and singular teacher achievement, dealt with student issues on an individual classroom basis. Scanlan concluded that well-developed systems of communication both within

schools and with outside experts, can enable schools to be more effective at serving a diverse population of students. Russo et. al (2011), concurred with this finding arguing that it is essential for school staff to collaborate with outside service providers in order to develop a more cohesive educational program. Similarly, Boyle and Hernandez found that, "Quality inclusionary programs tend to be predicated on highly collaborative relationships and supportive problem solving teams" (p. 209). These are two structures that were not in place in the schools in this study.

The dearth of adequate supports and resources observed in the Catholic Schools in this study did not exist because of a lack of good intentions or moral leadership. The Catholic Church, in fact, has supported efforts for inclusion. In their report, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium,* the United States Conferences of Catholic Bishops (2005) stated, "We applaud the increasing number of our school administrators and teachers who have taken steps to welcome these children and others with special needs into our Catholic schools" (p. 7.) There is a true desire on the part of many stakeholders within the Catholic leadership to be more inclusive, as well as a compelling moral argument for serving more diverse populations (Carlson, 2014; Scanlan, 2017). As Scanlan wrote in his 2017 report urging Catholic schools to utilize a service delivery model and a more collaborative system of leadership to meet the needs of students with special needs, an "improvement science" (p. 60) is needed to move schools in the right direction. Unfortunately, the drive to do good is not yet accompanied by the systems necessary to serve students well.

Although this study focused on students who attended Catholic Schools, the findings of it are not limited to those students who function outside of the public school system. The interconnectedness of emotional-well being, self-efficacy, and academic achievement is not

unique to the students who were in this study (Bergen, 2013). It is therefore important to think about the focus of research and practice that is conducted on behalf of all young students who require extra support to read, even those who function within the protections of IDEA. For the five to seven percent of children who struggle to develop basic reading skills (Veluntino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004), research and practice can reflect the intimate relationship between learning to read and developing positive self-esteem (Bergen, 2013) .

Students Who Struggle to Learn to Read

Learning to read has often been defined as one of the key goals of early elementary school, and can take up to two hours of a typical school day (Allington, Billen, & McCuiston, 2015). The act of struggling to read is therefore, not an isolated event in the life of a third grader, but instead, is often the product of years of school-related difficulty and the feelings and emotions associated with those experiences. The last several decades of reading research have reflected the tireless effort of educators to develop systems of intervention for struggling readers, even those who have not responded adequately to the programs of support that have worked for their peers (e.g. Sanchez & O'Connor, 2015). The resulting literature has largely resulted in interventions that are designed to be effective for the vast majority of students with learning disabilities in reading (e.g.,Wilson Reading Program^{R}), but do not take into account the complex neurocognitive and emotional profiles with which students present, such was the case for the participants in study. At the same time, there has been a growing interest in studying the social-emotional well-being of students in schools and a commitment to the direct instruction of social skills in the classroom (Blad, 2016). Unfortunately, the emotional impact of reading intervention including students' level of response to it has been largely neglected in the research (Bergen, 2013). There is currently only one study that addresses the connection between inadequate

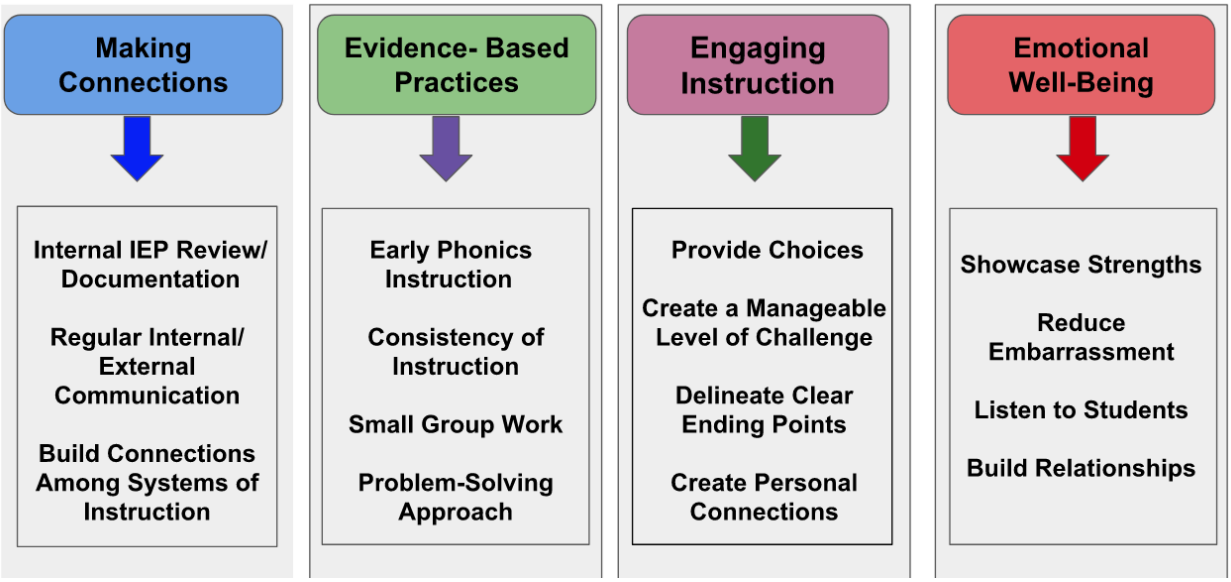
response to intervention and anxiety (Grills et al., 2014); given the partnership that we know exists between struggling to read, and social-emotional well-being, this is a connection that cannot be overlooked. The non-academic aspects of reading intervention programs such as community building, creating safe spaces, and autonomy- supportive practices (Guthrie et al., 2007) have been shown to impact student engagement and achievement during intervention periods (Orkin et al., 2017). Unfortunately, these elements of instruction are often largely overlooked. As a result, students such as those in this study, are brought up to believe that reading is not only something that they are bad at and find generally unpleasant, but something to which they cannot form a connection. They are also raised to associate reading with sadness and embarrassment, instead of hope and promise. It is time for this to change. The time has come to listen to our students' feelings and interests, and to design instruction that reflects not only what they need to learn, but how their paths to learning can impact their self-esteem.

Implications

The research on the three students in this study yielded a large number of implications that are outlined in Figure 6.1. They connect to each other in multiple ways, and can be interpreted as both additive and deeply reliant on each other. The implications are the direct outcome of the research-based findings of the study. They are therefore, designed to respond to the needs of the students that emerged from the data and relate to the literature. They can be divided into four categories. The first, **Making Connections**, describes strategies to help private school teachers bridge the gap between the systems of intervention that often occur outside of the school day and that which takes place in general education classrooms. The second category, **Evidence-Based Practices,** delineates a group of research-supported practices that need to be prioritized in private school settings in order to help students to make adequate progress and

have greater access to the curriculum. Next, **Engaging Instruction**, lists strategies designed to make reading instruction more manageable and motivating for young readers who have struggled to develop basic reading skills. Finally, **Emotional Well-Being,** includes suggestions for improving the emotional health of students who, like the boys in this study are at risk of anxiety and depression because of their academic struggles. The first half of the implications are specifically designed for students in private schools settings, and are described as such. The second half are intended as a reminder to all teachers of students who struggle academically to balance evidenced-based intervention with research-validated strategies for social-emotional well-being.

Figure 6.1
Implications for Practice



Making Connections

Students in private schools who have IEPs that were developed through their public school districts or who receive services through schools that they do not attend, present with the unfortunate possibility of having two separate service plans that do not connect to each other - one that is driven by the IEP, and one that is driven by the school curricula. This disconnected

educational system can be problematic when it creates a lack of consistency of instruction and service delivery, both elements that students with learning disabilities, such as the ones in this study, need to be successful (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). This issue can be avoided by a commitment on the part of in-school staff and educators providing service delivery outside of the school setting to create meaningful connections among all of the stakeholders in the child's educational life. This connection can have several components. The first is communication. Regular and structured conversations among all IEP team members, including those from outside of the school, can help to deepen all of the stakeholders' knowledge of their students, and can streamline the child's educational plan. IEP meetings do not occur with enough regularity to build true connections among staff who do not work together. It is only through regular communication that teachers can build the type of collaborative trusting relationships that have been shown to impact student progress (Russo, 2011; Scanlan, 2009a), and can bring about a unified educational plan.

The lack of regular communication among the outside and school-based educators can create significant inconsistencies in students' instructional methodologies that can impact their learning. The third graders in this study experienced multiple cueing systems in reading as well as a disconnect between that which was being taught outside of school and that which occurred in the classroom.With that in mind, one goal of collaboration should be for in-school staff and outside providers to agree upon a single cueing system for reading instruction as well as a plan for how skills learned in isolation can be reinforced in the context of connected texts and classroom curricula. Students with learning disabilities in reading benefit from structured and sequential systems of intervention (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001). Close communication

can help all reading teachers to support each other, by ensuring that reading instruction is cumulative and straightforward, and not confusing and disconnected.

IEPs are complex documents created by experts and are often written in educational jargon and legal terminology (Boyle & Scanlon, 2019). In the case of students in this study, the IEPs were created by people with limited or no knowledge of the students' school environments, but with some understanding of the learners' strengths and learning profiles. Although parochial school classroom teachers generally attend IEP meetings (Russo et al., 2011), the time-bound formal nature of those meetings may not be enough to help all teachers who work with the students to understand their specialized instruction, curricular modifications, and academic accommodations. With that in mind, it would benefit Catholic School staff to set aside time to develop an understanding of each student's IEP. In-house meetings dedicated to unpacking the document could give staff an opportunity to ask questions and discuss elements of the IEP that might be confusing, do not sound accurate, or need to be modified to be effective in a particular context. It would also give staff a chance to look closely at the classroom accommodations and curricular modifications the students need, because they will be implemented by the classroom teacher and are therefore important for her or him to understand and internalize. One way to address this issue is for school staff to create their own condensed version of the IEP that is designed specifically for the child's school setting. This product can also help translate the IEP into a more context-specific document.

Evidence-Based Practices

The students in this study struggled to read partially because they did not have an opportunity to be exposed to consistent evidence-based practices in reading for children with special needs. This issue was first apparent when they were as young as kindergarten and did not

have sufficient exposure to structured work in phonemic awareness and phonics, and continued throughout their school years. Neither school in this study utilized an early structured phonics program in kindergarten and first grade, a time period that has been shown to be essential for this form of instruction (Gabrieli, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2014). The addition of a structured phonics program in the early grades has been shown to have a significant impact on those learners who are exhibiting reading behaviors that indicate that they might be in the need of early support (Gabrieli, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2014); it may have also changed the participants' early reading trajectories.

Along the same lines, these students began to receive special education support only when they had a specific diagnosis even though they had shown signs of difficulty earlier in their academic lives. It is this "wait to fail" philosophy that has been shown to be detrimental to learning and was an impetus for the creation of the Response to Intervention system that is used widely across the United States ([RTI], Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The boys in this study experienced the most success in their small intervention groups partially because of the "just right" nature of the instruction and the direct attention that they received within them. The systematic implementation of a small group and individual support system such as RTI could represent a significant opportunity to impact students' achievement and self-esteem (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Additionally, the increase in structured support would limit the amount of time that students are left to work independently or asked to complete unmodified assignments that are beyond their independent abilities, activities that were problematic for the students in the study.

The addition of an RTI program is only successful if the programs used within it are evidenced-based and are implemented with fidelity (RTI Action Network, 2014). The careful

selection of reading instructional programs is therefore essential to the success of an RTI System. Selecting a structured, sequential, reading instructional program is not enough. Students who truly struggle with reading must be taught how to apply skills learned in isolation to their negotiation of connected texts (Scammacca et al., 2007). Structured sequential reading instruction in isolation must therefore, be followed by instruction in the application of skills learned in isolation to meaningful fiction and non-fiction texts. Intervention should focus first on developing skills, and then lon ocating and using those skills in connected reading materials.

As important as is the consistent implementation of structured and sequential reading instruction, it is also essential that students do not continue to be exposed to instruction that is not working once it has been deemed ineffective. Cameron worked within the same intervention system for years with little resulting growth. That type of inflexible instruction can be frustrating and demoralizing for students and can be a waste of valuable school time (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). A problem-solving approach when instruction is not working in the way that it is intended can result in a more child-centered and effective program for those learners who teachers have determined they have demonstrated an inadequate response to intervention (Gilbert et al., 2013). The three students in this study, despite their common diagnosis, struggled to develop reading skills for different reasons. A problem solving approach such as that discussed by Gilbert et al., can help pinpoint instruction, thereby reducing lost time and effort, and avoiding a prolonged lack of response to intervention.

Engaging Instruction

The students in this study repeatedly avoided the vast majority of reading activities they were assigned, and when asked, described them in negative terms. In line with Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), these students may have demonstrated this behavior

because they felt that the work was too long and difficult for them and they did not have meaningful connections to it or see its value. According to Eccles and Wigfield, students have the potential to experience more success when they are given work that feels manageable and valuable to them. This requires teachers to think carefully about not only the skills that they need the students to learn, but the ways that they will enable their students to connect with them. Teachers can empower students to experience a higher level of motivation in reading by creating assignments that are engaging because they connect to students' areas of interest, and are in the children's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky,1978). Daniel commented that he enjoys working with his tutor since she plays games with him, and it is that positive and playful attitude that can make an impact on reluctant students (Orkin et al., 2017). Text is not limited to books and articles; it exists all around the students who are learning to access it-in music, theater, art, building, video games, and sports. Teachers who are willing to modify plays, rewrite books, work with students to create video games, and to listen to students as they give hints into their interests have the unique opportunity to build connections with their learners while simultaneously enabling them to connect to print. The integration of text into play and exploration that is so valued in preschool and kindergarten (Gronlund & Rendon, 2017) does not need to disappear as children enter first grade. It is through meaningful integration that children can find meaningful and self-directed ways to engage with print. In their book, *Saving Play,* Gronlund, and Rendon (2017) argue that standards-based play is an essential way to engage students in learning while allowing them to construct the essential skills and concepts that they are required to learn in early elementary school. Literacy instruction can be integrated into a range of play-based experiences, and play can be a way to motivate and encourage reluctant readers to engage in text (Gronlund & Rendon, 2017).

Finally, since the inclusion of less-engaging structured activities such as the direct instruction of phonics skills will be necessary for continued reading achievement, these lessons should be time-bound and carefully planned to be at the child's level, build on his prior skills, and, when possible, incorporate autonomy-supportive practices such as choice in their implementation (Eccles & Wiggfeld, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2007). If students feel that activities are doable and interesting they may be more inclined to attempt them; this could ultimately enable them to feel that they are active participants in their own reading programs and that instruction is not being thrust upon them (Louick, 2017).

Emotional Well-Being

The emotional well-being of the students in this study was inextricably linked to their academic performance. It is therefore essential to create structures to help students develop the self-confidence and emotional stability necessary to take on the challenging and exhausting task of learning to read (Sweller, 1994). One way to do this is to highlight their strengths. In this study the biggest shift in reading attitudes occurred when Cameron began to use his abilities as a nurturer and a passionate teacher to help a younger student learn to read. Research has demonstrated the high occurrence of depression among students with learning disabilities in reading, more than in students with other disabilities (Mammarella et al., 2014). This can be mitigated by creating authentic opportunities for students with learning disabilities in reading to "shine." The students in this study highlighted their strengths as their areas of preference in school. Unfortunately, few of those areas occurred in the classroom. Movement, art, and building do not have to be absent from first, second and third grade classrooms. These activities can be even more powerful if they can somehow be associated with reading, thereby pairing an area of

struggle with a point of strength and interest. School cannot only be about failure; it must provide every student with opportunities to experience success.

In addition to highlighting the positive, there is value in avoiding negative experiences. The students all told stories of public embarrassment when they had to showcase their reading skills in front of their peers. It is therefore essential to create learning experiences that reduce embarrassment, understanding that each person's threshold for embarrassment may be unique. Reading out loud in front of other children may not be a tolerable activity for some students, and cold calling may be stressful and upsetting for others. Finding private ways for students to share their knowledge can be a more effective method to measure their progress. Identifying alternative methods to work with students requires a deep knowledge of them as individuals, and a commitment to understanding what makes them comfortable. The relationships that the teachers formed with their students was a central finding in the study, and is a key factor in increasing the students' engagement in the classroom (Roorda et al., 2011). The participants' teachers understood their students' strengths and weaknesses, and though they were limited in the supports that they could provide for them, worked hard to create safe spaces for them. They were aware of the connection between their emotional and academic well-being and realized that taking the time to form meaningful relationships with their students may be one way to give them the strength to power through the challenges that they faced each day in school. In the end, teachers, like doctors, have the profound responsibility to "first do no harm." These teachers, whether or not they were aware of it, took this pledge seriously. I wonder how the students' lives would have changed if all of their past educators had lived by that promise.

Future Research and Limitations

The students in this study shared powerful insights into their school experiences and helped deepen my understanding of their day-to-day reading lives at school. They, even more than their parents and teachers, were able to describe how they experienced the trials and tribulations of learning to decode. Students, even young children, are incredibly valuable sources of information, and talking to them about their experiences with reading can help teachers and researchers understand how aspects of the curriculum and academic expectations influence their development. Listening to students can also prevent the formation of assumptions, and can help to clarify the complex relationship between academic and social-emotional development. It is through taking the time to have meaningful conversations with students that educators can truly understand how they experience reading and how changes in their instruction can impact how learners feel about themselves as readers. This needs to be a goal of future research.

Although there exists a growing collection of literature on students who demonstrate an inadequate response to intervention (e.g. Cho et al., 2015; Denton et al., 2013), case studies of individual learners is almost entirely missing from the research. This is so not just for students who demonstrate an inadequate response to intervention, but for struggling readers in general (Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008). More case study research is needed to understand the experiences of students who struggle to learn to read as well as that of their parents and teachers. Although studies on interventions are essential for designing effective instruction for this group of students, it is only through close, individual investigations that researchers can understand the ways in which learners experience the impact of those interventions on their day-to-day reading lives in the classroom. Although a great deal can be learned from observing students, and measuring their academic achievement (e.g. Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007), their voices are the

greatest window researchers have into their thoughts, reactions, and understandings of their experiences. They should not be neglected from the literature.

There also exists a lack of research on students with special needs in Catholic School settings (Carlson, 2014). This has contributed to the perceived lack of progress in working with this population in this setting and has skewed the research towards public school settings, a location with a completely separate set of issues related to special education. Research involving students with special needs in faith-based schools can help to identify the opportunities and issues that are unique to that setting that may be different from public schools. It can also help to develop systems of intervention, communication, and support for students who struggle to access the general education curriculum or who are identified with special needs. Context matters (Yin, 2014). The lack of research addressing this context has limited the development of context-specific systems for students with special needs, and has in many ways decreased the collaboration with institutions of higher education that research has highlighted as necessary for the continued growth (Scanlan, 2009a). Additionally, the lack of research may inadvertently send the message that this is not a topic that is of central importance to the Catholic School community. This study has shown that this is not the case.

I am incredibly grateful to the teachers at EECS and St. Gemma's for inviting me into their classrooms, and to the students and families for including me into their lives. Although I spent a great deal of time in the schools, this study was limited by the finite number of observations and interviews that I was able to conduct during the data collection period. I was not privy to teacher meetings about the students, planning sessions, or IEP meetings outside of the school. Exposure to these types of interactions could have deepened my understanding of the processes undertaken by the teachers to support the students, and could have stood in the way of

my forming assumptions about them. Although my observations took place during academic and non-academic periods in both school settings, outside of reading activities, I did not observe the same subjects or unstructured periods in both schools. The differences among the topics and contexts observed may have influenced the conclusions that I was able to draw about them. Similarly, some of the observations at St. Gemma's occurred quite late in the school year; this timing may have impacted the behavior of the participant students and their teachers. Finally, I would have liked to return to the schools after coding the data to address some of my unanswered questions; this was not possible because of the schedule of the data collection, and as a result, left some questions unanswered.

There were also limitations in my analysis of the students' educational documents. All of the children in the study switched schools repeatedly; consequently, I did not have access to all of their records. I therefore, had to rely on the documents that were available as well as the recollections of the children, parents, and teachers. All of the students had been evaluated through their districts and by outside private evaluators. Although I spent a great deal of time and sought out support to fully understand the students' outside neuropsychological reports, I am not a trained psychologist, and was therefore limited in my understanding of them.

Finally, it is important to note that my positionality as a parent of children in a faith-based school, including one with a learning disability in reading, certainly influenced my interpretation of the data. Throughout the process I found myself drawing parallels among the schools in which I conducted my research and my own children's school experiences, including similarities and frustrations that I experienced as a parent. Those connections, along with my own professional experience certainly influenced my analysis.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation study was to understand the reading lives of three young students whose paths to literacy have not gone the way that they, their parents, or their teachers would have wanted for them. The findings revealed that their lack of perceived success was the result of the learning contexts in which they found themselves, the systems of intervention in which they did and did not participate, and the emotional ramifications of their struggles. They were chosen because they were considered inadequate responders, but despite their cognitive and academic weaknesses, they were far from inadequate. This was a study of misplaced inadequacies. The inadequacies that were associated with the students actually belonged to the school and district-based systems that did not meet their needs and to the missed connections between their academic development and their emotional well-being.

Despite their young age, the students who were at the center of these case studies were able to contribute profound insights both through their words and their behavior, thereby deepening my understanding of their lives as readers. The existing research on students who demonstrate an inadequate response to intervention has been invaluable in finding successful ways to impact student learning. It is my hope that case studies such as this one can deepen and broaden the research on students who struggle to learn to read so that a closer connection can be made between the programs that are designed to impact learning and the learners that take part in them.

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Appendices

Appendix A IEP Information - 1st or 2nd grade	
Disability and date of diagnosis	
Strengths	
Key Diagnostic Test Results	
Accommodations that can be used during reading	

Goal and objectives related to reading	
Goal and objectives related to reading	
Related service related to reading	

Service delivery for reading goals and objectives	
Testing accommodations	

IEP Information - 3rd grade	
Disability and date of diagnosis	
Strengths	
Key Diagnostic Test Results	
Accommodations that can be used during reading	

Goal and objectives related to reading	
Goal and objectives related to reading	
Related service related to reading	

Service delivery for reading goals and objectives	
Testing accommodations	
Other notes	

Reading Intervention History	Relevant Information	Dates
Kindergarten CBM Results		
Kindergarten Reading Intervention Programs		
1st Grade CBM Results		
1st Grade Reading Intervention Programs		

2nd Grade CBM Results		
2nd Grade Reading Intervention		
3rd Grade CBMs		
3rd Grade Reading Intervention Program		

Other Notes		

Kindergarten Report Cards	**Ist Grade Report Cards**	**2nd Grade Report Cards**	**3rd Grade Report Card(s)**
Date:	**Date:**	**Date:**	**Date:**
Date:	**Date:**	**Date:**	**Date:**
Date:	**Date:**	**Date:**	

Appendix B

Focus group questions:

Thank you very much for attending this focus group. I know how busy you are and really appreciate your time. The purpose of this meeting is to learn about your perspectives of X's reading experiences during the past 4 years. Can we please begin by going around and introducing ourselves and our roles.

Thanks! I have some guiding questions, but please feel free to share your thoughts freely with me.

1. Can you tell me about X?
   A) What are his strengths?
2. How would you describe X as a student?
3. How would you describe X as a reader?
4. Can you talk to me about your experiences working with X in reading?
   A) How did X perform in reading in your classroom?
   B) How did X behave during reading instruction?
   C) How did X appear to feel about reading?
5. Can you describe the systems of intervention that have been put in place for X in reading?
   A) What systems have been put in place in the classroom?
   B) What systems have been put in place outside of the classroom?
6. What do you think about his experience with those systems?
7. What is your impression of the specific curricular materials that have been used with X around his/her reading?
8. In your opinion, how has X responded to the systems of support that have been put in place for him/her?
   A) Why do you think that is the case?
   B) What factors do you think contributed to/inhibited his progress?
9. What do you think about the process that was taken to make intervention decisions for X?
   A) Why do you feel that way?

10. How would you describe X's progress in reading over the past 4 years?
    C) Why?
11. In your opinion what has gone well for X in reading?
12. In your opinion what have been the challenges for X in reading?
13. What else do I need to know in order to understand X's reading experience in school?

Appendix C

Protocol for student interviews:

Describe what I just saw in his intervention period……..

1. What did you think of that lesson?
2. Did you like anything about it?
3. Were there any parts that you did not like? Why?
4. What is reading usually like for you in school?
5. Are there parts of your reading blocks in school that you like or make you feel good?
6. Are there parts of your reading blocks in school that bother you?
7. Have you always felt this way or have your feelings changed about reading?
8. What if we made a list of 3 words to describe reading for you- what would those words be?
   A) Why did you choose each word?
10. If you were in charge of the school is there anything that you would change about the way that kids learn reading in your school?
    A) Would that change for everyone or just for kids who need a little extra help?
11. When I work with teachers what should I tell them about helping kids learn to read better?
12. What else should I know about reading at your school?

Appendix D

Protocol for parent interviews:

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me. Your perspective is incredibly important to my study. I have some prepared questions, but I want to hear your thoughts so please feel free to share whatever is important to you.

1. Can you tell me a little about _____.

2.. What four words would you use to describe him?

3. What are his greatest strengths? What are his interests?

4. How would you describe X as a reader?

5. How would his teachers describe him as a reader?

6. What are his feelings about reading?

7. Can you tell me about his reading experiences at school? Walk me through X's elementary school reading experiences.

    A) What were his experiences in his general education classrooms?

    B) What were his intervention experiences?

8. Were there any specific events that were particularly important in those experiences that stand out to you?

    A) What made them significant?

9. What in your opinion were positive aspects of his reading instruction over the years?

    A) What made those experiences successful?

B) How did X respond to those experiences?

10. Were there any aspects of the instruction that you wish had gone differently?
    A) What made those experiences less successful for X?
    B) Do you have thoughts of what should have gone differently?

11. What are your goals for X in reading?

12. Do you feel that there are systems in place in X's school to enable him to reach those goals? Why or why not?

13. What are your goals for X in school in general?

14. Do you feel that there are systems in place in X's school to enable him to reach those goals? Why or why not?

15. What do you feel has been your role in X's school-based education? Why has it been that way?Are you satisfied with it?

15. What else should I know about X's reading experiences over the past 4 years?