Guided Reading: Teachers Speak Up

by

Nicole Piercey
B. Ed., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1999

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Sylvia J. Pantaleo, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Supervisor

Dr. Alison Preece, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Departmental Member

Dr. Gina Harrison, (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)
Outside Member

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Guided reading is a common component of literacy instruction in elementary classrooms. The purpose of this research was to examine multiple areas of guided reading from the perspective of teachers who were using guided reading in their classrooms. Knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment issues were the five instructional topics of guided reading that were investigated using a mixed methods approach. The research was carried out in a single school division located in northern Alberta and involved Kindergarten – Grade 3 language arts teachers.

Survey data collected from 27 respondents were analyzed using an interpretational focus. The data were coded and categorized using the five identified instructional topics as a framework. Common themes and patterns of response were identified for each instructional topic. The survey findings were then used to generate a focus group agenda. The transcripts of three focus group sessions that involved 16 teacher participants were also analyzed using an interpretational focus.

The findings of the study suggested that guided reading is an important component of early language arts instruction for the teachers who participated in this

research. Two types of guided reading instruction were identified: a small group guided reading approach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) and a Four Blocks approach to guided reading (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1991). The teacher participants identified a wide variety of goals and purposes in using guided reading. The grouping practices of the teachers shared some similarities and many teachers indicated that they used a variety of sources of information to determine students' placement in guided reading groups. Repeatedly, the survey and focus group participants communicated how their guided reading instruction was affected by their perceptions of differences among students and classes as affecting their guided reading instruction.

The teachers indicated that their continuous attempts to maintain balance and focus during guided reading instruction also affected their organization and management. The teachers' responses to survey items and focus group questions that addressed dialogue also focused on maintaining balance and focus during guided reading instruction. The teachers also discussed how they used dialogue for instructional purposes and commented on their ability to maintain balance and focus during the discussions during guided reading lessons. Many teachers indicated that they used running records to inform their guided reading instruction. Various other assessment tools that are consistent with an assessment for learning focus were also identified by the teacher participants. Overall, many of the findings suggested that individual teachers have adapted their guided reading practices to such an extent that they are no longer consistent with a single guided reading approach. The findings of

the research indicated a need for teachers the have opportunities to engage in reflective activities with respect to their guided reading practices.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and support of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo. Her continued patience and encouragement helped make it possible for me to complete this study. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Alison Preece and Dr. Gina Harrison, who both provided insightful comments and valuable suggestions that improved the quality of this thesis.

I would like to thank the school division for their willingness to allow me to conduct this research with their teachers. This research would not have been possible without the fantastic teachers who kindly shared their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs about guided reading with me. I am grateful for their contributions.

Dedication

A special debt of gratitude is owed to my family

while I worked to complete this thesis.

Jamie, George, and Lewis,

without your love, support, and patience

this thesis would never had been completed.

Chapter One

Introduction

Over 40 years ago, Guy Bond and Roberta Dykstra (1967) attempted to answer three key questions about beginning reading instruction. How do variables such as pupils, teachers, classes, schools, and communities affect student achievement in reading and spelling? Which instructional approach used in Grade 1 results in superior student reading and spelling achievement? Are there programs used in beginning reading instruction that are particularly effective or ineffective? (p. 5). Although no definitive answers emerged from their findings, a focus on beginning reading instruction still prevails and the "continuous search for new ways to teach reading" (p. 9) is still present, with new approaches, programs, and materials in constant development. Small group instruction remains an essential component of reading instruction in today's elementary classrooms. Guided reading is a teaching approach that involves thinking, talking and working through text with a small homogeneous (similar reading ability) group of students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The teacher guides the learning experience and provides support for students, thus enabling them to read and comprehend text that offers readers some challenges (Mooney, 1995). Guided reading is a common type of small group instruction and one of several types of reading experiences identified in studies of exemplary first-grade literacy instruction (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999).

Statement of Purpose

In keeping with a focus on beginning reading instruction, this research examined several instructional topics germane to guided reading. According to Fawson and Reutzel (2000), guided reading has become one of the most significant and common practices in

primary classrooms in the United States and is used by many teachers to organize their reading instruction. The purpose of my study was to examine various aspects of guided reading instruction from the perspective of teachers who were using this instructional approach in their classrooms. As a teacher of guided reading myself, I have struggled with the implementation of guided reading and sometimes doubted its utility when other students were not engaged in meaningful literacy activities. As an educator, I discovered that parent or other adult assistance during guided reading helped increase learning for those students not under my direct guidance. When I began teaching in 1999, I used guided reading as a mainstay of my beginning reading instruction. At that time, guided reading instruction in my classroom was similar to the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). Since then, my guided reading practices have evolved because of my interest in the Four Blocks (Cunningham, Hall, and Defee, 1991) model. Guided reading remains as a pillar of my language arts instruction, but now includes practices from both approaches to guided reading. This investigation stemmed from these experiences and my desire to continually improve my teaching practices and provide my colleagues with similar opportunities. The research questions were designed to address areas essential to understanding guided reading as a complex phenomenon (i.e. knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment).

It is important for readers to know that during the seven years of employment with the school division where the research occurred, I have been involved with professional development opportunities concerning the Four Blocks approach (Cunningham et al., 1991). Thus, many of the participating teachers knew of my

advocacy of the Four Blocks approach, and I recognize that their knowledge of my affiliation may have influenced their responses to the survey and/or the focus groups.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my research and were later used as an organizational framework for data analysis. Each question addressed a specific area of guided reading in a general manner in an attempt to better understand guided reading instruction in primary classrooms.

a) What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading?
b) What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading lessons? Are these groupings dynamic and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year?
c) How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading sessions?
d) How do teachers encourage and facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions?
e) How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction? What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed?

Each of these questions was created to address a specific area of guided reading instruction. My intention, in exploring specific areas of guided reading instruction, was to better understand the complexities of guided reading instruction. The benefits of an enhanced understanding of guided reading instruction could help teachers develop and/or improve their guided reading practices, which could affect student learning through improved guided reading practices.

Significance of the Study

Although many professional development resources currently exist on guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Schulman & Payne, 2000; Tyner, 2004), a lack of research on guided reading prevails within the academic or scholarly literature. Other researchers have also identified the need for more research on guided reading, especially in the primary grades (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006; Skidmore, Perez-Parent, & Arnfield, 2003). To create an extensive understanding of guided reading from the practitioner's point of view is an important area of guided reading research and was the focus of this research.

As stated earlier, guided reading is a common approach in many elementary classrooms, therefore it becomes vital to understand guided reading from the point of view of teachers who are using guided reading. An abundance of professional development resources are available to assist teachers in acquiring the background necessary to begin guided reading instruction in their classroom. However, my research began to address the concerns of teachers who are using guided reading, with the intention of highlighting the strengths of teachers' guided reading practices and also identifying what can be done to assist teachers in improving their guided reading practices.

Curriculum Connections

This research was conducted with teachers in a rural northern school division located in Alberta, Canada. The utility of using guided reading, as a component of literacy instruction, is identified in the following sections. Guided reading can be used to accomplish many of the learning objectives outlined in the *Alberta Program of Studies*

(Alberta Learning, 2002). The *English Language Arts* curriculum document (Alberta Learning), in the Program of Studies, identifies five general outcomes that guide language arts instruction in Alberta elementary schools. These five outcomes focus on listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing to: explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences (p. 7); comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts (p. 17); manage ideas and information (p. 47); enhance the clarity and artistry of communication (p. 65); and to respect, support and collaborate with others (p. 87). Each general outcome contains three specific components: subheadings, sideheadings, and specific outcome statements. This research targeted teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 3 and the number of specific outcome statements related to guided reading for all four grade levels are too numerous to report. For this reason, the specific subheadings and sideheadings for Grade 1 that relate to guided reading are outlined below in Table 1. For more details on the specific outcome statements for the other grades please see the *Program of Studies* (Alberta Learning, 2002).

Table 1

Grade 1 Sideheadings Related to Guided Reading

General Outcome	Subheading	Sideheading
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences.	1.1 Discover and Explore (p. 6)	Express ideas and develop understanding (p. 8) Express preferences (p. 8) Set goals (p. 8)
	1.2 Clarify and Extend (p. 6)	Consider the ideas of others (p. 12) Extend understanding (p. 12)
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent	2.1 Use Strategies and Cues	Use prior knowledge (p. 18) Use comprehension strategies (p. 18) Use textual cues (p. 22)

to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts.		Use phonics and structural analysis (p. 26)
	2.2 Respond to Texts	Experience various texts (p. 30)
		Construct meaning from texts (p. 30)
		Appreciate the artistry of texts (p. 34)
	2.3 Understand Forms, Elements and Techniques	Understand forms and genres (p. 38)
		Understand techniques and elements (p. 38)
	2.4 Create Original Text	Structure texts (p. 42)
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to manage ideas and information.	3.1 Plan and Focus	Focus attention (p. 48)
	3.2 Select and Process	Access information (p. 52)
	3.3 Organize, Record and Evaluate	Organize information (p. 56)
		Record information (p. 56)
	3.4 Share and Review	Share ideas and information (p. 60)
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.	4.1 Enhance and Improve	Appraise own and others' work (p. 66)
		Expand knowledge of language (p. 70)
	4.2 Attend to Conventions	Attend to grammar and usage (p. 74)
		Attend to capitalization and punctuation (p. 78)
	4.3 Present and Share	Use effective oral and visual communication (p. 82)
		Demonstrate attentive listening and viewing (p. 82)
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to respect, support and collaborate with others.	5.1 Respect Others and Strengthen Community	Appreciate diversity (p. 88)
		Relate texts to cultures (p. 88)
		Use language to show respect (p. 88)
	5.2 Work within a Group	Cooperate with others (p. 92)
		Work in groups (p. 92)

As evident by Table 1, numerous learning outcomes can be accomplished by the effective use of guided reading. The quantity of learning outcomes potentially covered by the use of guided reading justifies the need for a closer examination of guided reading. This study contributes to the body of literature that currently exists on guided reading and

examines multiple areas of guided reading instruction in an attempt to better understand the complexities of guided reading instruction. It is also advantageous for teachers to have access to a document that addresses guided reading from the perspective of colleagues who are currently using guided reading.

Definitions

Specific phrases and terms that are aligned with the research questions on guided reading may be unclear or known to have multiple meanings. Therefore, below I describe how the terms guided reading, dialogue, discussion, discourse, and assessment for learning are used in this study.

Guided Reading

Although some have credited Fountas and Pinnell (1996) with developing guided reading (Tierney & Readence, 2000; Tyner, 2004), guided reading as a teaching method is not new. In a recent historical perspective on guided reading, Ford and Opitz (2008) connected guided reading to the directed reading activity advocated by Betts in his seminal work *Foundations of Reading Instruction* (1957). In 1975, Manzo described a "guided reading procedure" that, despite its rigid structure, bears some similarities to the current model of guided reading described by Fountas and Pinnell. Mooney (1990) talked about and published writings about guided reading as early as 1990. Her model is consistent with the Fountas and Pinnell method currently in use in many elementary schools. With the publication of *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (1996), guided reading has become a common term used among educators in Canada and the United States.

The purpose of guided reading is to help readers become independent, to use strategies appropriate to their reading abilities, and to question and construct meaning from the text (Mooney, 1990). Typically, the teacher sets up the reading of the text with an introduction and subsequently, each student reads the book independently. During the reading of the text the teacher observes and notes which strategies are being employed by individual students, listens to individual children while they read, or offers support if a reader encounters difficulty identifying a word. After the text has been read, the teacher assesses students' comprehension of the text through dialogue and discussion. The teacher chooses the level of text difficulty with the students' needs in mind and gradually increases the level of difficulty to ensure that students are working at an instructional level within their zone of proximal development (Antonacci, 2000). Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1934/1978, p. 86).

Dialogue, Discussion, and Discourse

The terms talk and dialogue are often used synonymously. Cazden (1988) identifies particular situations or occasions where students and teacher gather for talk as either a lesson or discussion. Graves (2004) defines dialogue as "give-and-take, face-to-face discussion in which students really strive to make themselves understood and to understand others" and further identifies dialogue as "a mainstay of learning" (p. 438). In this study, the term dialogue was used to identify the 'face-to-face' oral interactions between two or more people. A discussion is the result of a dialogue where participants

are co-producing meaning by taking up the ideas of others and expanding and adding their own knowledge (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). The goal of discussion is to be understood and to understand others (Graves, 2004).

Dialogue and discussions are both examples of oral language use. Any discussion of language use would be incomplete without the mention of discourse. Gee (1989) explains discourses as: "ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p. 6). He further distinguishes between discourses 'with a capital D' and "the connected stretches of language" (p. 6) that constitute discourses 'with a little d.' Gee equates Discourse (with a capital D) with an 'identity kit,' that allows us to successfully participate within a particular setting or social group. Thus, the setting of school presents a Discourse community that all children must become familiar with, although it may be different from the primary discourse acquired at home (Gee). Discourse communities are created within guided reading groups since the dialogue that teachers use may encourage certain discourses while limiting others. These issues are taken up in Chapter Six.

Assessment for Learning

In the past few years there has been an increase in the amount of attention given to formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning, instead of assessment of learning (i.e. summative assessment). This attention can be widely attributed to an article written by Black and Wiliam in 1998, in which they focused on an extensive review of the assessment literature to answer three key questions. The most important finding was

that “all these studies show that innovations that include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains” (p. 140).

In a follow-up article, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004) succinctly defined assessment for learning as: “any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning” (p. 10). Guided reading is an instructional approach that enables teachers to promote students’ learning by offering support and feedback as students are working through a text, therefore guided reading can be considered as a component of assessment for learning practices.

Overview of the Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used to address the research questions identified in this chapter. A mixed methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative methodology to investigate research topics or questions. The quantitative research tool used was a survey, developed by me to specifically address each key instructional issue of guided reading. The survey provided breadth to my research and allowed me to gather data on teachers’ guided reading practices covering a range of instructional areas. The survey was administered to primary, Kindergarten to Grade 3, language arts teachers in a single rural school division located in Alberta, Canada. Findings from the analysis of the survey data were used to generate the focus group agenda, which was used during the focus group sessions conducted with volunteer teachers from the same school division. The focus group sessions enabled the teachers to discuss specific instructional topics in greater depth than the survey, and also provided me with the opportunity to address gaps found as a result of the survey data analysis. The survey and the focus group sessions

allowed me to present the research questions directly to those teachers practicing guided reading and therefore obtain data from the perspective of teachers. A detailed explanation of the research methodology is found in Chapter Three.

Overview of the Thesis

In this chapter, I provided a brief discussion of the purpose of the study and identified the research questions that were used to guide the inquiry. A concise overview of the research approach was presented, as well as a discussion of the significance of the study. I also provided the connections between guided reading and the *Alberta Program of Studies*. Definitions were offered for guided reading, dialogue, discussion, discourse, and assessment for learning to ensure a shared understanding of these terms.

In Chapter Two, a review of the literature on guided reading, I describe the theoretical background and the history of guided reading. I also discuss the Four Blocks approach (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1991) to guided reading because the use of this instructional framework emerged during data analysis. In addition, I address the specific instructional topics related to guided reading that were examined in this study and present background knowledge that situates guided reading. Each instructional area specific to my research questions is explored in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three, I discuss my use of the methods of inquiry used in this study. The research procedures, including the investigative tools; data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative; and data verification and concerns for bias are outlined.

Chapters Four and Five present the results of the research. Chapter Four focuses on knowledge and beliefs, and grouping and Chapter Five focuses on organization and management, dialogue, and assessment. The instructional topics of guided reading were

used to organize the survey items and the focus group agenda. These topics were again used as an organizational framework to first present the findings of the survey, and then to describe the findings of the focus group sessions.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I return to the research questions outlined in this chapter and link the survey and focus group findings described in Chapters Four and Five to the research literature presented in Chapter Two. I also present recommendations for teachers and for future research, identify the strengths and limitations of the study, and offer my final reflections.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine current research on guided reading. I present the theoretical foundations of the subject before addressing specific topics relevant to guided reading. The literature on balanced literacy and exemplary reading instruction suggests that guided reading is an essential component of reading instruction. These two topics are described in order to situate guided reading within a larger instructional context. Although, guided reading embraces a multitude of instructional components, in this review of the literature, I focus on only those topics that are central to my inquiry. Therefore, the section on guided reading examines the following key instructional topics: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment issues.

Theoretical Foundations of Guided Reading

Guided reading is grounded in the interactive model of reading. This model of reading highlights the importance of the interaction between the reader and text in the creation of meaning (Graves, 2004). According to the interactive model of reading, "both the reader and the text play vitally important roles in reading" (Graves, p. 435). Rumelhart (1994) identified the meeting of both sensory and nonsensory sources of knowledge as a key factor in the reading process. The sources of knowledge identified by Rumelhart, semantic, syntactical, lexical, and orthographic, each contributes specialized knowledge about aspects of the reading process. Readers draw from each type of knowledge when reading and use information from each knowledge source as needed to read the printed text. Readers use information from their background knowledge to

construct their understanding of the printed text. These interactions between the reader and the text to construct meaning have several implications for guided reading.

The first implication suggests that the quality of the book introduction is related to students' successfully comprehending the text they are working with. During the introduction of the reading material, the teacher identifies potentially problematic words for the reader and provides opportunities to make predictions, discuss content possibilities, and connect background knowledge and prior experiences to the text. These activities potentially scaffold the reading of the text enabling students to focus on understanding what they are reading. Discussing new or potentially unfamiliar vocabulary, during the introduction, assists students to successfully read a text that may otherwise be too challenging. Many children have been exposed to a variety of experiences, while others may have fewer or different experiences. The whole guided reading group can potentially benefit when a student shares his or her understanding of the text.

The second implication involves teachers' use of coaching strategies while students read the text, and teachers' expectations that students will decode unknown words. Different strategies should be used when students become "stuck" on a word and this type of flexibility encourages students to become independent readers. Teachers need to ensure that students are able to use reading strategies that draw from the multiple sources of knowledge identified by Rumelhart (1994). Such a repertoire should include strategies that encourage students to use their knowledge about letters, sounds, words, syntax, and semantics when reading.

The final implication of the interactive model of reading for guided reading addresses comprehension. Students need time to share, discuss, refine, and evaluate the meaning of the story by using the strategies taught during the guided reading lesson. The teaching of comprehension is more than asking literal questions with one correct answer. Cazden (1988) discussed a common questioning technique known as IRE. This questioning technique refers to the process of teacher-initiated question, student response, and teacher evaluation and is believed to create environments that are not conducive for encouraging student discussions. Comprehension can be enhanced through interaction with members of the group, resulting in students negotiating a deeper understanding of what was read. According to Graves (2004) "comprehension involves both 'extracting and constructing meaning'" (p. 435). The interactive model of reading identifies the importance of semantic knowledge and how it can be used to evaluate if the previous information sources were used effectively to generate meaning that is both plausible and understandable (Rumelhart, 1994). The social aspect of students' construction of understanding is elaborated upon in the next section.

As described in Chapter One, guided reading typically involves the teacher setting up the reading of the text with an introduction and subsequently, each student reads the book independently. During the reading of the text the teacher observes and notes which strategies are being employed by individual students, listens to individual children while they read, or offers support if a reader encounters difficulty identifying a word. After the text has been read, the teacher assesses students' comprehension and understanding of the text through dialogue and discussion. Guided reading acknowledges the importance of accessing the background knowledge of students during the introduction of the text, an

important component of the interactive model of reading. Similarly, the after component of the guided reading lesson is consistent with the interactive model of reading. This part of the guided reading lesson usually involves ensuring that students have understood what they have read through discussion or other comprehension activities such as relating personal responses, revisiting predictions, or responding to the text through drama, art, or writing activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory defines cognition as a profoundly social phenomenon in which individuals use their social experience to shape their interpretation of the world (Berk & Winsler, 1995). According to Vygotsky (1934/1978), language is the "critical bridge" (p. 12) between the social milieu and the individual. Antonacci (2000) discussed how Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underlies the use of guided reading in the classroom. She identified the following three constructs, from the work of Vygotsky, to support guided reading in primary classrooms: "Learning is social and occurs in social contexts; learning is mediated by language; and learning or the development of concepts and higher mental functioning takes place within a student's zone of proximal development" (p. 23). Sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of the social nature of learning, therefore, dialogue or language, as the main tool of instruction, must also be considered an important component of reading instruction.

Vygotsky (1934/1978) defined the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Scaffolding is a

metaphor for the support given to students working in their zone of proximal development. The scaffold or support enables students to work at a level above what they could achieve independently and thereby encourages students to work beyond their independence level to acquire and develop new skills and strategies. Berk and Winsler (1995) described the social environment as a scaffold. In guided reading, the teacher creates "scaffolds" for students by organizing groups of students with similar reading needs. In this setting, the teacher is able to prompt students when they become "stuck" on a word. S/he ensures that they are working with materials in their zone of proximal development. In other words, the reading level of the text is just beyond the students' independence level (i.e. at their instructional level) and the teacher needs to support students as they work through the challenges found in this text.

Vygotsky's theory, which views learning as socially based and integrated, has influenced research on classroom language and literacy learning for the past three decades (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000). Sociocultural theory and social constructivism, which also contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of guided reading instruction, both highlight the importance of the social environment and it affect on students' learning. These similarities and their connections to guided reading are described in the next section.

Social Constructivism Paradigm

Both social constructivism and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory perceive learning as an active and constructive process that occurs in social settings. In Graves's (2004) analysis of constructivism, he identified two important points that relate to the teaching of reading. He described "making meaning," emphasizing the active role of the reader in

interpreting and comprehending text. The second point involves the subjective nature of the meaning that is constructed from the reader's processing of text. In essence, learners' construction of their knowledge cannot be separated from the social context in which the learning takes place. All social interactions, both group and face-to-face interactions, along with political, historical, and social trends potentially influence the way that people perceive and describe the world (Au, 1998). The social constructivist paradigm acknowledges both the social and the intersubjective nature of learning (Au).

The social and constructive nature of learning is a part of guided reading. During guided reading, students are organized in small groups that provide opportunities for social interaction while allowing individual learning. Students are expected to draw upon their social and cultural backgrounds to make sense of the text and to make predictions about the text before they read it. Comprehension activities often include students sharing their personal response to the text or relating the text to their personal experiences. Instruction is facilitated through dialogue; the teacher uses discussion before and after the reading of the text to support students in their reading of the text. The teachers' use of dialogue reflects an attempt to meet students' needs while they work within their zone of proximal development. Exploratory talk is an example of the type of language teachers can purposefully encourage during guided reading.

Exploratory talk, which is often social in nature, is a common concept in several studies of dialogue (Maloch, 2002; Skidmore et al., 2003). Barnes (1992) defined exploratory talk as "students working in small groups to make connections, re-arrange, reconceptualise, and internalise new experiences, ideas, and ways of knowing" (p. 6). The nature of exploratory talk within guided reading is consistent with the fundamental

beliefs of the social constructivist paradigm. Guided reading lessons can provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in exploratory talk as they and the teacher work together to understand text. Providing students with many opportunities to talk with their peers and with the teacher has been identified by Allington (2002) as a component of effective reading instruction which is discussed in the following section.

Exemplary Reading Instruction

Studies of exemplary reading instruction examine classrooms "in which many variables are already successfully integrated" (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999, p. 463). Morrow et al. found that homogeneous guided reading groups were one type of daily reading experience in first-grade classes taught by exemplary teachers. Guided reading instruction was used to provide explicit, planned, skill development, comprehension development, and opportunities for writing-extension activities. Teachers focused on a particular child each day to assess strengths and weaknesses during a guided reading lesson. The focus child was asked to complete more tasks than the other students in the group. All students were a part of the small group instruction, however each child had a day on which the instruction and evaluation focused on him or her.

Further research and in-depth studies on exemplary literacy practices have provided more data on exemplary reading pedagogy. Pressley et al. (2001) identified six instructional characteristics of exemplary practice, all of which relate to the use of guided reading. The management of the classroom was excellent; students in these classrooms demonstrated high levels of engagement and incidents of negative classroom behaviours were infrequent. The classroom environment was positive and co-operative; reinforcement of positive student behaviours occurred. These teachers balanced their

teaching of skills and presented many reading and writing opportunities for students. Scaffolding was used to accelerate students' needs and to assist students in achieving competence. In these classrooms, teachers expected students to do things for themselves. The teachers expected students to regulate their own learning and behaviour and they taught students how to be independent or work without constant guidance from the teacher. The last instructional practice identified by Pressley et al. was the creation of strong connections between curriculum areas; teachers integrated reading and writing within all subject areas.

Each of these characteristics of effective instructional practice is related to guided reading. Teachers who use guided reading need excellent classroom management skills; the management and organizational demands created by implementing a guided reading approach are numerous. The small group setting of guided reading provides teachers with an opportunity to create positive and co-operative environments for students. During guided reading lessons, teachers balance their instruction of skills, while providing many opportunities for students to read and write. Modelling, explicit teaching and re-teaching are some ways that teachers adapt instruction to match students' needs during guided reading lessons. Scaffolding is a foundational principle of guided reading instruction, as is matching books to readers; moving students through increasingly challenging text is a goal of guided reading instruction. Guided reading also creates opportunities for students to self-regulate as they become responsible for their behaviour when not under the direct guidance of the teacher. The final characteristic of exemplary instructional practice, creating strong connections between curriculum areas, is evident when teachers use content area (i.e. social studies, science, health, or math) reading materials during guided

reading lessons. As previously stated, reading and writing are common activities during guided reading lessons and also assist teachers in helping students make these strong connections across subject areas. Each of the characteristics of exemplary instructional practices (Pressley et al., 2001) can be found within the practices of guided reading.

Based on the research on effective teaching, the International Reading Association (2000) identified six qualities of excellent reading teachers. The qualities included:

1. A thorough knowledge of reading and writing methodology;
2. A belief that all children can learn to read and write;
3. The use of assessment and monitoring strategies to plan instruction;
4. The use of a variety of methods of reading instruction to create an effective program;
5. A willingness to use flexible grouping strategies to benefit students; and
6. The use of coaching as an instructional model. (p. 235)

Each of these qualities of effective teaching relates to guided reading. A thorough knowledge of reading and writing methodologies is fundamental to successfully implementing guided reading instruction. Instruction that targets students' instructional levels reflects a belief that all children are able to learn to read and write. The use of assessment and monitoring strategies to plan instruction forms the basis of guided reading, as teachers use assessment data to address students' needs during guided reading and to plan subsequent guided reading lessons. A guided reading approach involves the use a variety of methods of reading instruction. The core elements of guided reading require that the teacher take on the role of a coach, and the use of flexible grouping

strategies has been identified in studies that have examined successful grouping practices during guided reading (Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). When teachers are willing to have as few as one or two children in a 'group' for reading instruction, it is easy to see how the role of teacher can be transformed into that of a coach. This flexibility in supporting all learners may contribute to the effective label attached to these teachers.

Guided reading practices share many of the qualities and characteristics of exemplary literacy instruction. Based on these similarities, guided reading, when well implemented, can be justified as a component of exemplary literacy instruction.

Balanced Literacy

Many teachers identified as exemplary often described themselves as having a balanced perspective with respect to literacy instruction (Morrow et al., 1999). Balanced literacy can be viewed as an umbrella term with varying definitions. In their synthesis of the research, Freppon and Dahl (1998) presented several conflicting views of balanced literacy. Balanced literacy has been identified as the common ground between whole language and explicit phonics instruction; perhaps signaling an end to "The Great Debate." Several researchers and teachers equate balanced literacy with an eclectic approach (Freppon & Dahl).

Cunningham and Allington (2003) compared a balanced reading program to a balanced diet. They claimed that many components are necessary for children to become "able, avid, thoughtful readers and writers" (p. 136). They suggested that guided reading is only one component of any language arts program, although Fountas and Pinnell (1996) identified it as the "heart of a balanced literacy program" (p. 1). Balanced literacy programs described in professional development texts (e.g. Fountas & Pinnell, 1996;

Schulman & Payne, 2000) written for educators often prescribe exact components of a balanced literacy program. They identify balanced literacy programs as containing activities with varying amounts of teacher involvement and support. Highly teacher-directed activities, such as read-alouds, are suggested along with independent reading, which involves minimal teacher direction. Guided reading, shared reading, and reading workshop are considered moderate teacher supported activities because they signal a "gradual release of responsibility" to students (Schulman & Payne, 2000, p. 18). This clearly defined view of a balanced literacy program, that includes many broad practices, is contradicted by other teachers and researchers.

Fitzgerald (1999) suggested that there is no one right or correct balanced literacy approach. She defined balance as a "philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained" (p. 100). She identified three broad categories of knowledge about reading. Local knowledge about reading involves specific knowledge and skills such as phonemic awareness, sight word bank, knowledge of sound-symbol relationships, and the ability to use phonics when decoding words. Global knowledge refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to what has been read. Affective knowledge refers to feelings and the positive attitude one holds toward reading and the desire to read. Fitzgerald pointed out that these three types of reading knowledge are not entirely separate, instead they become intertwined during most reading instruction. Fitzgerald stated that the teacher is not the sole source of knowledge in the classroom and that teachers make use of the variety of knowledge sources available to them. Multiple ways of learning is the third and final component of Fitzgerald's balanced philosophical perspective. She claimed that

there is no one best way for children to learn; therefore a balanced perspective is one that acknowledges and includes diverse instructional practices.

Teachers may use these three components of balance to guide any literacy approach, but "there are many faces of balance" (p. 105). When teachers consider the kinds of reading knowledge that are encouraged, the source of that knowledge, and the instructional practices used to acquire that knowledge, they are employing literacy instruction that is guided by a balanced philosophical perspective. Keep in mind that balanced literacy instruction will vary from year to year, class to class, week to week, student to student, and moment to moment. Balanced does not necessarily mean equal. Guided reading is one such instructional practice that enables teachers to balance the types of reading knowledge and knowledge sources that they support, as part of literacy instruction.

Guided Reading

As stated in the definition of guided reading in Chapter 1, guided reading is not a new approach to the teaching of reading. In a recent historical perspective on guided reading, Ford and Opitz (2008) connected guided reading to the directed reading activity advocated by Betts in his seminal work *Foundations of Reading Instruction* (1957). The sequence of steps recommended as part of the directed reading activity, shares common features with the beginning, middle, and final components of a guided reading lesson as described by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). The directed reading activity sequence includes (a) developing readiness, (b) guiding the first reading, (c) developing word-recognition skills and comprehension, (d) rereading, and (e) culminating activities (Betts, 1957). Ford and Opitz (2008) drew from the work of several prominent reading authorities since the

1950s to identify the emergence of guided reading and its subsequent development into the guided reading approach that is currently used by many teachers. Over the years, 11 approaches to guided reading have been found in the literature through an examination of the uses and definitions of guided reading. Through their historical overview and an in-press research article, Ford and Opitz have begun to address the lack of research on guided reading.

In my research, guided reading was examined from the perspective of Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers who were using guided reading. This grade limitation is not meant to suggest that teachers in Grade 4 or higher do not use guided reading, rather it was imposed by me to limit my research focus. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) wrote that guided reading is not static and will vary over time as readers grow in knowledge, skill, and experience. Similarly, the materials and instruction provided by teachers will also change depending of the instructional level of the students. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2007), "It is important for all students to receive guided reading instruction at a level that allows them to process texts successfully with teacher support" (p. 7). Therefore, it is possible that students in older grades (e.g., Grade 4 or 5) may require guided reading instruction that is similar to the instruction provided in earlier grades. In their continuum of literacy learning, Fountas and Pinnell identify curriculum goals and characteristics of texts, for Grades 3 to 8, that could be used to inform guided reading instruction with older students. In my research, during the process of data analysis, two distinct approaches to guided reading were identified as being used with Kindergarten to Grade 3 students. The approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), described in

Chapter 1, and the Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 1991) approach to guided reading were both used by the teachers who participated in the study.

Guided reading in the Four Blocks framework was originally labeled the "basal block" because basal readers were the main instructional material used (Cunningham et al., 1991). Guided reading is only one component of the Four Blocks framework and therefore is to be assigned one-quarter of the language arts instructional time. The other components are self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. The purposes of guided reading within the Four Blocks framework are to "expose children to a wide range of literature, teach comprehension strategies, and teach children how to read in materials that become increasingly more difficult" (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998, p. 653). The format of the lesson remains the same as the Fountas and Pinnell (1996) approach as there is a before, during and after reading component. The significant differences between the Four Blocks approach and the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell are in the selecting of text and the grouping of children during guided reading.

In classrooms using the Four Blocks approach the guided reading block begins with a whole class mini lesson, students then read the same text in a variety of flexible groups not based on ability, and return to the whole class format for discussion and closure. Depending on the reading level of the students, the during reading portion of guided reading may include shared reading practices, such as choral reading or echo reading, partner or individual reading, and small mixed ability groups (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000). In the Four Blocks approach, the reading instructional practice is conflated with the grouping approach. When addressing grouping, the creators of the Four Blocks framework are explicit of their intention to not include ability

grouping as part of the model (Cunningham et al., 1991). They suggest that students' inattention or immaturity are often used as justifications for the students' placement in ability based groups. They also suggest that movement between groups is based on group management more than students' reading abilities. Ability based groups, when used in this manner, do not adequately serve the needs of a classroom of diverse learners. For these reasons, Cunningham et al. advocate for shifting away from ability based guided reading groups.

In classrooms using the Four Blocks approach the level of text chosen alternates between grade level text and easier selections. Several other supports are used to address the needs of struggling readers; often texts are reread in different formats for different purposes; extra reading time is given for experience with easy books, and small, teacher-supported mixed-ability groups are used. The teacher is also expected to move around the room to visit each group or student and offer support as needed.

Both approaches to guided reading, Four Blocks and the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), are similar in the overall format of the guided reading lesson. The differences between these two approaches reflect divergent beliefs about how students learn how to read. The Fountas and Pinnell approach reflects the following beliefs: that students learn to read by reading text at their level among a small, academic homogeneous group of students, and that the purposes of guided reading are to help readers become independent, to use strategies appropriate to their reading abilities, and to question and construct meaning from the text. The Four Blocks approach reflects the following beliefs: that academic homogeneous groups are not conducive for students to successfully learn how to read and that the use of a variety of reading formats encourages

success for all readers; that the purpose of guided reading is to teach comprehension strategies, in addition to teaching children to read more difficult text and exposing students to a wide variety of genres (Cunningham et al., 1998). Those teachers who embrace a Four Blocks approach address specific reading strategies within the "working with words" block and promote at-level reading during the "self-selected reading" block. As is evident, teachers' knowledge and beliefs about how children learn to read can affect their pedagogical choices related to beginning reading instruction. Teachers' pedagogical choices may also be influenced by the particular school or school division that they teach in. Specific approaches can often be mandated or prescribed by administrators.

Knowledge and Beliefs

What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading? I began with this research question when designing this inquiry on guided reading. The following section presents research relevant to understanding the knowledge and beliefs held by teachers and how they might influence teachers' practice.

In educational research teachers' beliefs are often considered a "messy" and difficult subject to study, but according to Pajares (1992), teachers' beliefs influence the manner in which they act and teach. Interpretation of the term beliefs varies, as does the way of describing the beliefs of teachers. In his synthesis of educational research on teachers' beliefs, Pajares found many constructs related to beliefs. He identified a failure to adequately distinguish between beliefs and knowledge as the crux of the confusion.

According to Pajares (1992), beliefs provide "elements of structure, order, direction, and shared values" (p. 318) on a societal and cultural level. He stated, "People grow comfortable with their beliefs, and these beliefs become their 'self,' so that

individuals come to be identified and understood by the very nature of their beliefs, the habits, they own" (p. 318). Drawing from the work of many researchers, Pajares found a common factor in most definitions of belief and knowledge: "Belief is based on evaluation and judgement; knowledge is based on objective fact" (p. 313). Nespor (1987) indicated that beliefs or belief systems have stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge sources and that these affective components seem to operate independently of other forms of cognition associated with knowledge sources. Also relevant to this research, Nespor suggested that knowledge is stored in a systematic manner, by semantic categories or principles. In contrast, beliefs are comprised of episodes and are therefore stored in the memory based on personal experiences or events.

Because of this distinction between knowledge and beliefs, researchers cannot directly observe or measure beliefs; they must be inferred by actions. In order to examine teachers' beliefs, the researcher must use methods such as interviews, observations, or recordings, which include the teacher's actions, methods, or words. Also, teachers' beliefs may be more difficult than knowledge to bring out during interviews or discussions based on their storage in episodic memory and their strong affective component. In my research, an examination of teachers' beliefs and knowledge about guided reading focused on the topics of grouping, management and organization, dialogue and assessment.

Grouping

What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading lessons? Are these groupings dynamic and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year? These research questions assisted in guiding my

investigation of guided reading and in informing my development of the survey items and in turn, the focus group agenda. The following section discusses the research relevant to understanding grouping as a component of guided reading instruction.

In guided reading, dynamic grouping is typically used to determine student placement in reading groups. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) described several concerns about the dangers of grouping and noted how dynamic groups differ from traditional ability groups. To ensure that the negative effects of traditional ability groups are not encountered, they proposed "combining groupings by similar reading processes and text level" (p. 98) but only for the purpose of guided reading. They advocated the use of heterogeneous grouping in other reading activities and content areas. Dynamic grouping in this context is based on ability. Multiple sources of information (such as daily observations, running records, and regular and systematic individual assessments) should be used to determine temporary and flexible group placements.

The documented effects of traditional ability groupings are substantial, however few studies have examined flexible or dynamic grouping as described by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). In a review of the extensive research on grouping for literacy instruction, Paratore and Indrisano (2003) listed several negative factors associated with traditional ability grouping. These factors included children not making the expected academic gains (especially low-performing students), and students in the higher groups being offered more effective instruction as well as materials that were more challenging and interesting than materials presented to students in the lower groups. Students in low groups experienced low self-esteem and often developed negative attitudes toward learning and reading. Paratore and Indrisano also found evidence that did not support the myth of

higher ability groups making larger gains when working with groups of others of similar ability. Many of these negative effects can be eliminated with the use of appropriate assessment tools and close monitoring.

Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) used ongoing interviews and classroom observations to examine the grouping practices of four effective New Zealand teachers. These teachers had positive views of ability grouping, high percentages of students grouped by ability for reading instruction, and high achievement levels of student literacy. The researchers found that the teachers initially placed students in a group based on informal observations. Students were closely watched to see how they performed in their groups. Reading ability was the main factor influencing group membership, but organizational factors were noted as sources of frustration for teachers.

Group movements were analyzed over the course of the school year (Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). Teachers used different grouping strategies such as including members from other groups, combining groups, and permitting groups of one or two members. Teachers managed between 4 and 10 groups during the year. Moves between groups were frequent, occurring almost monthly. Running records were usually kept monthly and confirmed the informal observations recorded during group and individual activities. The researchers identified three reasons for the success of these groups, in addition to the flexible nature of grouping. High expectations were apparent in the classrooms; the teachers believed that all students could become independent as their abilities increased. The matching of books to students was regarded as important in ensuring students' success. Guided reading was only one part of language arts instruction; during other activities, students were grouped in a variety of ways.

The findings of the study by Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) supported the use of small-sized ability groups in guided reading, but it is difficult to determine whether the students in these groupings were successful compared to other grouping structures because there was no control group. This study illuminates the complex demands associated with flexible grouping. Teachers need to ensure that assessment is constant, consistent, and encompasses a variety of skills and situations. The management of groups and instruction requires a highly organized teacher with a solid knowledge base of reading instruction methods, students' needs, and the resources available for instruction. These skills were key factors as observed by the researchers.

Current research or reviews of research on student perceptions of grouping are lacking. Research on students' perceptions of grouping may lead to findings that may have been overlooked in other studies. Working with a large survey sample (549 students) of third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1997) found that mixed-ability groups and pairs were more successful than whole-class reading instruction, and that same-ability groups and working alone were liked least of the different reading instruction formats. Only those students who were considered poor readers were identified as needing same-ability groups. The students perceived that in mixed-ability groups, they could learn from one another, work cooperatively, and make better progress in reading. A caution of this study is that some students may not have been familiar with all the grouping formats and thus answered the question in a hypothetical manner. The implications of these findings are still encouraging for guided reading. If flexible or dynamic groupings (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) are used during

guided reading students may perceive these groupings as more favourable than same-ability groups.

In 1999, Elbaum, Moody, and Schumm found slightly different results when they conducted a similar study. Their study involved individual interviews with a smaller sampling (55 students) of third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders, which included 27 students with learning disabilities. Students reported being distracted by the noise level in the classroom when teachers were working with small groups. They also mentioned not being able to get help from the teacher while s/he was working with another small group. Many struggling readers identified mixed-ability groups and small groups as problematic. The reasons are their awareness of their need for help and inability to cope with the task. These studies, based on student perceptions of grouping, emphasize the management and organizational challenges that accompany implementation of a small group approach to guided reading in the classroom.

In surveying the results from the literature on grouping, Barr (1995) suggested that the most important finding is the inconclusiveness of the findings. She found that the materials, activities, and supporting environments offer more variability in terms of students' experiences and their perceptions of learning. Her suggestion that grouping is not as important as previously thought is worth noting, considering the relevance of grouping to guided reading instruction. The Four Blocks approach to guided reading (Cunningham et al., 1991) was developed as an alternative to the traditional reading groups based on ability, while, flexible homogeneous groupings form the basis of the guided reading approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). Barr also suggested that the most important consideration in grouping is the type of instruction that students

in lower achieving groups received, in comparison to their higher achieving classmates. According to Allington (1983), the instruction of low-achieving groups is typically characterized by lower-level activities with fewer opportunities for higher-level thinking activities. Students in these groups often spend less time on reading. Many of these negative consequences associated with homogeneous grouping can be overcome by instruction that is appropriate and thoughtful, sensitive and respectful toward students.

Management and Organization

How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading sessions? This research question reflects the important consideration of organization and management when planning effective guided reading instruction. As described in this section, the research findings in this area of guided reading contribute to developing a complete picture of guided reading instruction.

When teachers decide to organize their instruction around small groups in their classrooms, they increase the complexity of the classroom environment. The teacher needs to balance adapting instruction to suit the needs of the students with managing the dynamics of such a classroom (Reutzel, 2003). The choices available to teachers are straightforward. Students who are not in the guided reading group, work independently, without the support of the teacher. The teacher must decide whether students can work in learning centres or on learning activities either individually, with partners, or in groups. Classroom observation and interview data from studies of exemplary first-grade teaching remind us of the time that must be devoted to the teaching of rules and routines to achieve a successful learning situation when starting the school year. Teachers who use small-group guided reading must immediately begin to teach students to become

independent learners. Morrow et al. (1999) found that attention to the routines and rules and the effective management of learning centres paid dividends throughout the year by allowing teachers to devote their attention to small-group guided reading lessons during centre time. Bohn, Roehrig, and Pressley (2004) also found that effective primary-grade teachers attended to routines and procedures during the first days of school.

Guastello and Lenz (2007) found that time spent modelling, teaching routines, and building up to a longer work time were worth the effort in their guided reading kidstation model. The four kidstation model was implemented in an unreported number of Kindergarten to Grade 6 urban classrooms, with many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The researchers found that after an introductory period of six weeks, students were able to work for longer, uninterrupted periods of time and were able to complete more and higher quality work. At the end of a five-day cycle, students are required to communicate their learning to the class in the form of a presentation. The kidstations are independent literacy activities meeting the Standards for the English language arts identified by the National Council of Teachers of English (1996).

The kidstation model was developed in response to growing frustration with centre management and organization during guided reading (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). The kidstations differ only slightly from centres. The term centre refers to the permanent physical space and the materials needed for specific activities. Centres were not feasible in these urban classrooms because teachers could not find the space within their overcrowded classrooms. Kidstations are, in essence, portable centres that allow students to move around in the classroom and enable teachers to have centre type activities within a limited space (Guastello & Lenz). The kidstation model addressed the needs identified

by teachers unable to have permanent physical centres in their classrooms, however, the complex organizational demands created by these activities and the management demands associated with grouping students for guided reading instruction were not alleviated in this approach.

In-depth observations and teacher interviews were used in a first-grade classroom to understand the factors that influence ability group formation and maintenance (Eder, 1986). Although conducted over 20 years ago, several findings from the study are still worthy of consideration in current classrooms. The number and size of the groups were predetermined, based on the teacher's perceived management of the groups. Movement between groups was not based exclusively on ability, but also on the manageability of the group into which the student was moving. Further, this study reminds educators of the need for flexibility when grouping students and of the new management dynamics created by group movements.

The classroom management and organization of small ability-group guided reading presents many challenges, such as organizing meaningful literacy activities for the students without direct teacher supervision. In his research on effective reading instruction, Allington found that exemplary teachers used "far less of the low-level worksheet type tasks" (2002, p. 745). These low-level activities are easier for students with high levels of literacy, but for readers who struggle, this structure often develops into activities that are "busy work." Busy work has a negative connotation because it does not improve students' skills; it is simply intended to keep students busy. Attention given to the types of task is only one of the six T's of effective elementary reading

instruction identified by Allington. In addition to tasks, he identified time, texts, teaching, testing, and talk.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential component of guided reading instruction; it enables teachers to encourage and support readers as they work with text that offers some challenges. The following research question guided my investigation with respect to dialogue: How do teachers encourage and facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions? The following descriptions of studies involving dialogue and guided reading provided background for my research.

Allington (2002) observed that talk, one of the six T's of effective reading instruction, was controlled less by the teacher in exemplary elementary classrooms, providing students many opportunities to talk with their peers and with the teacher. Dialogue is seen as an integral aspect of classroom life because it occurs in all learning situations and is essential for learning. According to Hiebert and Fisher (1991), "all classroom events are embedded in oral language" (p. 143). Language provides the means for communicating the directions and expectations for the literacy task on one level, and provides the medium for structuring and restructuring meaning on a second and more profound level. Language enables the student to become an active participant in the making of meaning (Barnes, 1992).

In my study, the term dialogue was used to identify 'face-to-face,' oral interactions between two or more people. During discussions participants are co-producing meaning by taking up the ideas of others, and expanding and adding their own

knowledge as a result of the dialogue (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). Understanding others and being understood by others are the goals of discussion (Graves, 2004).

The benefits of students engaging in discussion are numerous. Almasi (1996) described many benefits in the cognitive, affective, and social domains, including but not limited to the following: (a) internalizing higher-level thinking processes, (b) developing social interaction skills, (c) working within the students' zone of proximal development, and (d) developing students' enjoyment of reading literature. Guided reading offers opportunities to engage students in discussions that can result in these benefits. However, this opportunity is often overlooked, as revealed by the following study.

In a small-scale study that involved recording guided reading sessions and analyzing transcripts in English primary classrooms over a 6-month period, Skidmore et al. (2003) found that teachers asked three kinds of questions during guided reading. The most common type of question had only one correct answer, like the teacher Initiate, student Response, teacher Evaluate sequence (IRE) described by Cazden (1988). Other types of questions asked by teachers involved longer and more detailed responses from students, but these were rare. According to Cazden, IRE is the questioning strategy most often used by Western teachers.

Skidmore et al. (2003) found that transcripts of teacher-student interactions during guided reading demonstrated that the teacher "rarely asks authentic questions, normally controls turn-taking by nominating the next speaker, keeps a tight grip on the topic of conversation, and does most of the talking" (p. 52). By taking a dominant role in the discussion, teachers can limit the discussional roles available to students. Students are able to respond to only the questions posed by the teacher. Similarly, when a teacher

controls the discussion, it may inhibit interactions among students. Although the name guided reading would suggest that the teacher guides the learning experience, it is possible for teachers to guide the discussion using authentic questions, to encourage students to do most of the talking, and to allow the conversation to develop in a natural manner. Teachers can move away from asking literal questions and have students pose their own questions. This change may encourage students to speak in a manner that more closely resembles a discussion and prevent the need for teachers to nominate the speaker. This type of dialogue during guided reading would more closely resemble exploratory talk. These researchers make a case for teacher and students to construct meaning collaboratively and to engage in exploratory talk as described above.

Based on feedback from student teachers that effective guided reading was not happening in primary classrooms, Fisher (2008) undertook a small-scale case study that examined the quality of guided reading in three British classrooms. The observations and interviews involved three teachers working with Years 2, 4, and 6. Fisher identified all three teachers as using three-quarters of the guided reading time listening to individual students read. All three teachers used the IRF (initiate, response, feedback) format, described by Cazden (1988), during their guided reading lessons. Hobsbaum (2002) stated, “Hearing children read individually is necessary when recording their behaviours and analyzing their skills, but it is not a way of teaching” (as cited in Fisher, 2008, p. 25). Fisher noted a lack of engagement and personal connection with the text, despite the opportunities to promote such critical elements during the guided reading lessons. Although this study does not allow for generalizations due to its small sample size, it does mirror the findings of the previous study where opportunities to engage students in

relevant and meaningful discussions were lost. Guided reading discussions, as described in both studies, were not opportunities for students to talk about books, rather they were opportunities for students to answer literal level questions or read orally for the teacher, perhaps for assessment purposes.

Assessment Issues

How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction? What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed? These research questions, as identified in Chapter One, focused on assessment issues related to guided reading instruction. This section describes research in the field of assessment that is relevant to guided reading. Assessment is an important component of effective guided reading instruction, particularly, running records.

Running records are the recordings of students' oral reading behaviours as they read a text (Clay, 1993). Running records are one assessment tool that teachers can use to monitor students' growth in reading ability. Teachers' use of on-going assessments of students' reading skills and behaviours are essential to inform and enhance guided reading instruction. These assessment can be used to inform students, parents and administrators; to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching practices or programs; to determine student placement in groups or programs; and to plan instruction. Paris and Carpenter (2003) noted that the connection between assessment and instruction was strong in the primary grades because of the variability of beginning readers as demonstrated by the range of student reading levels in primary classrooms. The range of reading levels in the primary grades can be linked to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). If teachers are to scaffold students within their ZPD and insure that

they are providing students with the level of text appropriate to their ability levels, then teachers need to be knowledgeable of students' skill levels. Teachers need to be aware of the range of students' ZPD and to provide support as needed. This variability or range of reading levels makes the need for assessment, and in particular the use of running records, an essential component of guided reading instruction.

Running Records

Running records were created by Marie Clay, a widely known and well-respected educator in the field of emergent literacy, as one of several systematic observation tasks. These tasks were designed "to make a teacher attend to how children work at learning in a classroom" (1993, p. 80). She distinguished between standardized tests and the observational tasks that she created. "Standardised tests are indirect ways of observing children's progress. They are suitable for reporting the behaviours of groups but cannot compare with the observation of learners at work for providing the information needed to design sound instruction" (p. 7). The term running records refers to the recording of students' oral reading behaviours as they read a text. Clay (2000) stated that the "prime purpose of a Running Record is to understand more about how children are using what they know to get the messages of the text" (p. 8) and this understanding can be accomplished by having students read any text. She stated that "students who are proficient readers can be assessed for a different purpose – to see how they read a new, unseen text revealing a level of achievement" (p. 8). The use of unfamiliar or benchmark books, unseen text reserved for assessment purposes, are often advocated in many assessment kits designed for classroom teachers (Barrett, Littleford, & Watson, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2008; Reading A-Z, 2008) and are similar to running records in their

administering, scoring, and analyzing. Clay described the conventions for recording and scoring running records, the procedures for calculating the error rate and analyzing the running record; for a more detailed explanation see Clay (2000).

Running records are often advocated in the literature published for teachers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hebert, 2004; Paratore & McCormack, 2005). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) described running records as "the most important tool in guided reading" (p. 78) and as "quick, practical, and highly informative" (p. 89). Hebert (2004) has compared running records to a "window into the brain" (p. 31) of young readers and considers them to be one of the most effective tools for assessing students' reading skills. Her article identified the "general" attitude of teachers who believe that using running records is a time-consuming practice - a common criticism of running records (Paris & Carpenter, 2003).

Johnston and Clay (as cited in Paratore & McCormack, 2005) noted the benefits of "keeping a graphic record" (p. 72) of students' oral reading. Such graphic records, of which running records are one example, help "the teacher obtain instructionally relevant information at a glance; provide useful data that allows the teacher to compare earlier and later performances of oral reading behaviours and aids record keeping in documenting the changes and planning instruction" (p. 72). Paratore and McCormack drew upon the work of Cooper and Kiger, who noted further reasons to justify recording oral-reading behaviours. Their reasons included allowing the teacher to make decisions regarding student grouping and text difficulty, and sharing information with other stakeholders such as students, parents and teachers. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested that running records add to the teacher's knowledge of the reading process. They assist the teacher in

developing strategies for all readers, and contribute to evaluation of the effectiveness of the guided reading program.

Survey research conducted with members of the International Reading Association, who described themselves as reading teachers, found that 62% identified running records as an "important assessment tool" (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002, p. 739). The results of one Ontario study cannot be generalized, but Ross's findings (2004) supported the advocacy for running records that is apparent in the literature. Ross compared provincial achievement results of Grade 3 students in 39 schools that were introduced to the use of running records with the same achievement results of Grade 3 students from 34 schools that used action research as an alternative school improvement vehicle. He set out to investigate whether using running records to guide instruction could result in improved student-literacy achievement. His results concluded that running records "contributed to higher achievement in reading and writing" (p. 192) based on the higher achievement results of the schools that were introduced to running records compared to the others in his sample that were not.

Few studies have examined how teachers use running records in the classroom. In his research, Afflerbach (1995) drew upon the experiences of 10 classroom teachers to identify their assessment practices. These teachers worked in schools with high ESL student populations. The teachers said that effective assessment was "essential" to their instructional programs. Running records and anecdotal records or observations were among the assessment tools identified by the teachers (Afflerbach). The teachers used running records as a base for their educational decisions and a guide for their teaching by identifying the strengths and needs of developing readers. Similarly, anecdotal notes were

used to document growth in reading as observed by the teacher. Anecdotal notes were used to tailor instruction to meet the needs of the student and were identified as a versatile assessment tool because they could be adapted by the teacher to meet simple and complex assessment purposes. Although the results of this study are encouraging, the sample size was small and the findings cannot be used to generalize the effectiveness of running records or anecdotal notes. Further, the teachers' instructional practices were not identified or connected to their assessment choices. It does, however, justify the demand for large-scale studies that focus on the use of running records and other assessment tools used in primary classrooms in connection to teachers' instructional practices. Assessment demands can become more complex when working with students who do not speak the language of instruction. Students who are learning to speak English present unique considerations in most aspects of instruction and therefore, these learners are addressed separately in the following section.

English as a Second Language Learners

During the data analysis of the focus group transcripts a finding connected to the use of guided reading with English as a second language (ESL) learners was found. Some of the teachers in this study, who worked with ESL students, were concerned with the comprehension demands that emerged during guided reading instruction. As a result, a brief description of some of the research that involves ESL students is reviewed below.

Instruction that involves students whose first language is not the language of instruction can be even more demanding for teachers and students. A French immersion program (where students are proficient in English but receive instruction in French) is one example of an instructional context involving second-language learners. A second

example involves students who attend schools where English is the language of instruction, but the students speak a different first or home language when outside of school. The levels of language proficiency of ESL students create special learning situations for students and teachers, especially during situations, such as guided reading, when dialogue forms the basis for instruction.

Cummins, as noted by Purdy (2008), has identified two dimensions of language proficiency that are relevant for students whose first language is not English. The first is "basic interpersonal communication skills" (p. 45) or BICS, which includes the day-to-day skills necessary to communicate. These skills usually develop over one or two years for ESL students. The second dimension of language proficiency identified by Cummins is "cognitive academic language proficiency" (p. 45) or CALP, which includes the more complex language used during content-area instruction in classrooms. The nature of CALP, which includes markers of language, figurative language, idioms, and content area vocabulary, takes longer to develop for ESL students, perhaps even five to seven years. The identification of these types of language proficiency adds an extra dimension to guided reading discussions and reading instruction. Many ESL students may have acquired the basic interpersonal communication skills identified by Cummins and are able to participate in discussions during guided reading. However, these students may not have mastered cognitive academic language proficiency, thus limiting their involvement in discussions and creating situations where ESL students' participation in guided reading discussions is limited, despite their ability to converse fluently on a social level.

Purdy draws upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1934/1978) and Au's (1998) definition of the social constructivist paradigm to examine the social nature of learning

and its importance for all students in the structuring of meaningful discussions. "Questioning, teaching vocabulary, inviting collaborative talk, and adopting a culturally sensitive point of view" are four ways suggested by Purdy (2008, p. 46) that teachers can improve the language and literacy development of ESL students. Guided reading instruction offers a setting in which to include these suggestions into teaching practice. Au (1998) used the work of Cummins to create a framework that asks how educators can modify their reading instruction to benefit students from diverse backgrounds who speak a language different from the language of instruction. This framework suggests that educators need to address the following areas: "the goal of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods, and assessment" (p. 297).

In addressing reading instruction for second-language learners, Lenters (2004) identified similarities and differences in first- and second-language reading instruction. The requirements for both types of learner include: (a) an understanding of the alphabetic principle, (b) decoding skills, (c) development of sight vocabulary, (d) fluency, (e) development of metacognition, (f) text matching reader's needs, and (g) engagment in extensive reading (p. 331). The particular limitations of second-language learners include text structures, background knowledge, vocabulary constraints, and sound and symbol mismatches. These problems must be addressed in guided reading if children are to succeed in reading. Lenters made several suggestions to solve these problems during reading instruction, while advocating that second-language learners need instruction in *both* languages to ensure proficiency in both languages.

Conclusion

The body of literature on many aspects of guided reading demonstrates that more research is needed to target the guided reading instructional practices of teachers. Several of the instructional areas discussed in this chapter provided few research findings that targeted guided reading specifically in relation to these instructional areas. Much of the research presented in this chapter is positive. Indeed, guided reading is included as a component of balanced literacy approaches and identified as a component of effective instruction. The negative aspects associated with grouping students have been well documented in the past and few recent studies have examined grouping for guided reading instruction. Some of the organizational and management challenges associated with guided reading have not yet been addressed in a research context. Thus, there is limited research that addresses the complexities involved in the managing and organizing of guided reading instruction. Although current research on assessment is available, connections between assessment practices and guided reading instruction are few. Each instructional area, that was identified in my research questions, has been discussed and relevant research findings have been presented. In the following chapter, I describe the methodological basis for my study and how I attempted to answer the research questions identified in Chapter One.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The focus of my research was to explore guided reading from the perspective of primary grade teachers, who indicated that they use guided reading within their classrooms. The research questions stated in Chapter One reflect the key instructional issues of guided reading that formed the basis of the inquiry. This study explored the sampled teachers' perspectives on the role of knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment in relation to guided reading. In this chapter I outline the methodology and research procedures used in my mixed methods research design. I describe the research context, the procedures for securing participants, and the specific methods of data collection and analysis. I also identify the measures that were used for the purposes of data verification and the concerns about researcher bias.

Research Design

"Research design is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of study" (Yin, 2003, p. 19). My research design used a mixed methods approach as both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to examine guided reading. During the data collection component of the research three principles outlined by Yin were followed to help increase the reliability and validity of the study. These included collecting data from multiple sources, survey and focus groups, to allow for triangulation. The second principle included keeping a database of the raw data separate from the findings of data analysis. The third principle involved creating a strong chain of evidence that would allow for external observers to

follow the path of data collection and analysis. If the details and decisions made during data collection and analysis are transparent then an external observer is able to follow the path of the researcher and able to replicate the investigative procedures and potentially the findings of the researcher. These three principles were followed during data collection and analysis and the following sections describe the details and decisions that were made during the course of this research.

Quantitative research has traditionally involved the researcher using postpositivist perspectives. Knowledge claims are developed using strategies such as cause and effect thinking, measurement, theory and hypothesis testing, and reduction of research to specific variables (Creswell, 2003). In quantitative research, experiments are often conducted with few variables and many cases. According to Creswell (1998, 2003), in the past this type of research was considered to be more rigorous than qualitative research. Quantitative research involves closed questions, numerical data, statistical applications, and the testing of hypotheses, and the use of standards of reliability and validity (Creswell, 2003). Its purpose is to answer specific questions or test hypotheses by measuring attitudes and rating behaviours, thus relying on empirical methods to produce generalizations. In contrast, the purpose of qualitative research is to explore the many dimensions of a problem or issue in its natural setting.

Qualitative research has a long and distinguished history; Flick (2006) noted that qualitative methods as being used as early as 1928 by psychologist William Wundt. Flick describes four features that are essential to qualitative research. The first feature addresses the appropriateness of methods and theories selected. The second feature acknowledges the multiple perspectives of participants and their diversity. The third

feature acknowledges the reflexivity of the researcher and the research. The final feature identifies the variety of approaches and methods available in the field of qualitative research. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker; someone who is able to take on multiple roles and jobs to represent a complex situation. The tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are in constant flux as the bricolage is being created. This comparison highlights the aesthetic component present in qualitative research.

Qualitative research is characterized by an interpretive or naturalistic approach to exploring a societal or human problem (Creswell, 1998). Erickson (2004) stated, "Qualitative research is concerned with the identification of *qualities* (from *qualitas*) – the kinds of entities that exist in a particular local social world or 'local community of practice'" (p. 487). The qualitative researcher "collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data" (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Knowledge claims are based on constructivist or participatory perspectives. The results of qualitative research are often presented in the form of a narrative that attempts to create a holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998, 2003). The goals of qualitative research draw from a variety of research methods and strategies to present an in-depth understanding of the topic being studied while acknowledging the effects of the researcher's personal history on the topic. The various research methods and strategies used in qualitative research draw from five traditions of qualitative research identified by Creswell (1998) which include biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

In my research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in a mixed methods approach. According to Creswell (2003), mixed methods approaches "probably originated in 1959, when Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study validity of psychological traits" (p. 15). Since then, researchers have used mixed methods with great success and mixed methods research continues to evolve; in the editorial of the first issue of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* the editors identify their belief that a mixed methods definition has not yet been clearly set (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The editors identified inconsistencies in the ways that researchers are defining their mixed methods approach. Some researchers use mixed methods to refer to the separate collection and data analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, while other researchers reserve the term mixed methods to refer to research, data collection and analysis, that has integrated both types of data. In an effort to be inclusive, Tashakkori and Creswell use the term mixed methods to refer to studies where "the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry" (p. 4). With the field of mixed methods still evolving, several areas need continued exploration and further development. Researchers also use the terms multi-method, convergence, integrated, or combined (Creswell); in this document, the term mixed methods is used.

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) there are areas where mixed methods approaches appear to be superior to research based on only quantitative or qualitative approaches. The first area involves research questions that have confirmatory and exploratory aspects. Both types of inquiry can be addressed within a single mixed

methods research design. The second area involves researchers being able to provide stronger and better inferences when methods are mixed in such a way that they complement the strengths and do not overlap any weaknesses inherent in the other method. For example, combining case studies with surveys allows researchers to cover depth and breadth on a single topic. The third area that mixed methods research may have a perceived advantage over single method research is in the presentation of diversity, different voices and perspectives. In using more than one data collection method there is greater potential for researchers to access these multiple perspectives.

In mixed methods research, knowledge claims tend to be based on pragmatic grounds and the researcher operates under the assumption that collecting different types of data will provide the best method to understand the phenomenon being studied. Creswell, Clark, Gutman, and Hanson (2003) have identified six types of mixed methods research designs based on implementation, priority, stage of integration, and theoretical perspective. The six types are sequential explanatory, sequential exploratory, sequential transformative, concurrent triangulation, concurrent nested, and concurrent transformative. The mixed methods approach used in my research was a sequential explanatory design, the most straightforward of the six designs, with priority being given to the qualitative data. The qualitative data collection and analysis follow the quantitative data collection and analysis.

Although this type of mixed methods design typically gives priority to the quantitative data, Creswell et al. (2003) identify a variant of the design where priority is given to the qualitative data. My design exemplified this type of variant. The straightforward nature of the sequential explanatory design is one of its main strengths as

it is easy to implement because of the discrete steps. Reporting the results of this type of design can also be made easier by reporting in two separate phases with a final discussion that combines the results (Creswell et al.). These distinct phases are also associated with the main weakness of this design: the length of time required to collect data in two phases. In my research, the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated during phases of data analysis, as the qualitative data comprised the bulk of the collected data. A survey, comprised of open-ended and closed questions was used to gather initial data on the research questions that addressed guided reading. Both the qualitative and quantitative data from the survey were analyzed and the results were used to create questions that were further explored during the focus groups. Table 2 displays the connections between the research questions and the survey items and focus group questions. These connections are further explained in the section on data analysis.

Table 2

Research Questions in Relation to Survey Items and Focus Group Questions

Research Question	Survey Items	Focus Group Questions
f) What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading?	KB1, KB4, KB6, KB7, KB8, KB9, KB10, G9, A2,	KB1, KB2, KB3, KB4
g) What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading lessons? Are these groupings dynamic and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year?	G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, , G6, G7, G8, G9	G1, G2, G3
h) How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading sessions?	OM1, OM2, OM3, OM4	OM1, OM2, OM3, OM4, OM5, OM6
i) How do teachers encourage and	D1, D2, D3,	D1, D2, D3, D4

	facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions?	D4, D5, D6	
j)	How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction? What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed?	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7	A1, A2, A3

One of the major benefits of mixed methods research, as identified by Creswell (2003), is the resulting triangulation of data sources. Researchers have identified biases inherent with each method and believe that by combining methods these biases can be limited or canceled. The mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study increases the complexity of the study and also increases the need for clear and explicit data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell). This attention has led to an increase in the amount of literature available on mixed methods research.

Research Procedures

Research Context

Once approval for my study was received from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, I sent the Superintendent of the targeted school division a letter (see Appendix A) seeking permission to contact primary teachers within the school division to invite them to participate in my study. The letter indicated the level of teacher involvement, identified the goals of the study, described how teachers' consent would be acquired, and explained how teachers' identity would be protected. Once permission was granted survey packages were sent to all primary (Kindergarten – Grade 3) language arts teachers in the school division.

The research project took place within a single rural school division located in northern Alberta, Canada. The school division covers a large geographic area that

encompasses small towns and communities and has approximately 3,400 students, 200 certified teachers, and 170 support staff in approximately 20 schools. The schools range in size from 10 to 400 students.

The research focused on primary grade teachers who reported using guided reading as a component of their reading instruction. Information gained from the divisional web site was used to identify these teachers from individual schools. The divisional AISI (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement) resource team was also contacted by e-mail to identify language arts teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 3, to ensure all the teachers who met the criteria received a survey and a focus group invitation.

Data Collection Tools and Methods

Multiple sources of data are considered to be a strength of mixed methods research. Anfara, Brown, and Magione (2002) suggested that by making the details and decisions made during the research process transparent, the validity of the research is increased. The following sections identify the data collection tools that were utilized and the data analysis methods that were employed in this research. The details and decisions made during the research process are explained to ensure transparency for the reader. Data sources for this research included a survey and transcripts of focus group discussions. The following sections describe each method of data collection and the specific procedures that were followed to obtain data using these methods.

Survey.

Surveys are a common "mode of empirical research in a wide variety of social sciences disciplines" (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983, p. xv) and are one of two types

of inquiry that Creswell (2003) associates with quantitative inquiry. Surveys have been conducted in a basic manner since people began asking questions about people, communities, and populations (Rossi et al., 1983). Survey development and sophistication became a focus after World War I, and since then marketing research greatly influenced the evolution of survey research (Rossi et al.).

My research methods included the use of a survey, which is defined as "a way of obtaining self-reported information about the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviors, or other characteristics of a population" (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, & Booth-Kewley, 1997, p. 1). Most surveys share three common characteristics (Fowler, 1993): the purpose is to obtain numerical data or statistics on the population being studied; the method of data collection is to ask people questions; and the population surveyed is only a sample of the actual population. The term survey is often used to refer to the actual instrument used to gather data and the process of gathering the data.

The evolution of survey research has resulted in five general phases or steps associated with creating a survey (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). The first phase involves determining the purpose of the investigation, deciding if a survey is the most effective method of gathering information, and then designing a plan. The second phase is the development of the survey. The third phase involves identifying respondents and administering the survey. The fourth phase includes organizing the returned surveys and analyzing the data. The fifth and final phase involves translating the data and results into a document or sharing results with the respondents or other interested parties. These phases were followed in this study to ensure that the many aspects of survey construction, administration, and analysis were not overlooked.

Writing the survey items is considered to be the most important aspect of the survey process. Edwards et al. (1997) refer to the items as "the building blocks of the survey" (p. 24). Open-ended or unstructured items were included on my survey to enable respondents to answer the questions using their own frame of reference. A survey comprised of solely open-ended questions would have taken a considerable amount of time for respondents to complete and may have negatively affected the number of respondents who completed the survey (Edwards et al.). For these reasons, my survey also included items to be answered using a Likert scale.

The Likert scale is the most popular type of the widely used rating scales and according to Edwards et al. (1997) nearly everyone has rated something using a Likert scale. One area of concern when using a Likert scale is whether or not to include a midpoint or neutral point. Edwards et al. give several strong justifications for using a neutral point. The most relevant justification for my research was that the midpoint allowed respondents, who held a neutral viewpoint, to accurately express their feelings; by removing the midpoint respondents would have had to choose between a positive or negative response and potentially give an answer that was untrue or inaccurate.

A criticism of Likert scales has been that their success is based solely on the quality of the survey items: if the items are poor, then the responses may be inaccurate and the survey a failure as a result (Anderson, Basilevsky, & Hum, 1983). A second criticism of Likert scales is their lack of reproducibility; it is possible to obtain the same overall score on a survey using Likert scales, even when giving a wide variety of different responses (Anderson et al.). This criticism is not applicable to the use of Likert scales in my research as respondents' total scores on Likert scale items were not

calculated or used for data analysis purposes. A third concern with Likert scales involves respondents interpreting the descriptors differently. Further, surveys with predetermined responses limit the options available to respondents and they may not be able to express their opinions accurately within the responses available or offer supporting details. A final drawback of Likert scales, and surveys in general, is that respondents may give answers that they think are correct or answers that they believe are desired by the person or organization administering the survey.

For my survey, a small number of initial questions were generated to capture demographic information (Edwards et al., 1997). The majority of survey items addressed the instructional issues that I deemed essential to understanding guided reading: knowledge and beliefs, assessment, grouping, management and organization, and dialogue. Survey items were grouped in sections by instructional topic. Many suggestions for writing 'good' survey items were taken into account during the construction of the survey items. These suggestions included, "ask what you want to know, keep items simple and short, ask only one topic per item, avoid ambiguous or vague questions, use appropriate language, and be specific" (p. 31).

The survey was field-tested using a sample of 11 teachers. These teachers were graduate students who were enrolled in a Master's program or who had recently completed a Master's degree. They were selected to offer feedback from the perspective of practitioners and researchers. They were asked to review the survey and offer descriptive feedback on the individual items. This process resulted in minor changes to several survey items to improve clarity. Once revised, the survey was not returned to these teachers a second time. The final survey was six pages in length, included six

sections, and asked participants to respond to 42 items, 31 of which were open-ended (see Appendix B).

The response rate is an important consideration with survey research because if few individuals respond, the results of the survey become unreliable. Babbie suggested that a response rate of 50% is "adequate," but a response rate of 70% is "very good" (as cited in Edwards et al., 1997, p. 92). Suggestions for maximizing response rates include: repeated contact and follow-ups, incentives, personalized cover letters, and return envelopes (Edwards et al.). A small incentive, an individual package of herbal tea, was included with each survey to encourage respondents to complete and return the survey. A survey cover letter, explaining the reasons for the survey and providing contact information should participants have questions related to the survey, was also included (see Appendix C). The cover letter also explained to the teachers that the surveys were anonymous and by returning the survey they were implying their consent to participate in the study. Once a survey was returned it was not possible to remove it from data analysis because the surveys were not numbered or tracked in any way.

The survey was sent to all 50 primary grade level language arts teachers within the school division using a courier service. Approximately 27 surveys were returned to me, using the school division courier service, resulting in a response rate of 54%. The rural school division where the research took place is small, therefore surveys were not numbered or tracked by school as this information may have identified teachers to the researcher. An e-mail reminder was sent to all teachers approximately two weeks later to help increase the number of returned surveys.

Focus groups.

Focus groups originated in Columbia University in the early 1940's and were first known as 'focused' interviews (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Focus group interviews became popular in the early 1950's as a way to provide data concerning a concrete or recurrent experience (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Traditional focus groups have been popular in the fields of marketing and advertising since their inception; they have become popular in areas such as education, health, communication, and psychology in the last two decades.

A variety of definitions can be found for focus groups, however Vaughn et al. (1996) have outlined the core elements of focus groups. A focus group is a small gathering of 6 to 12 people from a targeted population, and usually the participants' backgrounds are homogeneous. Their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, ideas, feelings, perceptions, and points of view are desired on a specific topic. The focus group is led by a moderator whose goal is to obtain information using prepared questions and probes. The data collected during a focus group is not generalizable to a larger population.

Social constructivism, as identified as part of the theoretical foundations of guided reading in Chapter Two, is also fundamental to the use of focus groups. This data collection method acknowledges the social and constructive aspects that underlie all learning. As teachers came together to discuss their beliefs, opinions, and experiences concerning guided reading it was important to recognize that their discussions may have led to unique findings that may not have been possible had individual interviews been used to gather data. It was also possible that through discussion the teachers would have clarified their own understandings of guided reading or encountered ideas that created

dissonance and have led them to rethink their guided reading practices. It was my desire that the focus group participants would come away from the focus groups sessions with new understandings on guided reading, questions about their own practice, or ideas that they would want to experiment with. The social constructivist nature of the focus group sessions may have helped to achieve these goals.

Krueger (1994) succinctly differentiated between interviews and focus groups: "the focus group is not a collection of simultaneous individual interviews but rather a group discussion where the conversation flows because of the nurturing of the moderator" (p. 100). The role of the moderator is thus very important and can influence the quality of the discussion. The focus groups in this study were specifically 'postsurvey focus groups' as the purpose was to provide clarification and explanation to the survey responses (Edwards et al., 1997) and further explore the research questions that guided this inquiry. During the focus groups I was also able to highlight and explore trends and gaps found during the data analysis of the survey results. The survey was used to provide a breadth of data on guided reading, while the focus group sessions provided depth on the key instructional topics being examined.

Survey respondents were asked to voluntarily participate in the focus groups. To ensure anonymity, a separate invitation to share their knowledge and experience through focus group sessions was included in the survey package to be returned separate from the survey (see Appendix D). This invitation included details about the nature of a focus group, topics to be discussed, and the reasons for the focus groups. A follow up e-mail invitation was sent approximately two weeks later. Those who volunteered to participate

in the focus groups were contacted by e-mail with the specific details of each meeting approximately one-week before the focus group took place.

Krueger suggested "the ideal size of a focus group typically falls between 6 and 9 participants" (1994, p. 78). Vaughn et al. (1996) also recommended that more than one focus group be conducted. The exact number of focus groups used should take into account the purpose of the research and should also be a sufficient number of groups to find repetition and patterns among the responses. The size and number of focus groups in this study was limited by the willingness of teachers to participate. Given that 19 teachers volunteered to participate in the focus group, three focus group sessions organized by geographical locations in the division were held. One focus group was held in an eastern location, a second focus group was held in a western location, and a third focus group was held in a northern location within the division.

The focus group agenda (see Appendix E) was sent out to participants several days before the date on which the focus group was scheduled to take place. The focus group agenda was developed based on the analysis of the survey data. The data from each returned survey were combined by item and examined for commonalities and patterns. This analysis involved creating a table for each survey item (see Table 5 as an example). For example, many respondents identified themselves as teachers who use a Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 1991) approach to reading instruction, an approach that advocates whole class guided reading instruction that focuses on comprehension (Cunningham et al., 1991). Based on these data a focus group question was generated that asked participants to address the differences between the Four Blocks approach and the small group guided reading approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). Similarly,

when teachers were asked to define guided reading, a wide variety of answers were given on the survey. As a result, a focus group question was generated to get at the main purpose of guided reading and the importance of reading strategies, as some teachers distinguished between decoding, comprehension, and fluency strategies and others did not.

After each survey item was examined individually some comparisons were made between related items. For example, when Knowledge and Beliefs survey item #2, #4, and Information About You survey item #1 were compared, the findings revealed that respondents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with the size of their guided reading groups did not have a match between their perceived ideal size of a group and their actual group sizes. A question was then generated to ask teachers what was preventing them from having a match between their perceived ideal group size and the actual size of their guided reading groups. The survey analysis resulted in the generation of 20 questions, addressing six areas of guided reading instruction, on the focus group agenda (see Appendix E). These focus group questions enabled me to gather data related to my research questions from the perspective of the teachers who used guided reading.

The focus groups were scheduled to last 120 minutes; this time period was considered acceptable because it set a limit to the time commitment and it also communicated to the participants that I valued their time and contributions (Seidman, 2006; Vaughn et al., 1996). The first and second focus groups took place in the evening in staffrooms within the elementary school that was located in the area. The third and final focus group took place in the home of one of the participants because the community is small with few options for organizing such events. Also, the third focus

group occurred directly following the end of the school day and the staffroom would have been busy and unsuitable for conducting or recording the focus group session. The setting of the focus groups was an important consideration in the planning of the focus groups. The location needed to be conducive for audio and video recordings, yet large enough to accommodate the group and small enough to encourage interaction among participants seated in a circular arrangement (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

The environments selected for the focus group discussions were not visually distracting as this type of environment may have resulted in drawing participants' attention and interest away from the discussion. Food and snacks were offered to participants as a way to help create a relaxing atmosphere where they were encouraged to visit and connect with each other (Kreuger, 1994). My intention was to make the focus group a positive experience for all participants.

Similar to interviews, focus groups are data gathering procedures that have the potential to be heavily influenced by the biases of the moderator or interviewer. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the flexible and adaptable nature of the interviewer as a positive 'instrument' that can adjust to situations in a constructive manner. As the moderator of the focus group I was conscious of my efforts to create an atmosphere of acceptance for all viewpoints (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). It was also my role to take control of the discussion, if necessary, to ensure responses were offered from all members. On several occasions, I redirected the discussion back to the focus group agenda and I also directed questions toward specific participants who spoke less frequently than other participants. A script was read to participants at the start of each focus group session (see Appendix F). The purpose of the script was to ease possible

anxieties and to start all three focus group sessions in a relaxed and informal manner. Also included in the script was a reminder to the teachers that their participation in the focus group session was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the session at any time. I also explained to participants that their identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms. Guidelines were included in the script to inform participants about details of conducting the focus group including the speaking order, disagreeing agreeably, and staying on topic (Vaughn et al., 1996). Following the reading of the script all participants were given a letter of consent to sign (see Appendix G).

The focus group discussions were transcribed using both audio and video recordings. The video recording was utilized as a second audio recording to ensure complete transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis component utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. Drawing on the work of Hartley, Kohlbacher (2006) identified an iterative or repetitive process, which involves data collection and analysis; these components are developed collectively and thereby strengthen the findings because they are grounded in empirical evidence. In my research, the data collected at the beginning of the study and the analysis of that data were used to guide the direction of future data collection. By analyzing data throughout the research process I was able to introduce and address new issues or ideas as they occurred during data collection. This process specifically involved using the data gathered from surveys to inform the agenda for the focus group sessions. The qualitative data and quantitative data were organized based on the instructional topics being examined: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and

assessment. The data collection methods of survey and focus groups were selected because they allowed me to gather data, from the perspective of teachers who were using guided reading, to answer the research questions that I used to guide my inquiry. The focus of this research, as stated in Chapter One, was to examine multiple areas of guided reading instruction from the perspective of practitioners.

Quantitative Analysis

The response rate was calculated based on the number of returned surveys. Of the 50 surveys distributed, 27 surveys were completed and returned generating a response rate of 54%. As completed surveys were received they were first examined for irregularities such as incomplete responses and unanswered questions and then a number was printed on the top right hand corner. The numbering of surveys allowed me to start transferring the data to computer documents right away. The numbers were also helpful during data analysis in situations where something seemed irregular, such as inconsistent responses; I was able to quickly go back to the survey to confirm the response.

The quantitative data from the demographic survey items were analyzed using the descriptive statistical measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode (Howell, 2004). These measures present a graphical representation of the data. Table 3 was created to demonstrate the range of teaching experience of the respondents.

Table 3

Survey Respondents' Range of Teaching Experience

Years Teaching	Survey #	Total years
1st	1, 20, 23, 24, 27	5
2nd	25	2
3rd	7	3
4th		
5th		
6th		
7th		
8th		
9th	14	9
10th	3, 16, 17, 18, 19	50
11th	4, 22	22
12th		
13th		
14th		
15th	11, 12	30
16th		
17th		
18th		
19th	26	19
20th	21	20
21st	13	21
22nd	2	22
23rd	6	23
24th		
25th	9	25
26th		
27th		
28th		
29th	10	29
30th	15	30
31st		
32nd		
33rd	5	33
34th		
35th		
36th	8	36

Mode: 1st & 10th Year Teachers
Mean: 14.03 Years
Median: 17.5 Years

The analysis of the quantitative survey data did not involve calculating a total score for each respondent based on their responses. The focus of the research was to examine multiple areas of guided reading instruction in classrooms and not to rate teachers or assign values to their responses. For items that used a Likert scale, I was able to create tables that displayed the 5-point scale and the number of times each response was chosen (see Appendix H). When relevant, I also included the survey number to indicate which respondents answered in a similar manner. For example in Table 4, responses to survey items #6 and #7 under the section Knowledge and Beliefs were compared. The shaded areas show the survey respondents who answered both items with the same response.

Table 4

Knowledge and Beliefs Question #6 and #7 Comparison

Survey #	Guided reading is an important component of my literacy instruction.	Survey #	I use guided reading to model, demonstrate, and explicitly teach reading strategies.
12	5 Strongly Agree	12	5 Strongly Agree
2	5 Strongly Agree	2	5 Strongly Agree
4	5 Strongly Agree	4	5 Strongly Agree
5	5 Strongly Agree	5	5 Strongly Agree
21	5 Strongly Agree	21	5 Strongly Agree
22	5 Strongly Agree	22	5 Strongly Agree
8	5 Strongly Agree	11	5 Strongly Agree
19	5 Strongly Agree		
	Total 8		Total 7
6	4 Agree	6	4 Agree
7	4 Agree	7	4 Agree
9	4 Agree	9	4 Agree
17	4 Agree	17	4 Agree
16	4 Agree	16	4 Agree
18	4 Agree	14	4 Agree
11	4 Agree	8	4 Agree
13	4 Agree	1	4 Agree
		19	4 Agree
		20	4 Agree
		10	4 Agree
	Total 8		Total 11
14	3 Neither		
20	3 Neither		
10	3 Neither		
1	3 Neither		
	Total 4		
23	2 Disagree	23	2 Disagree
		13	2 Disagree
	Total 1		Total 2
		18	1 Strongly Disagree
			Total 1

Note. No response on surveys #24, #25, #3, and #15.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis included both the survey and focus group data. Patterns and themes in qualitative data do not appear or emerge for the researcher, rather they must be identified (Erickson, 2004). Although the data from the survey were analyzed first, the data from both the open-ended survey responses and focus groups were analyzed using a similar process. This process involved using an interpretational focus (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005), a series of systematic procedures to code and categorize the data to ensure the identification of important themes and patterns of response. This analytical plan is similar to axial coding, as described by Krueger (1994) allowing "the researcher to fracture the data and to reassemble it in new ways" (p. 128).

First, I created a research database (Gall et al., 2005) that contained all of the data collected during the course of the study. Data sources were organized for easy access. This process involved labeling word processing documents according to the source of the data. For example, documents were titled 'Raw Data Section #2 Guided Reading Knowledge and Beliefs Questions # 5-7' and 'June 5th Focus Group Transcript.' This first step was completed for both quantitative and qualitative data. The remaining four steps were completed for the qualitative data.

Second, each resulting text was then chunked into meaningful categories (Gall et al., 2005). These meaningful categories began as the instructional issues of guided reading that were identified in Chapter One as the focus of the research: knowledge and beliefs, management and organization, assessment, dialogue, and grouping. The participants' responses to a single question, on either the survey or during the focus group

session, provided the text for initial data analysis. A table format was used to organize the raw unedited data gathered from individual items.

Third, meaningful categories were used to code the data. Key words or phrases were used from the text, also known as in vivo coding (Creswell, 1993). This process involved reading and examining the text created by single questions as shown in Table 5. Similar responses, words and phrases, were colour coded to identify categories of response. For example, the highlighted text in Table 5 demonstrates the multiple references teachers made to running records in their responses to this survey item.

Table 5

Raw Data: Grouping Question #7

Survey #	What information or criteria do you use to help you determine student placement in guided reading groups?
1	Knowledge of letters/knowledge of sounds/ knowledge of sight words/ability to sound out words
2	Attention span/pre-reading skills/social awareness
3	No response
4	The strengths and needs that students present in a running record. General observations in other areas of language. Learning on a daily basis (shared reading etc.)
5	If I do small group guided reading it is incidental and dependent upon the needs of individual students. Groups would then not always be comprised of the same students.
6	Class as a whole for the Little Readers Dolch Stories. Partnering-strong paired with weak: initially: from there students choose their own partners attempting to have read with everyone before time is up.
7	N/A I don't place them in-groups. If in partners, generally a stronger and weaker reader (to help weaker reader) or two at the same reading level so as not to single out.
8	It is difficult to make up guided reading groups at the beginning of Grade 1. I have the students read to me and use running records. Between Nov. and Jan. In Grade 1, the groups may change frequently.
9	Running records- should score 70-85% at the level tested and taught. Listening to informed reading of kid's choice books. Ease of reading at a particular level. Comprehension of passage checked.
10	Running records. Anecdotal on strategies used.
11	I do not group them according to their reading levels always. Most often

	they are mixed together. When I do group them according to reading levels I use and type of reading assessments that I have done so far.
12	Assessment kits. Quick daily miscues and analysis check. Score out of five. Reading needs and how well they cope in a group.
13	Three times in the year I have the students read a benchmark book to me. I try to place the students in groups at their instructional reading level (sometimes students move from 1 group to another because of different needs educational or even behavioral).
14	Running records/ levels. Personality of students.
15	Reading level, social maturity, independent workers, and behaviour.
16	I look at the book and the questions/skills that I have made for that book. I also try to group my weaker with strong readers yet I also want to challenge my stronger readers. I also let my students pick their top three choices for the book I have and try to get one of their top three.
17	No response
18	I take a percentage of test scores for sight words and phonetics words.
19	Reading level, behaviour
20	Grade level
21	N/A
22	Students who read (and comprehend) at 90-95% level are placed in an instructional group. Student reading and comprehension above 95% would be considered independent and students would be placed at the next reading level.
23	Reading ability and comprehension level (sometimes interest)
24	Knowledge/ability to read certain words.
25	Running records
26	NA
27	Running records, sight word quiz

Fourth, each response was coded by all categories that may apply. This process resulted in responses fitting into several categories. This situation was common in the analysis of the focus group transcripts. Often teachers' responses fit within more than one category. For example the comment: "I do the Four Blocks approach to language arts and guided reading is very much a part of that" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher) fit within the category of Four Blocks and also fit within the category the importance of guided reading. Therefore the comment was placed in both categories and compared to other comments that fit within each category to identify commonalities within the categories. It

was anticipated that the instructional issues of guided reading would need to be further subdivided into positive and negative points, patterns of behaviour, or educational beliefs about a topic. This division was found to be the case. The analysis of the focus group transcripts resulted in the creation of many such categories. Teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, and adult support were categories that were generated during data analysis that reflected this division of instructional topics.

Fifth, all the meaningful responses were compiled into categories, which were then used to generate themes and repeated patterns of response (Gall et al., 2008) that are discussed in the following chapters. For example, the category of teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes was identified during the data analysis of several focus group questions. Comments related to this topic were also found during the data analysis of survey items. All comments related to this category, from both the survey data and the focus group data analysis, were compiled and used to generate the theme teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, which is discussed as a part of the findings in Chapters Four and Five and then elaborated upon in Chapter Six.

Data Verification and Concern for Bias

As stated earlier, three principles outlined by Yin (2003) were followed when collecting evidence. These principles address issues of reliability and validity and although these principles are drawn from case study research, they are applicable to this study due to its qualitative aspects. The first principle involved using multiple sources of information, allowing for triangulation to verify findings across different data sources. The survey data analysis were utilized to develop the focus group agenda, as a result the

findings of the focus group data analysis often converged with the survey findings. In Chapter Six I have synthesized these findings, drawing from both survey and focus group findings, to identify areas where the findings were both consistent and inconsistent across both data sources. The second principle involved creating a database that was separate from the findings; this database increased the reliability of the study because the raw data are available for inspection by outside researchers. As shown earlier in Chapter Three the raw data were recorded, unedited, using a table format. All survey items were organized using this method and a second table was created as the data were analyzed. The second table used for data analysis allows an external observer to trace the decisions made by the researcher, from raw data to findings, and therefore replicate the findings of the researcher. The third and final principle involved creating a strong chain of evidence. The chain of evidence allows an external observer or reader "to follow the derivation of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions" (Yin, 2003, p. 105). The research database enhances the strong chain of evidence by providing an "audit trail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) where an individual can follow "a complete documentation of the research process" (Gall et al., 2005, p. 320). This process is consistent with increasing the rigor and improving the quality of qualitative research. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) suggest that qualitative researchers need to disclose more of the details and decisions made during the research process to increase the validity of the research. The use of triangulation, a database, and a strong chain of evidence ensures that all aspects of data collection and analysis are transparent and available for outside inspection.

When considering the merit of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to replace traditional quantitative terms such as reliability, validity and objectivity. Specific techniques that are linked to establishing these criteria are triangulation, member checks, prolonged and persistent engagement, an audit trail, and a reflexive researcher journal (Lincoln & Guba). As described previously, the measures that were used to ensure the accuracy of this study included triangulation and an audit trail. As described earlier in Chapter Three, the survey was also field-tested using a sample of 11 teachers, who were graduate students who were enrolled in Master's programs or who had recently completed Master's degrees. These teachers were asked to offer descriptive feedback on individual survey items. Their feedback resulted in minor changes to help improve the clarity of individual survey items.

A major concern for bias within this research is my connection or proximity to the population being studied. Seidman (2006) cautions against interviewing friends or acquaintances because of the potential problems that may occur when the researcher and participants have contact in other areas. Although many of the participants in this study were known to me, efforts were taken to eliminate my influence. These efforts included the use of a focus group agenda, similar to an interview guide (Yow, 1994), to ensure that the focus group stayed on topic and the provision of the agenda distributed in advance to provide participants with time to consider their responses before the meeting. The focus group agenda began with general questions to engage participants and moved toward more specific issues as the discussion progressed (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). During the focus group sessions, as the moderator, I refrained from taking an active role in the

discussions and did not offer my opinion. I remained quiet and spoke only to redirect the conversation back to the topic and to clarify any misunderstandings of the agenda questions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the 'how' of my research: how the research questions were used to inform the design of the research, and how data were collected, analyzed, and organized. I have discussed both the quantitative and qualitative research methods, and my use of them within my mixed methods research. As well as identifying the research context, I described the data collection methods, and the methods of analysis used for both the quantitative and qualitative data. I also identified how the data were verified and addressed potential concerns for bias with respect to my proximity to the participants and my connections to the research topic. In Chapters Four and Five the 'what' or the findings of the analysis are presented in detail. Chapter Four presents the findings that address knowledge and beliefs, and grouping practices with respect to guided reading. Chapter Five presents the findings that address management and organization, dialogue, and assessment issues related to guided reading.

Chapter Four

Findings on Knowledge and Beliefs, and Grouping

Chapters Four and Five report the integrated findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The findings from the survey and focus groups are arranged using the instructional topics investigated in this study of guided reading: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. These instructional topics were selected as the focus of this research to help understand the complexities of guided reading instruction from the perspective of practitioners who were using guided reading in their classrooms at the time of the research. The research questions that were generated for each instructional area were used to guide this inquiry. Chapter Four presents the findings on knowledge and beliefs and grouping, and Chapter Five presents the findings on management and organization, dialogue, and assessment issues related to guided reading. These topics served as a framework for organizing the findings during data analysis. Data analysis began with a survey section and the individual items within that section. As described in Chapter Three, the focus group agenda was derived from the analysis of the survey data and, like the survey, it was organized according to the instructional topics of guided reading.

Before the findings from the data analysis are discussed, a section on demographics provides information about the survey respondents and focus group participants. The knowledge and beliefs section presents the findings of the data analysis of the 10 survey items and four focus group questions that addressed this topic. With respect to grouping, nine survey items and three focus group questions were analyzed. The findings of these analyses are presented in the section on grouping.

Data Analysis

Current definitions of mixed methods research emphasize the integration of qualitative and quantitative data (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). In my analysis, both data sources were integrated. The findings are presented through the framework of the key instructional topics of guided reading identified above. An interpretational focus was employed (Gall et al., 2005), which involved organizing quantitative and qualitative data by individual survey items or focus group questions, and using charts and tables created in Microsoft Excel and Word. As described previously, once the tables were created, the data were read and examined for common words, phrases, and comments. These words and phrases were then used to create categories to organize and label the data. The data were coded by colour for easy identification and sorting. Data were coded into all applicable categories. The data pertaining to each category were then compiled and used to generate themes and patterns. Neither quantitative nor qualitative data analysis software were employed because the data were manageable using the previously described methods. Please note that all the tables referred to in Chapter Four are located in Appendix H. Tables were placed in Appendix H to improve the coherency of the presentation of the findings.

Demographics

Survey Respondents

In review, surveys were sent to Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3 language arts teachers in a single school division. Of the 50 teachers who received surveys, 27 teachers completed and returned a survey (i.e. response rate of 54%). Of those 27 teachers who returned surveys, 3 indicated that they had not used or were

currently not using guided reading. Thus, 24 teachers who returned the survey indicated that they were currently using guided reading. Readers are reminded that the survey and focus group findings reported in this thesis reflect information gathered between February to June of 2008.

A Bachelor of Education was held by 23 of the 27 respondents. Three teachers indicated that they had a Master's degree and five indicated that they had two or more degrees. Table H1 (see Appendix H) provides information about the specific education, teaching experience and teaching assignment of each teacher who returned a survey. Survey respondents were not asked to identify their gender. However, I use the pronouns her and she because few male teachers were on the initial survey mailing list.

Overall, the survey respondents had a wealth of teaching experience, with experience at all grade levels, including secondary and preschool education. The mean or average length of teaching experience was approximately 14 years per teacher. The median of teaching experience was 17.5 years, indicating that the teachers' years of experience ranged from 0 years to 36 years.

When asked about years of experience teaching their current grade level, 40.7% of respondents indicated that it was their first year teaching their respective grade level. The median value for this survey item was 13.5 years but most teachers were below this value, with two exceptions: one teacher was in her 17th year of teaching the same grade level and a second teacher was in her 28th year of teaching the same grade level. With respect to grade assignment, a large number of the teachers, 14 of the 27 respondents, were currently teaching Grade 1. The grade levels taught by the survey respondents are organized in Table H2 (see Appendix H).

The final distinction made among the survey respondents was the use of a Four Blocks approach (Cunningham et al., 2000); 6 of 27 teachers (22%) identified themselves as teachers who use a Four Blocks approach to literacy instruction. The differences between a Four Blocks approach and the approach to guided reading advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) were described in Chapter Two and are discussed further in Chapter Six.

In this school division, multiple opportunities to take part in professional development activities concerning the Four Blocks approach have been available over the past 7 years. Many teachers who act as mentors to beginning teachers have taken part in these professional development activities.

In summary, many of the teachers who returned surveys were beginning teachers with five years or less of teaching experience. Many of these teachers were in their first year of teaching at their particular grade level. Approximately one-half of the survey respondents were currently teaching Grade 1. Both of these findings need to be considered when examining the results of the data analysis.

Focus Group Participants

As stated previously, all 50 primary teachers of language arts in the school division were invited to participate in the focus group sessions. Of the 50 invitations extended, 19 female teachers volunteered to participate in the focus groups but three teachers who initially volunteered did not attend the session resulting in 16 focus group participants. It is not known if each focus group participant completed a survey because the surveys were returned anonymously. Since two separate data collection methods were utilized for this research, participation in the focus group sessions was not limited to

those teachers who completed surveys. As described in Chapter Three, the focus group sessions were organized by geographical location, resulting in three sessions. The first focus group session, held in a western location in the school division, was attended by three Grade 1 teachers, one Grade 3 teacher, and one Grade 1/2 teacher. These teachers had a range of 1 to 34 years of teaching experience, with the mean falling at 18 years. Table H3 (see Appendix H) provides details on the grade levels taught by the focus group participants.

The second focus group was held in an eastern location and included all 5 participants who had returned focus group invitations. The teacher participants included 2 Grade 2 teachers, 2 Kindergarten teachers, and 1 Grade 1 teacher. These teachers had a range of 1 to 25 years of teaching experience with a mean of 12 years.

The third focus group was held in a northern location in the school division. Two of the 7 teacher participants who had initially volunteered to attend were unable to do so at the last minute. The teacher participants included 2 Grade 1 teachers, 1 Grade 2 teacher, 1 Grade 3 teacher, and 1 multigrade teacher. The five teachers in this focus group had a range of teaching experience of 1 to 11 years and included teachers from Grades 1 to 3. The teachers in this group teach in two schools in the school division with large English as a second language (ESL) student populations.

Similar to the survey respondents, larger numbers of teachers working with students in Grade 1 participated in the focus group sessions. It is also worth noting that 7 of the 16 focus group participants were in their early stages of their career with less than five years of teaching experience. Again, the findings presented in the following sections need to be considered with this data in mind.

Teachers not using Guided Reading

Although 3 teachers indicated on the survey that they were not using guided reading in their classrooms, this statement was not completely accurate. In their responses to the two survey items intended only for respondents not using guided reading, two of the teachers indicated that they had used guided reading and found some of the challenges associated with guided reading difficult to overcome. These teachers offered no details about the nature of these challenges. The third teacher defined guided reading accurately, but was unsure whether her understanding was correct because she teaches French Immersion. When asked to describe the methods of teaching reading used in her language arts program, she wrote, "Students are not usually divided into groups based on levels." Based on this data, I assumed that she was the only teacher of the 27 respondents who was not using guided reading in her classroom.

Knowledge and Beliefs

In examining teachers' knowledge and beliefs about guided reading, I began with the research question: "What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading?" My intention was to explore teachers' beliefs about the importance of guided reading and how their beliefs might influence their practice. In reporting the findings of the analysis of the data that addressed knowledge and beliefs, please note that the tables referred to in the text below can be found in Appendix H. For all of the instructional areas of guided reading discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the quotes taken from survey responses and focus group transcripts are unedited. All teachers' names are pseudonyms.

Survey Findings

Of the 10 survey items that addressed knowledge and beliefs, Likert scales were used for three items and seven questions were open-ended. The number of respondents who answered each survey item is reported below because not all respondents answered each question. Individuals may have chosen to leave an item blank or overlooked an item. As a result, the number of respondents for the survey items on knowledge and beliefs varied from 18 to 23. The survey items that addressed similar topics pertaining to knowledge and beliefs about guided reading are grouped to improve the coherency of the presentation of the findings. The following sections address teachers' knowledge base of guided reading, pragmatic issues of guided reading, and overall opinions of guided reading.

Teachers' knowledge base of guided reading.

On survey item #1, as teachers defined what they believed guided reading to be, they used a variety of words and phrases reflecting different understandings. The responses provided by 23 of the 27 respondents were organized to determine the grouping arrangements and the reading formats that were indicated in many teachers' definitions. Small group arrangements were mentioned by 12 respondents; only 2 teachers indicated that they used both small and large groups and none of the respondents indicated that they used only whole groups during guided reading. One respondent said that individual students were instructed during guided reading, while 8 respondents made no reference to the groupings they used during guided reading. With respect to reading formats, the respondents mentioned a variety of structures including echo reading, partner

reading, shared reading, reading aloud, independent or self-selected reading, reading word wall words, choral reading, and performing plays.

The answers to survey item #1 were also analyzed to identify teachers' purposes or goals and to create categories to analyze the data that were not related to grouping arrangement or reading format. The third analysis of teachers' definitions resulted in the creation of eight categories of response in addition to the grouping arrangements and reading formats previously identified. The use of guided reading to teach and reinforce reading strategies was indicated by 13 respondents. Three teachers specifically identified decoding strategies; while the remaining teachers used the phrase "reading strategies." Comprehension was identified by 11 teachers as an important component of guided reading in addition to reading strategies; although most of the teachers used the word comprehension, the words understanding, interpreting, and extracting information were also included in this category. Nine teachers wrote about student support and encouragement. These teachers were concerned with supporting, encouraging, guiding, leading, coaching, scaffolding, providing feedback, and assisting students during guided reading. For example, survey respondent #2 defined guided reading as, "A teaching strategy whereby the teacher provides support and instruction for children who are learning to read. The teacher will coach the students to use various reading strategies as well as guide their understanding of what is being read."

Homogeneous groupings were identified by 7 respondents as part of their definition of guided reading, while 6 participants identified students reading at their instructional level as part of their definitions. These categories were not combined because grouping students by reading levels does not ensure that the instruction they

receive is aimed at their instructional level. As pointed out by survey respondent #26: "When you divide your students into levelled groups *and* read with them according to their needs and ability."

The remaining three categories that were generated to describe the data were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents. Using guided reading to model how to read was mentioned by 5 teachers. A focus on fluent reading was identified by 3 respondents, as was introducing students to a variety of genres. The content of many teachers' responses was analyzed into multiple categories: "Guided reading is a group setting which allows students to learn reading strategies, comprehension skills, and enjoy a large range of reading genres. Students feel supported and encouraged. Super way to model (repeatedly) what you are teaching" (survey respondent #5). The identification of the eight categories during data analysis reflected the wide variety of instructional foci teachers attend to when using guided reading.

The responses of 21 teachers to survey item #2 demonstrated a wide range of experience using guided reading. The most common response, or the mode, was one year. Six teachers indicated that they were in their first year of using guided reading, while the most experienced teacher had been using guided reading for 15 years. Table H4 (see Appendix H) provides the numbers of teachers at each year of experience within the range of 1 to 15 years.

Teachers were asked to rate their knowledge base of guided reading using a Likert scale on survey item #4. The responses of the 22 teachers who answered this item are displayed in Table H5 (see Appendix H). More teachers selected responses that were positive than negative and five teachers selected neither. The responses of teachers to

survey item #4 were organized relative to the years of teaching experience they reported and the number of years they reported using guided reading. The resulting table demonstrated that the teachers who strongly disagreed that their knowledge base of guided reading was well developed were among the least experienced teachers. Conversely, the teachers who strongly agreed that they had a well-developed knowledge base had the highest average experience using guided reading. Table H6 (see Appendix H) displays the information according to teachers' Likert scale responses to survey item #4.

Survey item #6 asked respondents to use a Likert scale to rate the importance of guided reading in their literacy instruction. The responses of 23 teachers were mostly positive with 8 teachers indicating that they strongly agreed and 9 teachers indicating that they agreed (as evident in Table H7 in Appendix H). Two teachers indicated that guided reading was not an important component of their literacy instruction.

Pragmatic issues of guided reading.

Survey item #3, which addressed the frequency of guided reading lessons, was answered by 21 respondents. Their responses ranged from one guided reading lesson each week to daily guided reading instruction. Table H8 (see Appendix H) shows the distribution of teachers' responses for survey item #3.

Survey item #5 asked the teachers to identify the activities that contributed to their guided reading knowledge base. The responses of 21 respondents to this survey item were organized into the following four categories: professional readings, collaboration with peers, workshops, and classroom experiences. Professional readings were identified by 13 teachers, as was collaboration with peers. Professional learning communities, book

clubs, observations of other teachers' classrooms, and discussion with peers were included in the category collaboration with peers. Workshops on a variety of topics were identified by 12 respondents. These topics included guided reading, Four Blocks, early childhood, blended sight and sound, and included workshops offered by the Bureau of Educational Research and Robert and Marlene McCracken. The final category, classroom experiences, was identified by 4 teachers and included substitute teaching experience, piloting reading programs, and learning from trial and error.

The final Likert scale item in the section on knowledge and beliefs, survey item #7, addressed the teaching of reading strategies with respect to guided reading. Again, teachers' responses were generally positive. While 4 teachers did not answer item #7, 19 of the respondents indicated that they believed they used guided reading to model, demonstrate, and explicitly teach reading strategies. Table H9 (see Appendix H) shows the distribution of the 27 teacher responses to this item.

Overall opinions of guided reading.

Analysis of responses to survey item #8, which asked teachers to identify their goals or purposes of using guided reading, resulted in the creation of 10 categories of common response: developing reading skills and strategies, teaching comprehension, encouraging student success, individualizing student instruction, exposing students to a variety of genres, assessing student progress, developing fluency, teaching reading practices, supporting students, and modelling for students. Instruction of reading skills and strategies was identified by 14 respondents. One teacher stated, "My goal for teaching guided reading is to give my students the necessary skills they need to become fluent readers and understand what they are reading when faced with unknown text

independently" (survey respondent #4). Few teachers explicitly referred to decoding or word attack in their comments, however many used the word reading skills or strategies in their comments and were also explicit in separating fluency and comprehension. Based on this logic the category of reading skills and strategies is considered to encompass decoding or word attack instruction, but not comprehension. The second category, comprehension instruction, included comments made by 10 teachers. Many of these teachers included comprehension as one of several purposes, such as "Teach students good reading practices, fluency and intonation, comprehension, and questioning" (survey respondent #20). Comprehension was not included in the category of reading skills and strategies because many teachers, as indicated by the above response, demonstrated that they considered comprehension separate from the more general comments regarding reading skills and strategies.

Encouraging student success was identified as a goal of guided reading by 9 teachers. These teachers were concerned with students becoming confident and independent readers who experience success. Survey respondent #9 stated:

> To allow all kids an opportunity to have appropriate instruction which allows them to feel and be more successful, to remove the mystery surrounding "being a good reader," to ensure and teach a variety of strategies not just my favourites.

As demonstrated by this quote, teachers identified multiple goals or purposes in their responses.

Individualizing student instruction was a goal of guided reading identified by 7 teachers and comments in this category related to teachers organizing students into groups that best suited the needs of the student. One teacher wrote, "To try to have

students reading at their level and progressing at their best ability. There is such a diverse group of reading abilities that they need to be taught different skills at different times" (survey respondent #13). Introducing students to a variety of genres was identified by 6 teachers. Assessing student progress during guided reading was mentioned by 5 respondents. Several teachers connected assessment to individualizing instruction as shown by the following statement: "Assessment for learning - the use of guided reading allows me to see areas where students are struggling and address them immediately" (survey respondent #22).

The following two categories, reading practices instruction and fluency instruction, were identified by 5 and 4 respondents respectively. The comments that formed the basis for both of these categories were not included in the reading skills and strategies category because teachers made these comments in addition to comments related to specific reading skills and strategies. Teachers who identified reading practices instruction indicated vague or general purposes such as "to remove the mystery surrounding being a good reader" (survey respondent # 9), "to teach elements of reading" (survey respondent #7), and to enable students to develop "efficient reader behaviours" (survey respondent #27). Teachers who were concerned with fluency instruction also mentioned intonation while reading.

The remaining two categories, supporting students and modeling for students, were identified by 3 and 4 teachers respectively. Their comments related to modeling reading engagement and enjoyment and other specific skills, such as comprehension, for their students. The category of support included comments on scaffolding for students

and providing a safe environment. Three comments written by individual teachers were unrelated to the categories discussed above.

The advantages of guided reading, as noted by the 18 respondents who answered survey item #9, were similar to the goals and purposes reported in survey item #8. Analysis of the teachers' comments resulted in the creation of the following seven categories: assessment, intervention, homogenous grouping, small group setting, positive student characteristics, teacher demonstration, and fluency. Assessment and intervention were each mentioned as advantages by 10 respondents. One teacher wrote that one advantage of guided reading is an "increased awareness on the teacher's part of student needs" (survey respondent #2). Other comments relating to assessment included: "Being able to check individual progress" (survey respondent #10) and getting "to know individual students as readers and keeping records on individual student reading" (survey respondent #19). Comments related to intervention included: "Students can get the additional help they need" (survey respondent #13) and "the ability to address gaps in student learning immediately" (survey respondent #22).

For each of the following three categories, 6 of 18 respondents made comments about these topics as perceived advantages of guided reading in their responses. Comments related to the first category, homogeneous groupings, were focused on students receiving instruction at their level. At first glance, the second category of small group setting may seem similar to homogeneous grouping. The comments in this category were different; they reflected teachers' beliefs about the benefits of all small group instruction. "Small group settings enable me to demonstrate what reading is all about on a more personal level," was part of the comment made by survey respondent #4.

Teachers identified small group settings as non-threatening and important in helping students to focus. The category of positive student characteristics was created based on the comments made by 6 teachers. Their responses included the words success and confidence. For example, survey respondent #27 listed, “Realistic example of engaging in the reading process, develop a sense of confidence, independence, and determination in students,” as the advantages of guided reading. The final category, fluency, was identified by 3 respondents who made comments about routine practice and intonation when reading. Five other comments made by respondents were unrelated to the above categories.

Finally, teachers were asked to identify any disadvantages they associated with guided reading. Analysis of survey item #10 resulted in the creation of five categories based on the responses of 19 teachers: working independently, using meaningful activities, timing demands, acquiring volunteers, and the learning of the teacher. Eleven of the 19 respondents communicated concern about whether the students who were not with the teacher were able to work independently. These teachers made comments related to student behaviour, focus, and involvement, and classroom management.

The second category included comments made by 8 of 19 respondents on the type of tasks students completed while the teacher worked with a small group. A variety of adjectives were used to describe the activities that students had to complete independently: constructive, productive, valuable, meaningful, appropriate, and worthwhile. Survey respondent #14 stated, “My major concern is what the rest of the class is doing while I am working on guided reading ... if it is work they can do independently I question whether they need to be doing it.” Another teacher wrote, “I

think the greatest concern ... is the age old question … what are the other kids doing? It always creates a challenge to develop independent activities that are meaningful, support student learning and are not busy work" (survey respondent # 22). These 8 teachers were concerned with the quality of the learning activities students were completing independently.

The third category, timing demands, was a concern for 8 teachers. The first time-related issue in this category of response was the time required to plan guided reading lessons. A Kindergarten teacher wrote, "In ECS it is difficult to find the time to properly deliver a consistent guided reading program." The second time-related concern was finding enough time to work with each group. Survey respondent #13 wrote, "My biggest concern is having enough time to work with each group and having enough volunteers to help the other groups." The remaining two categories, acquiring volunteers to assist other groups and learning as a teacher how to create such a complex classroom environment, were each mentioned by two teachers. Survey respondent #16 simply stated, "I am still learning." Two other comments made by individual teachers did not fit into the categories generated during data analysis.

Development of Knowledge and Beliefs Focus Group Questions

As described in Chapter Three, focus group sessions were held following the data collection and analysis of the surveys. The focus group sessions were utilized to extend the findings of the survey data analysis and address any gaps found during data analysis. I generated an agenda to use with the focus groups. The agenda, like the survey, used the key instructional topics of guided reading: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment issues. The focus group agenda was

distributed to the participants several days before the meetings. From the analysis of the survey questions, four focus group questions were generated on knowledge and beliefs.

The first focus group question was based on the data analysis of several survey items. When teachers defined guided reading in the survey they mentioned a number of additional reading activities and formats that they used during other literacy instruction. Teacher responses to survey item #5 showed that 17 teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that guided reading was an important component of their literacy instruction. These responses made it essential to ask teachers exactly how guided reading fit into their literacy instruction given the variety of other literacy activities they used. I also asked teachers to connect these reading practices to their beliefs about how children learn to read.

The second focus group question was generated as a result of participants' responses to the three survey items (#1, #8, and #9) that asked teachers to define guided reading, list their goals and purposes for using guided reading, and identify any advantages they associate with guided reading. As the teachers identified many teaching points that should be addressed during guided reading instruction, it was important to ask participants to explicitly identify the teacher characteristics necessary for successful guided reading instruction.

Since 6 of the 27 survey respondent indicated that they used a Four Blocks approach to guided reading, the third focus group question was created to address the beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of these teachers, who employed a different approach to guided reading. It was important to ask teachers if (a) they used a Four Blocks approach, (b) they had previously used the approach to guided reading advocated

by Fountas and Pinnell, or (c) they had used small group guided reading that prompted them to change their practice.

The fourth and final focus group question on knowledge and beliefs was generated as a result of the data analysis of survey items #1, #8, and #9. With the many articulated definitions, goals, purposes, and advantages of guided reading, it was important to ask teachers about the main purpose of guided reading. In their survey responses, teachers often used the term "strategies" as an umbrella term; therefore the purpose of the second part of question #4 was to have teachers explain their use of the word strategy.

The findings generated from these four focus group questions are discussed below. Similar to the research questions, the focus group questions were intended to draw upon the perspective of teachers to help identify the knowledge and beliefs they held about guided reading.

Focus Group Findings

Question #1: How children learn to read and language arts instruction.

Analysis of the focus group transcripts generated from the first focus group questions resulted in three categories of comments: how children learn to read, how teachers support students in learning how to read, and how guided reading fits into language arts instruction. The focus group participants shared a variety of beliefs on how children learn to read. The discussion of teachers from the first focus group centered on fostering a love of reading and immersing students in an environment filled with quality picturebooks and all types of print. Erika, a Grade 2 teacher, stated, "They learn to read by being exposed to wonderful stories, by hearing stories, by being read to from the time

they were in utero." She continued, "We have to really show our love of reading, and the fun that you can have from words and sounds."

The teachers from the second and third focus group did not mention picturebooks and being read to; instead they talked about how "children learn how to read in all different ways" (Megan, Grade 2 teacher). A teacher who agreed with Megan added, "Some years it's much easier, depending on your class, the whole composition of your class, much easier to incorporate, it also depends on if you have parent helpers or aides that are willing to help" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). One teacher elaborated on the idea of adult support and talked about the difference between students in Kindergarten, who have received adult time and support at home, and the obvious effect that extra support has in terms of student success. As the teachers in each focus group described their beliefs about how children acquire literacy there were similarities and differences across the three groups.

The second category identified during data analysis of the first focus group questions was how teachers support students in learning how to read. The issue of lack of home support was identified when one teacher said, "We have to model that here and some kids don't get that at home, any sort of picturebook, special time with the book, so that's what I do in my room" (Holly, Grade 3). Another teacher talked about extra adult support in the classroom: "I think the more adult time we could have and the less [fewer] children is obviously going to be the most beneficial to the kids" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Several teachers identified teaching practices that were aligned with their beliefs. "Just by using as many different methods as possible" (Megan, Grade 2 teacher) was noted by a teacher who had earlier declared that she believed that children learn to

read in a variety of ways. The notion of variety was supported by other focus group members who said, “I think it’s just trying different things ... so it really is just a matter of what is gonna work this year. And what is working this year is going to be very different than what might work next year” (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Other teachers noted the learning styles of students, as in the following comment: “People learn to read by sight words, then there are people that ... learn to read by phonics” (Bev, Grade 2 teacher). Participants acknowledged the need for a wide variety of literature at all levels to interest students and the need for books to feel new or attractive to students. Several teachers discussed making their books more desirable by making them less available to students “because you want what you can’t have. My A-Z mysteries are locked in a cupboard and they beg me continually” (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

A third category generated from the analysis of the focus group transcripts was participants’ beliefs about how guided reading fits into language arts instruction. Several teachers who indicated that they used a Four Blocks approach to guided reading made comments pertaining to guided reading in their program: “I do the Four Blocks approach to language arts, and guided reading is very much a part of that” (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Comments on the importance of guided reading in language arts instruction related back to the first and second categories previously discussed in this section. For example, one of the teachers who talked about students learning to read in a variety of ways also said:

> I would like to say that guided reading is a large part of it because I think it’s important. Sometimes it’s not as large as I’d like it to be, so right now, different years is different. This year, guided reading has been a small part of my instruction. But it’s still there. (Megan, Grade 2 teacher)

Another teacher talked about teacher support during guided reading: “I think that the thing that’s really important about guided reading (that sets it apart from parents just reading to children) is that you have to have a plan past ‘They’re going to read this book to me’” (Hailey, Grade 1). Many of the teachers talked about how guided reading was an important part of their language arts instruction. One teacher said, “Guided reading would take up at least, I would almost say half of my language arts” (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

Thus, analysis of the discussion of these first focus group questions resulted in three categories of response: how children learn to read, how teachers support students in learning to read, and how guided reading fits into language arts instruction. The comments made by teachers suggested that the beliefs that teachers hold about how children learn to read strongly influenced their reading instruction. Guided reading was considered to be an important component of reading instruction by many of the teachers involved in this study.

Question #2: Characteristics of effective reading teachers.

Analysis of the focus group transcripts regarding the characteristics of effective reading teachers resulted in the creation of two categories: level of teacher involvement and teachers’ perceptions of differences among students and classes. The category level of teacher involvement was generated from comments about being a hands-on teacher. One participant said, “You have to be with guided reading because you can’t just sit back and let it go by itself ... you have to be involved right from the start” (Holly, Grade 3 teacher). Another teacher talked about showing passion and exciting students while sharing a love of reading.

> I think you have to live the stories, so you have to act them out, make them come alive to the kids, get really excited about it, approach it like this is the most wonderful thing, the most beautiful time of the day. I mean it all should be that way, but I think it's so important with the reading part of it because if they can't learn to read, they can't do much else. (Erika, Grade 1 teacher)

Another teacher noted that teachers should be "as engaged as the kids are" (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher). Being observant about students' actions and abilities was also identified as an important teacher characteristic and it was categorized as level of teacher involvement. Teachers noted that they needed to integrate guided reading content throughout other areas of instruction. Jade said, "To be able to reinforce what you're doing in guided reading throughout other areas in your day ... so that they get it more than once" (Kindergarten teacher). Another component of teacher involvement was teachers needing to demonstrate confidence in all students and their abilities to become successful readers. As Bev (Grade 2 teacher) stated, "They have to think that you have confidence in them... and then they think you're right I can read this."

Comments that formed the basis for the second category of response related to teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. Teachers talked about the changes in classes each year and how, as teachers, "you can't do the same thing one year that you did the year before, or for 5 years in a row, because it just doesn't work" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Another common thread during the discussions related to teachers' ability to adapt instruction to fit the needs of the students. Teresa stated, "You have to have a good repertoire of teaching tools, because you have to be aware that Johnny over in this corner and Suzie over here are quite different" (Grade 1 teacher).

Teachers identified students' interests as an important consideration in guided reading. They talked about finding materials that fit the needs of their students, particularly boys. Emily commented, "Sometimes especially with our boys, it's a matter of finding what they're interested in and getting that" (Kindergarten teacher). These teachers were concerned with finding a teaching and learning balance that worked for them and their students.

Discussion based on the second focus group question on effective teacher characteristics resulted in two categories of response: level of teacher involvement, and teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. Teachers' comments suggested that they believe their level of involvement with the students is related to the effectiveness of their guided reading instruction. They also indicated that the effectiveness of their guided reading instruction is linked to their ability to tailor their instruction to meet the changing needs of individual students, and to adjust their teaching methods yearly to meet the needs of particular groups of students.

Question #3: Four Blocks and guided reading.

The third focus group question that addressed knowledge and beliefs was directed toward teachers who used a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Of the 16 focus group participants, only 3 indicated that they were not using some form of the Four Blocks teaching approach in their classroom and 1 of these teachers said she was considering it for next year. The teachers' discussion of the focus group questions on the Four Blocks approach and changes to their guided reading instruction centred on previous guided reading instruction and the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Comments related to previous guided reading instruction were limited, perhaps because many of

these teachers were in their first or second year of teaching. Two teachers said they had used small group guided reading instruction before using Four Blocks. Both teachers indicated how the problems they had experienced with small group guided reading instruction had prompted them to switch to Four Blocks. One teacher talked about her discomfort in using flexible homogeneous groups during guided reading:

> I did use small group guided reading before Four Blocks but I felt uneasy about the way I was structuring it. Because going back to my own days of learning to read with the blue jays and the robins, and the crows. You always knew whether you were a blue jay, a robin, or a crow. I do the Four Blocks approach now, but when I did the small groups, I tried to always be changing my groups; they weren't always the same. (Erika, Grade 1 teacher)

Another Grade 1 teacher who had also switched to Four Blocks said:

> I also did small group guided reading for a year or two before I went into whole group guided reading. The thing for me was it worked really well one year when I had a 1/2 split ... because I had a fairly independent class that was able to handle the centres ... but the following year I had a couple special needs kids in there who really made it impossible for me to do that. (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher)

Thus, both teachers expressed concerns with the small group guided reading approach and had switched to a Four Blocks approach.

Most of the discussion of this focus group question centred on the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Teachers talked about how the Four Blocks approach to guided reading was a better fit for them as teachers. "I really do prefer having all my little chicks gathered around me. We do our guided reading as one big group. I think it is a

much more favourable way for everybody in the class to feel successful" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Several teachers indicated that they felt a sense of community was created when students came together for whole class guided reading. The teachers described the support offered by a larger group as being beneficial for struggling students. "They get comfortable with getting support from their peers, not necessarily always the teacher" (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher). One teacher indicated that she believed the whole group setting enabled students to learn how to be tolerant of other students. She said, "It encourages other students to be accepting of everybody at different levels" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Teachers noted being able to hear each student read as a benefit of the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Teachers who used the Four Blocks approach to guided reading considered it a benefit to eliminate independent low-quality literacy activities that were often included as a part of their small group guided reading. "I think that was something about small group guided reading, I knew in my heart that some of what the other groups were doing was busy work ... it wasn't meaningful work" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher).

Teachers defined Four Blocks in their discussions. Hailey stated:

> I think the thing that makes ... sets Four Blocks apart from what people might see as traditional, formerly traditional teaching is the idea that you do all of it every day. Every day, every kid has an opportunity to read by themselves, write something, work with words, and read. (Grade 1 teacher)

A group of teachers said that small groups were part of the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. "Four Blocks still feels like to me like, the guided reading part, feels like ability grouping because you're basing it on what their skill is in reading" (Hailey, Grade

1 teacher). Another teacher stated, “I don’t really think of it as Four Blocks. I just think of it as what I do” (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Similar comments made by other teachers indicated that several teachers had selected components of the Four Blocks approach and integrated them in their teaching practice. As teachers identified themselves (in terms of experience and proficiency) with the Four Blocks approach, a continuum was created. Teachers identified themselves as not using Four Blocks, looking at it for next year, having used it and gone back to small group guided reading, having used it and integrated selected activities, being at an emergent stage, and progressing to a proficient level.

As participants discussed their guided reading instruction it became apparent that many teachers were using a hybrid approach to guided reading that included elements of small group guided reading and the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. These teachers considered themselves to be using small group guided reading and the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, presenting somewhat of a contradiction. Further discussion of the Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 2000) approach to guided reading and the small group approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) is included in Chapter Six.

Question #4: Purpose of guided reading and strategies.

The analysis of the transcripts, generated by the fourth focus group question on the purpose of guided reading and the use of reading strategies, resulted in five categories of response. Two of the categories, student independence and teacher demonstration, were directly linked to the main purpose of guided reading. The remaining three categories, assessment for learning practices, grade level expectations, and English as a

second language (ESL) learner concerns, that were identified during data analysis did not directly relate to the topics identified in the focus group question.

The category of student independence included teacher comments about developing independent readers as the main goal of guided reading: "To become independent readers, fluent independent readers, and can understand what they're reading" (Sam, Kindergarten –Grade 8 teacher). The latter comment was typical because most teachers were unsuccessful in describing a single goal of guided reading. Sam included comprehension and fluency as main goals of guided reading. She connected her comment to the use of strategies:

> The more reading strategies you have, the more equipped [you are] or the more children you can reach ... if you're only teaching phonics you only teach the kids who understand phonics. The kids that just don't get it or can't hear it lose out, so the more reading strategies you give them, the more tools you give them.

Another teacher stated her goals for student independence differently. "I think it's sort of setting the stage for these kiddies to learn to do it by themselves, think about what they're reading without the teacher guiding them to do so" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Later in the discussion, Erika also noted teacher demonstration, teacher encouragement, and teacher confidence in students as important components of guided reading that can lead to independence.

In the category of teacher demonstration, the comments focused on modelling how to read for the students. Judy talked about using self-talk in her classroom to model for her students how she thinks when she reads a story, "I like to do self-talk so they

know what I'm thinking" (Grade 1/2 teacher). She discussed how her students often use similar self-talk practices in their independent reading activities.

In the third category, assessment for learning practices, teachers discussed working with students at their instructional levels and finding materials to match their instructional plan. The participants indicated that instruction was based on information gained from assessments. "Whatever you see as a need in the class, something that is not as strong as it should be, based on your assessments and evaluations and anecdotal notes" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). The teachers discussed triangulating their assessment data and co-creating criteria with their students. Strategies were also a part of the discussion as teachers aimed to build upon students' strengths and address any weaknesses such as students' overuse of particular decoding strategies.

Comments that formed the basis of the fourth category concerned how different expectations between grade levels can alter the purpose of guided reading. For example, a Kindergarten teacher said, "That's all I really focus on with them is going through looking at the pictures" (Jade, Kindergarten teacher). Emily, another Kindergarten teacher, shared a similar opinion: "In Kindergarten they still want to read to you by telling you the story from just the pictures ... it's a pre-reading skill and they need that." Teachers from other grade levels agreed: "I think that it's just as important for them to have that playing with the words kind of time that you guys are able to do more of than I feel comfortable spending time on in Grade 1" (Hailey, Grade 1 teacher).

The final category, that was identified as English as a second language learner (ESL) concerns, evolved from the conversations of teachers from the third focus group session because, at the time of the research, they were teaching in schools with large ESL

populations. Their discussion about the main purpose of guided reading included comments related to the demanding nature of teaching comprehension to these students. The teachers talked about the need to teach decoding simultaneously: "The comprehension and the reading ... has to ... the decoding of the words has to go hand in hand" (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher). They discussed situations in which "we can create people who can read and not know what they've read. We create people who have a skill, they're able to decode ... and very believably, and not have a deep understanding or what, where the drift of the theme is" (Michelle, Grade 3 teacher). The teachers also talked about the role of memorization in students' home cultures and its effect on how students learn to read: "Our kids are taught to memorize for today and forget it tomorrow, so that happens in English as well" (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher). The comments made by these teachers reflected an attitude that comprehension is problematic for ESL students.

The discussions about the fourth and final focus group question encompassed several topics: student independence, assessment for learning practices, teacher demonstration, grade level expectations, and English as a second language (ESL) learner concerns. The identification of these five categories indicated that teachers have multiple purposes when using guided reading, a finding that was mirrored in the survey data analysis. The main purposes identified during the focus group discussions differed from those indicated by survey respondents; this finding that is further explored in Chapter Six.

Knowledge and Beliefs Summary

When considering the research question, "What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading," data analysis revealed that the survey respondents

and focus group participants considered guided reading to be an important component of their language arts instruction. They hold strong beliefs about how they use and conduct their guided reading lessons. Overall, the teachers' use of guided reading seemed to be very specific to individual teachers. Some teachers indicated that they used a Four Blocks approach to guided reading, some use a small group approach to guided reading, and others have created and implemented a mixture of both approaches. The teachers' survey responses revealed that some teachers do not identify with either of these approaches to guided reading and consider guided reading as literally guiding students during reading. Thus, neither a single definition nor clear purpose for guided reading were identified by the survey respondents and focus group participants. These findings are further discussed in Chapter Six.

Grouping

Grouping is an important consideration when planning guided reading instruction. Two research questions addressed grouping: "What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading lessons?" and "Are these groupings dynamic and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year?" These two questions guided the development of the survey items and in turn, the focus group questions.

Survey Findings

The section of the survey that addressed grouping contained nine items. One question was open-ended, two questions required a yes or no response followed by an explanation, and six questions asked for a numerical answer. The number of respondents for the survey items on grouping varied from 22 to 25. The tables addressing grouping

and guided reading can be found in Appendix H. Survey items that addressed similar topics about grouping during guided reading are organized to improve the presentation of the findings. The following sections report the findings that addressed group management, group size, and group composition.

Group management.

The first survey item on grouping was answered by 24 respondents. The number of guided reading groups taught daily by teachers (as indicated by their responses) ranged from one to five. Using one or two guided reading groups were the most common responses, while using more than four groups was rare. Three guided reading groups were indicated by 5 respondents and four guided reading groups were indicated by 4 respondents. Table H10 (see Appendix H) displays the range of responses for this survey item.

The responses offered by 23 teachers to survey item #2, asking about the length of guided reading lessons, ranged from 5 minutes to 60 minutes. Responses were grouped into four categories as shown in Table H11 (see Appendix H). Approximately three-quarters of the respondents, 20 out of 27, indicated that their guided reading lessons were 30 minutes or less.

Survey item #3, on grouping asked teachers about the number of guided reading groups they use, was answered by 24 teachers; their responses ranged from one to eight groups. The results of this survey item presented a wider range of results than survey item #1, suggesting that some teachers have more guided reading groups than they are able to teach daily. A category labeled “varied” was created to accommodate the responses made by 7 teachers who indicated that the number of groups they used during guided reading

was not fixed. A single guided reading group was indicated by 4 respondents, two groups were indicated by 2 respondents, three groups were indicated by 3 respondents, four groups were indicated by 4 respondents, five groups were indicated by 3 respondents, and eight groups were indicated by a single respondent. Table H12 (see Appendix H) displays the wide range of responses for this survey item.

Group size.

Teachers' responses to survey item #4 on the ideal size of a guided reading group were organized into four categories: groups of 3 to 5 students, groups of 7 to 8 students, groups of 10 to 12 students, and those who were unsure of the ideal number of students to include in a guided reading group. Ideal guided reading groups comprising of 3 to 5 students were indicated by 18 of 23 respondents and was the most common response. Groups of 7 to 8 students were identified as ideal by two teachers, while one teacher indicated that groups of 10 to 12 students were the ideal size for a guided reading group. Teachers' responses to this survey are displayed in Table H13 (see Appendix H).

Of the 25 respondents who answered survey item #5, 15 indicated that their guided reading groups were typically comprised of 2 to 5 students. Slightly larger groups (6 to 9 students) were indicated by 4 respondents. A single teacher indicated that her guided reading groups included 10 to 12 students, while another teacher indicated that she used various sized groups comprised of 1 to 16 students. As evident in Table H14 (see Appendix H), the remaining 4 teachers indicated that the whole class was used as a guided reading group

Seventeen of the 25 teachers who answered survey item #6, indicated that they were satisfied with the size of their guided reading groups. When asked to explain why

they were satisfied, the comments offered by 15 of the 17 respondents were organized into categories of similar responses. The teachers who reported being satisfied with the size of the guided reading groups commented on student involvement, student ability levels, student support, efficient organization, and Four Blocks. Five of 15 satisfied respondents said students were more involved and focused during guided reading lessons. Survey respondent #2 wrote that in small groups she was "able to keep all students' focus at once and [the groups were] small enough for all students to feel that they're taking part." Working with groups of students at their instructional level was reported by 4 teachers as part of the reason they were satisfied with the size of their groups. Comments forming the basis of the categories, student support and efficient organization, and comments related to the Four Blocks approach to guided reading were each made by 2 of the satisfied teachers. One teacher, who had initially indicated that she was satisfied, wrote the following comment: "I am and I am not. The higher groups are doing really well but I think the lower groups could be separated into smaller groups" (survey respondent #24). This comment implies that a Likert scale may have allowed teachers to indicate their level of satisfaction more accurately on this survey item.

Comments shared by the 8 teachers who indicated dissatisfaction with the size of their guided reading groups were organized into the following three categories: reading level, time, and group size. Teachers concerned with reading levels (4 of the 8 respondents) identified the wide range of ability within the groups as a problem. "My lowest and highest groups are very small but they don't combine well with other groups" was the explanation given by survey respondent #9. Teachers found the differences between group sizes difficult when organizing guided reading lessons. The comment of

survey respondent #19 reflected the opinion of other respondents: “Some of my groups are rather small while others are too big, and [it] makes it difficult when organizing groups to work together.” Three of the dissatisfied teachers were concerned with time in two ways: (a) spending enough time with each member of the group during guided reading and (b) finding enough time to meet with each guided reading group. Survey respondent #15 wrote that it was “very hard to give them all enough attention in 30 minutes,” while survey respondent #9 wrote, “I have bigger groups as I can realistically get to them twice a week.”

Group composition.

The following four categories were generated based on the responses of the 23 teachers who answered survey item #7 about information used to determine student groupings: running records, other assessments, reading levels, and individual student characteristics. Running records were identified by 9 teachers. “Three times in the year I have the students read a benchmark book to me. I try to place the students in groups at their instructional reading level” (survey respondent #13). Four other teachers identified reading level or ability as the information they used to help them determine students’ placement in guided reading groups, although they did not specify how the reading level was determined.

A variety of assessment tools were identified by teachers in addition to running records. Comments by 11 teachers revealed the use of the following assessment tools: anecdotal records, sight word quizzes, miscue analysis, letters and sounds quizzes, and decoding checklists. Teachers also referred to assessment kits and reading assessments without offering any specific details. The final category, individual student

characteristics, was generated based on comments by 8 teachers. They identified an assortment of characteristics associated with individual students, such as coping skills, learning needs, level of independence, behaviour, maturity, attention span, and personality, as criteria to consider for determining students' placement. The following comment, made by survey respondent #15, reflects the amount of information that teachers take into consideration when placing students in groups: "Reading level, social maturity, independent workers, and behaviour." Most of the teachers indicated that they used more than one source of information to determine the composition of their guided reading groups.

Although survey item #8 was intended to generate data specific to time, teachers' responses indicated that time was not the sole consideration when changing guided reading groups. Teachers' observations of students' performance during guided reading formed the basis of group movements for 9 teachers, while another 4 teachers indicated that they used assessment data to change group compositions. Of the 23 respondents who answered this survey item, 11 indicated that they made changes to their guided reading groups at specific times. A combination of time and data were used by 4 teachers. "At least three times a year but they can change at any time according to need" (survey respondent #13). Two teachers provided ambiguous responses, such as: "Not often" (survey respondent #11). A final category was comprised of responses made by 5 teachers who use a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. These teachers indicated that they do not change their guided reading groups because the whole class receives instruction in the Four Blocks approach to guided reading.

Eight of the 23 respondents who answered survey item #9, indicated that they believe there are no negative aspects associated with grouping students. Fourteen teachers indicated that they believe there are negative aspects associated with grouping. A single respondent indicated yes and no. The comments made by 5 teachers who indicated no and the single respondent who indicated yes and no shared few similarities. Enabling students to work with their peer group and using various grouping formats in other subject areas were the only comments that were each made by more than one teacher.

All 14 teachers who indicated that they believed there are negative aspects associated with grouping wrote comments. Two similar categories of comments were identified during data analysis. Concerns about attaching labels that may stigmatize students were mentioned by 9 of these respondents. Another 3 teachers expressed concerns about ability groups resulting in an absence of models for less capable students. The remaining categories were created based on comments made by individual respondents.

An undecided teacher, who indicated yes they believe there are negative aspects associated with grouping, wrote the following comment: “Yes and no, because I don’t believe in putting all the strong together and all the weak together. Making the groups mixed helps both groups learn important skills from each other” (survey respondent #16). Similar concerns were identified by the teachers who indicated that they believe there are negative aspects associated with grouping and by the teachers who indicated that they believe there are no negative aspects associated with grouping students. Both yes and no respondents were concerned about students being labeled, about students staying in the same group for an extended time, and about students realizing their potential. “As long as

the students are not feeling labeled or if they need to stay in the same group too long" (survey respondent #13). Survey respondent #27 stated, "Same skill level groupings I feel are necessary in order to assist every student in reaching their full potential." Thus, all of the teachers indicated awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of grouping students based on ability.

Development of Grouping Focus Group Questions

From the analysis of the survey items three focus group questions were generated. The following section describes how the analysis of the survey items informed the development of focus group questions on grouping.

The first question on grouping asked teachers to reflect on their practice during guided reading. On survey item #9, 14 of 27 teachers indicated that they believed there were negative aspects associated with grouping students for guided reading. Connected to this question were the findings of survey item #10 in the knowledge and beliefs section. Teachers identified concerns about using guided reading, and these concerns included providing meaningful activities for students and students' ability to work independently. Thus, I wanted teachers to discuss how guided reading could be justified considering the identified concerns.

The second focus group question that addressed grouping was connected to the data analysis of survey item #9. Nine teachers were concerned with students being stigmatized by labels. I deemed it important to ask teachers to talk about their experiences with students and ability grouping.

The third focus group question was based on data analysis of three survey items (#4, #6, and #6) on the size of groups. Most teachers who indicated that they were not

satisfied with the size of their guided reading groups, did not have a match between their perceived ideal and the actual size of their groups. For me, the obvious question to ask teachers was, "Why not?"

The analysis of the transcripts of the focus group discussions on grouping and the findings generated from these three questions are discussed below.

Focus Group Findings

Question #1: Justifying ability groups.

Analysis of the transcripts for this focus group question resulted in the generation of two categories of response: ability grouping in guided reading and teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. During their discussions about ability groups several teachers suggested that they could not justify the use of ability groups during guided reading. One teacher's comments about ability groups were aligned with her beliefs about teaching children to read and the use of whole class groups. "I really think the Four Blocks guided reading is the one that sits closest to what I think is meeting the needs of most of the kids in the classroom" (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher). Teachers discussed the need for student support that is present in larger groups and not often present when small groups work independently. When discussing the idea of support in a large group teachers used the term "safety net."

Teachers who could not justify ability grouped guided reading talked about the type of tasks other students were completing while the teacher worked with a small group. Presley (Grade 2 teacher) noted that students not under adult guidance often complete pages of work incorrectly:

> I almost think I have to be circulating if I was doing that because I have to catch them making mistakes ... but so often I see kids who have printed a whole page and they've done it wrong ... and then I think we're actually two steps behind as opposed to one step forward.

Teachers who indicated that they could justify using ability groups in guided reading also identified problematic situations when students are expected to work independently. One teacher stated:

> I think that I don't need to be with them when they're practicing things ... But I have justified that in my own head, that the reading is more important to me than the rest of it. (Hailey, Grade 1 teacher)

Teachers who used ability groups discussed the problems that are created when students are placed in groups where they are unable to experience success. One teacher said, "I think of all the ways that kids have been grouped for reading instruction and are grouped for other things, grouping for guided reading is probably the least damaging" (Hailey, Grade 1 teacher). Teachers noted the need for flexible grouping in other subject areas, whereby students are grouped in a variety of ways. Sam shared, "You can't feed the child just one thing, so, you can't use <u>just</u> ability groups, and you can't use <u>just</u> mixing up all the students; it has to be a mixture" (Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher). Although the teachers noted the possibility of students being labeled in ability groups, they still thought that ability groups were a necessary part of guided reading. "I still think there is definitely a place for guided reading in whatever context it's being done in the classroom, whether it's small group or whole class" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Erika's statement reflected some teachers' beliefs that the positive results outweigh any

potentially negative consequences of ability grouping in guided reading.

The final category of response, teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, was also related to teachers' beliefs about ability groups. One teacher said, "I don't think I can justify it, unless it's depending on your group of students ... you want to try it differently one year, because you have such a maybe, unique group or something" (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher). Other teachers stated that larger class sizes were needed to mix up groups of students. "When you've only got 8, they catch fairly well on as to what I'm doing" (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

Teachers' discussions about ability grouping again revealed how guided reading practices are unique to individual teachers. Many teachers were aware of potentially negative consequences of ability grouping, but believed that it was a necessary component of guided reading. Other teachers believed that they could not justify using ability groups during guided reading.

Question #2: Students' self-esteem and ability groups.

Similar to the findings of the data analysis of the first focus group questions on grouping, ability grouping in guided reading and teacher' perceptions of differences among students and classes were identified as categories of response in the analysis of the transcripts for the second group of questions. Assessment for learning practices emerged as a new category of common response when the transcripts of this segment of the focus group discussions were analyzed. Comments shared during the conversation about ability grouping were similar to previous comments regarding the need for flexible grouping in other subject areas. Teachers noted the use of ability groups to prevent negative interactions between competent and struggling readers. One teacher stated, "If you put a

poor reader in with a hot shot they're gonna go 'What's the matter with ya? Can't ya read?' ... they're impolite" (Michelle, Grade 3 teacher). Teachers also discussed the need for honesty about students' abilities. "I think we need to be honest with students that you're working on this, this isn't a snap here" (Michelle, Grade 3 teacher).

The category of teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes reflected comments made about issues of competition and peer awareness of the needs of struggling students. Teachers described how they devoted the majority of their time and attention in the classroom to address the needs of their struggling readers. Hailey questioned, "Do they and others not realize that you're constantly at, with two kids helping them at everything that's going on in the classroom?" (Hailey, Grade 2 teacher). Other teachers presented an opposing viewpoint noting that students who are struggling and receiving individual attention with an educational assistant often are envied by their classmates. Other teachers concurred with Megan who stated, "At this age level I find the low students who are getting that type of help actually feel special and the other students envy them ... so it's actually almost a privileged position" (Grade 2 teacher). Michelle stated, "In some schools if you're a struggling person you attract aide time, so you're really quite desirable" (Grade 3 teacher). These students who receive extra adult support were considered to be envied by their classmates and wanted by their teachers.

In their discussions on competition, the teachers indicated that students often seem to have an innate sense of competition, despite teachers' encouragement for students to do their "personal best" and teachers' emphasis that, "it's not a race against each other ... you're challenging yourself; don't worry about what the guy next to you is doing" (Sadie, Grade 1 teacher). Some teachers thought it was not acceptable to "squash

that sense of achievement either. You know as long as we're just explaining if you're not achieving as well as everybody else you probably do something else better" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher).

The analysis of the focus group transcripts on questions about students and ability groups resulted in a third and final category: assessment for learning practices. This category was generated based on discussions about changes in teachers' assessment practices and how these changes influenced their grouping practices. The teachers described using targets and criteria expectations, and setting goals with their students as part of their assessment practices. One teacher indicated that despite her attempts to include students in the assessment process some children became upset with performances described as acceptable by the teacher. When these students were evaluating themselves they were unhappy with their less than "perfect" performance. One teacher talked about using student-based performance indicators to initiate changes in guided reading ability groups. She said that groups were changed based on how well the students performed on comprehension and retelling activities, not on how rapidly they read.

In summary, teachers' discussions of ability grouping and students' self-esteem did not directly address students' self-esteem or the issue of students being labeled. Teachers were concerned with individual student progress and particular practices that might prevent struggling readers from being labeled. Teachers also talked about their assessment practices that influenced their grouping choices.

Question #3: Guided reading group size.

Analysis of the transcripts of the final focus group question on grouping resulted

in the creation of one new category, size and number of guided reading groups, and the re-emergence of a previously identified category, teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. As the teachers discussed their guided reading groups, exact numbers of students and groups were discussed and although no consensus was reached, teachers agreed that a class of 12 or more students was necessary to create workable grouping situations for several reasons. First, teachers indicated that they needed a "mass" to work with when grouping students. In the first question on grouping, Sam had discussed how when working with her small class the students were aware of the kind of groupings she was using. One teacher said, "That's why I think just a bit bigger is better, because you've got more of a variety in your abilities" (Chelsey, Grade 1 teacher).

Chelsey identified student dynamics as a grouping problem for smaller classes. A benefit of bigger classes was having students who created a "spark." Teresa said, "You're always going to have somebody in that group that is excited about what you're doing" (Grade 1 teacher). Another common theme in the teachers' discussion was concern for the other students. "Having one in a guided reading group just doesn't work ... I feel guilty working with one student when there are other students in the class" (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher). Another teacher thought that four students in a guided reading group might still be too small. "It almost was too small to have a discussion, for the students to discuss what happened in the stories, and what they thought and how it kind of related to their life experiences" (Connie, Grade 1 teacher). Included in the category of size and number of guided reading groups were comments that related to why teachers often have a mismatch between the group size they would like and the group size they have. Time issues seemed to be the most common response. "You want to cover

every group each day. You can do that with three groups, perhaps, but not with six groups" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher).

In the second category of teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, the teachers indicated that in some years, small group guided reading worked very well for them because of the student personalities and class composition. Bev talked about her "ideal class." "I can get them silent reading and then I can do small group readings" (Grade 2 teacher). Another teacher talked about a "cooperative class." "The teacher works with five [students] in a guided reading group and they work with that same group for maybe two days in a row. Then they kind of rotate through different groups while the rest of the class is doing silent reading" (Connie, Grade 1 teacher). A slightly different situation was discussed when creating small guided reading groups that involved students who were perceived to be popular by their classmates. Teachers talked about trying to create workable groups, while being aware of the social dynamics within the classroom.

In their discussion of the final focus group question related to guided reading groupings, the teachers' comments reflected their perception that guided reading practices are connected to differences among students and classes. The teachers revealed that their guided reading practices were influenced by composition of their class, often leading to ideal guided reading situations or situations when guided reading rarely occurs. The guided reading grouping practices discussed by these teachers revealed common concerns and individual practices to address these concerns.

Grouping Summary

"What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading

lessons?" and "Are these groupings dynamic and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year?" were the research questions that addressed grouping. Teachers' grouping practices, as revealed during data analysis, shared some common characteristics, yet were often specific to individual teaching situations. Most teachers indicated that they used a variety of sources of information to determine group placement. Some teachers indicated that they used assessments and individual student performances, some changed their groups at specific times throughout the year, and others used information from several sources to determine their guided reading groups. The size and number of groups described by the teachers also shared some similarities. Teachers agreed that smaller classes often presented challenges because there was no "mass" of students to work with and that extra adult support affected their use of small guided reading groups. Teachers were divided concerning the negative aspects of ability groups, some teachers believed that these negative aspects could be balanced with the use of mixed groupings in other subject areas, while other teachers simply could not justify the use of ability groups. The category teachers' perceptions of the differences among students and classes was present in discussions of all three focus group questions. These teachers appeared to believe that their grouping practices were specific to individual teaching situations and the students being taught; this finding is explored in Chapter Six.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the data analysis on two aspects of guided reading: knowledge and beliefs and grouping. Overall, the findings revealed that teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes played a large role in

teachers' guided reading choices. This category was identified when analyzing the discussions of four of the seven focus group questions discussed in this chapter. Assessment for learning practices was discussed in both the knowledge and beliefs and grouping focus group questions. This finding may suggest that assessment for learning practices are embedded within teachers' guided reading practices and therefore, assessment and learning were difficult to separate for these teachers.

Chapter Five presents the findings of data analysis of the remaining survey and focus group sections that addressed management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. In Chapter Six, the findings presented in this chapter and Chapter Five are examined and related to the review of the literature that was presented in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five

Management and Organization, Dialogue, and Assessment Findings

As described previously, the findings from the survey and focus groups were organized using the instructional topics investigated in this study of guided reading: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. These instructional areas were selected as the focus of this research to better understand the complexities of guided reading instruction from the perspective of practitioners who were using guided reading in their classrooms. Chapter Four presented the findings on knowledge and beliefs and grouping. Chapter Five presents the findings on management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. In each of these major sections, the findings from the descriptive data analysis of the survey are followed by the findings of the analysis of the focus group transcripts. The focus group agenda was generated from an analysis of the survey data and, like the survey, was organized using the guided reading instructional topics that were examined in this study.

Management and Organization

The research question, "How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading sessions?" guided the development of the survey items and in turn, the focus group questions. This instructional area was considered essential to creating an in depth picture of guided reading as practiced by teachers because how teachers organize their guided reading instruction is closely linked to the type of guided reading instruction employed.

Survey Findings

The section of the survey that addressed management and organization issues

associated with guided reading contained four items. A Likert scale was used for one item, one question was open-ended, one question required a yes or no response followed by an explanation, and the final item asked for a numerical response. The number of teachers who provided answers for these survey items varied from 24 to 25 respondents. Survey items addressing similar aspects of management and organization have been grouped together to improve the presentation of the findings. The following two sections present the findings related to the instructional organization of guided reading and other management issues. Tables were created for each survey item that used a Likert scale to display the range of results. These tables can be found in Appendix I.

Instructional organization of guided reading.

The responses of 24 of the 27 teachers to survey item #1 that asked teachers how they organized and managed their guided reading instruction were analyzed into the following five categories: independent work, whole class activities, centre activities, follow-up activities, and adult helpers. Analysis of survey item #1 revealed that during guided reading, 11 teachers used activities that involved independent work, 7 teachers used activities that involved the whole class, and 7 teachers indicated that they used a centres approach during guided reading. Seven teachers indicated that they had students complete a follow-up activity based on reading or instruction that occurred at the beginning of the lesson. For example, a teacher described her guided reading as following this sequence: “Generally teach or review a concept, set class to work with activities associated with concept and then take a group” (survey respondent #10). Comments related to adult helpers (e.g., parents, Educational Assistants, and volunteers) were made by 3 teachers. Survey respondent #24 wrote, “I take a group, an Educational Assistant

takes a group, and my team teaching partner takes the other group."

In addition to the comments categorized as previously discussed, a need for detailed lesson plans during guided reading was identified by 2 teachers. This finding was not reported as a category because these teachers responded to this survey item with respect to how they manage the organizational demands of guided reading and not the instructional organization of their students or classrooms during guided reading.

Fourteen teachers indicated that they were satisfied with their current guided reading organization, 9 teachers indicated that they were not satisfied, 1 teacher indicated yes and no, and 3 teachers did not answer survey item #2. When asked to explain their response, 19 of the 24 teachers who answered this survey item wrote comments. The teachers who expressed dissatisfaction with their organization identified the following concerns: classroom management, lack of time, teacher proficiency, and lack of extra adult support. Issues associated with classroom management and lack of time were each identified by 4 teachers. One teacher wrote the following comment: "The center activities require much planning and I often have to cut the guided reading sessions short. Classroom management often becomes an issue" (survey respondent #19). Survey respondent #9 wrote: "Kids still need tons of help to get tasks done. Noise is an issue. Group process skills also need work."

Teacher proficiency in organizing and planning guided reading instruction was identified by 3 teachers. Survey respondent #16 wrote: "I am still putting all my plans together and because this is my first year in Grade 3 and doing guided reading, I am not totally satisfied." A lack of adult help during guided reading was identified by 2 teachers.

Comments made by teachers who indicated that they were satisfied (10 of 14)

varied and most were specific to individual teaching situations. For example, survey respondent #18 stated, “In a multi-grade classroom you have to stagger seatwork with active one-on-one for each grade level.” Two other teachers identified “meaningful literacy activities” as contributing to their satisfaction with their guided reading organization. The single respondent who indicated yes and no suggested that keeping students motivated during guided reading was a challenge. Survey respondent #27 wrote, “Some days it works well. Other days the students are distracted and uninterested.” Another teacher indicated that having an adult present during guided reading was essential, an issue that previously had been identified by 2 teachers who were not satisfied with their guided reading organization.

Other management issues.

Of the 25 respondents who answered survey item #3 about the presence of volunteers to assist them with guided reading, 5 respondents reported that they never had volunteers, 9 seldom had volunteers, 5 had volunteers about one-half of the time, 2 often had volunteers, and 4 always had volunteers. Thus, over one-half of the respondents reported not having volunteers on a regular basis. Table I1 (see Appendix I) shows the distribution of responses for this survey item.

According to the responses of the 24 respondents who answered survey item #4, they spent varying amounts of time planning for guided reading instruction. Teachers reported spending from less than 1 hour to up to 10 hours each week planning their guided reading instruction. Seven teachers did not give a specific response with respect to time. Comments fitting into this group included “lots, very little, varies, or not as much as I should.” Survey respondent #21 stated, “Hard to say. The first couple of years I spent an

awful lot of time but after that I was able to piggyback on." Seven teachers wrote that they spent approximately two hours each week planning guided reading lessons. The distribution of responses is shown in Table I2 (see Appendix I).

Development of Management and Organization Focus Group Questions

From the analysis of the survey questions, four focus group questions were generated on organization and two focus group questions were generated on management. On the focus group agenda these questions were not combined due to an oversight on the part of the researcher. In retrospect, these questions should have been organized under the same heading on the focus group agenda because the topics are related and there was some overlapping of topics during the discussion. The four questions that addressed organization are discussed first, followed by the two questions that addressed management. In the following sections the management and organization aspects are not separated and all six questions are refered to as addressing management and organization.

The first focus group question on management and organization reflected information gained from the demographic section of the survey. Four teachers indicated that they were currently teaching a split grade or multigrade classes. I was interested in asking teachers how a split grade or multigrade classroom might affect the management and organization aspects of using guided reading. In this discussion both terms, split grades and multigrades, are used to distinguish between classes comprised of two grades and classes comprised of more than two grades.

The second question addressed the range of responses to survey item #3 in the knowledge and beliefs section. Teachers used guided reading on a scale from once per

week to daily. Teachers were asked to discuss what might prevent them from using guided reading on a daily basis and what type of literacy activities would occur on the days on which guided reading was not used.

The third focus group question that addressed management and organization returned to the topic of adult support. As previously discussed, comments related to adult support were prevalent in the analysis of the survey data. This question asked teachers to talk about how they prepare other adults to work with students during guided reading.

Survey item #2 in the survey section on grouping asked teachers about the length of time of their guided reading lessons. A wide range of responses were offered, from 5-15 minutes to 60 minutes. Teachers were asked to talk about the differences between longer and shorter guided reading lessons during the focus group sessions.

The fifth focus group question on management and organization was developed to address the range of responses to survey item #4. Teachers reported spending between 1 hour and 10 hours each week planning their guided reading lessons. I deemed it essential to ask teachers what they did during their planning time in an attempt to uncover what might create such difference in teachers' responses.

In retrospect, focus group question #6 should have followed question #3. However, these focus group questions, #5 and #6, as indicated earlier were discussed later in the focus group session. The purpose of these questions was to have teachers describe how adult support was used during guided reading, specifically how adult support may influence establishing routines during guided reading. On survey item #3, 11 respondents indicated that they had adult support during guided reading. Adult support (or lack thereof) emerged as a category in several other survey items on management and

organization. The findings generated from these focus group questions, addressing management and organization of guided reading instruction, are discussed below. The quotes of the teacher participants are unedited and presented as they were shared during focus group sessions.

Focus Group Findings

Question #1: Split grades and guided reading instruction.

The analysis of transcripts for this focus group question resulted in the creation of two new categories and two previously identified categories. The advantages and disadvantages of guided reading in multigrade classrooms was identified as a new category, as was adult support during guided reading. Teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, and ability grouping in guided reading were categories that previously had been identified in the data analysis of knowledge and beliefs and grouping.

As the teachers discussed guided reading in multigrade classrooms, they noted both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the common advantages related to students in the lower grade having role models to emulate, perhaps serving as a motivating factor for younger students in the class. Teachers noted how the older students could act as tutors or mentors to the younger students, resulting in better self-esteem. Teachers said that struggling students in the older grade(s) within the split class were able to access instruction more suitable to their instructional level, not necessarily their grade level.

When discussing the disadvantages of multigrades, the teachers' main concern was teaching curriculum areas such as math, science, and social studies for all of the grade levels in their classes. The only disadvantage of multigrades that connected to

guided reading involved older students working with younger students. The teachers indicated that many older students did not demonstrate the patience to allow younger students adequate time to identify unknown words and often supplied the unknown word before the younger students were able to decipher it independently.

The teachers also discussed how the presence of Educational Assistants could affect guided reading instruction in a split grade. Teresa described a previous teaching situation as follows: “But I also had an aide in my room and when I had my small centres she was able to go and monitor what was going on there, keeping kids on task” (Grade 1 teacher). Judy used the Educational Assistant in her split grade somewhat differently. “I will give a lesson plan to my aide and do a run through with her and if I time it right, then I can do a good switch over and get guided reading with both of them [groups], with me as the teacher” (Grade 1/2 teacher).

The third category, teachers’ perceptions of differences among students and classes, was also identified in the analysis of the data of the focus group section on knowledge and beliefs. In their discussion of split grades, the teachers talked about the purpose of split grades for specific schools. For example, teachers distinguished between split grades that are essential in small schools and split grades in larger schools where students who meet the criteria in ability and/or independence can be selected for a split grade. Teachers described previous teaching assignments that involved combining students with higher abilities from a lower grade and students with lower abilities from a higher grade. From the teachers’ perspective this scenario created a favourable teaching situation. The teachers discussed a potentially unfavourable situation in smaller schools where all students at specific grade levels are included in the split class. Judy said, “I

don't have any Grade 2's that are low enough or any Grade 1's that are high enough to do small grouping, so I do split them by grade" (Grade 1/2 teacher). Teresa stated:

> I really think it would depend on what kind of split you have in your split grade, if an Educational Assistant is in there or if you're all by yourself, it's gonna depend on the set up and the mix of kids. (Grade 1 teacher)

The final category that was created in the analysis of this question addressing split grades was grouping practices. Several teachers believed that grouping students by ability would be easier in a split grade with some overlapping of students' reading levels between grade levels. Presley stated, "It doesn't matter what grade they're in. What matters is what level they're at in reading" (Grade 2 teacher). One teacher of a split grade indicated that it was not possible to do as much individual reading at each grade level and that she needed to put both classes together for instruction. Some teachers saw this situation as advantageous. The teachers also discussed some of the negative labelling aspects associated with ability grouping that were discussed in the previous section on grouping.

Question #2: Daily guided reading and other language arts instruction.

Analysis of the data on daily guided reading revealed four categories of response. The teachers talked about the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, balance and focus during guided reading, adult support during guided reading, and English as a second language (ESL) learner concerns. With respect to Four Blocks, teachers described using guided reading daily with their students because it is an important component of this approach. Teachers also mentioned their confusion about the Four Blocks approach to guided reading and the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). "When we

started doing Four Blocks training it was this whole argument slash discussion about whether guided reading is little groups with little levelled books or is it big groups stuff doing difficulty levels of reading" (Hailey, Grade 1 teacher).

The second category of response about daily guided reading related to balancing the type of literacy instruction offered to students. "I think there's a danger in spending too much time in one reading strategy as opposed to having a balance, because the kids don't always learn the same way" (Teresa, Grade 1 teacher) was a comment made by one teacher. Also connected to the category of balance and focus were time-related issues. Teachers said that time demands prevented them from using guided reading as much as they liked. The demands associated with certain times of the year also presented a challenge to guided reading instruction for some teachers: "I found that the approaching provincial achievement tests had a lot to do with how programming went" (Michelle, Grade 3 teacher). The teachers also talked about scheduling guided reading in the timetable and extending or shortening the lesson depending on the engagement level of the students. Teachers specifically commented on working with book selections over several days and noted situations where guided reading is scheduled more often than it actually occurs in the classroom. Few details were offered to explain why guided reading may get pushed aside during a school day.

The teachers' comments forming the basis of the category, maintaining balance and focus within their guided reading programs, also addressed how teachers integrated science and social studies content into their lessons. This integration of other subject areas often enabled teachers to do daily guided reading that otherwise might not have been possible. "Sometimes it's embedded in science, sometimes it might be in social,

sometimes it's in language arts, but it's every day" (Bev, Grade 2 teacher). Teachers also talked about the availability of resources influencing the frequency and effectiveness of their guided reading instruction.

The third category relating to teachers' ability to use guided reading daily, adult support, was generated based on comments made by teachers from the second focus group sessions. The teachers indicated that adult support, both Educational Assistants and parents, had a dramatic influence on the frequency of their guided reading instruction. "If I didn't have my aides, I would be doing a very limited amount of guided reading this year" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Another Grade 2 teacher shared a similar opinion:

> My ideal would be to have a parent with every group and I actually had that one year and it was a lovely thing. But this year I have no one, so I can really only focus on obviously just 1 group at a time so I probably only do it twice a week. (Megan, Grade 2 teacher)

In teachers' discussions of daily guided reading, the fourth category of English as a second language learner concerns was also based on the discussion in a single focus group session. At the time of the research, teachers from the third focus group session were teaching at schools with high ESL populations. They discussed the need for daily guided reading as perhaps more important for students who are learning English. Michelle said, "I think our situations are somewhat different ... we have so many language development issues, it's just getting the language identified and a lot of that revolves around reading ... I think we read a lot" (Grade 2 teacher).

Question #3: Guided reading instruction delivered by other adults.

Categories of response identified during analysis of the transcripts on this focus

group question included types of adult support available during guided reading and teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. During their discussions, teachers distinguished among the support offered by other teachers, Educational Assistants, and parents. Various opinions were shared by the participants. One group of teachers held strong beliefs about their role in guided reading, as revealed by the following comments:

> I'm afraid I don't easily give up my guided reading to anybody else ... unless it's another qualified teacher. If I have a parent coming in I don't have time to give them the training or prepare them the way they need to be to successfully lead the children through guided reading. I'm very firm on that**.** I love to have parents help, to have kids read to them, but not for parents to guide them as I should be doing. (Erika, Grade 1 teacher)

The teachers said they needed to see what the students were doing. They described parents as not being particularly interested in taking on a teacher role with students. "I haven't had any parents that wanted to do anything other than the prepatory kinds of stuff" (Sadie, Grade 1 teacher).

Another group of teachers thought that having parents or Educational Assistants take groups of students for guided reading was not an issue. One teacher said, "I think you take what you can get ... I mean if you can get help then I guess you have to appreciate that" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). The teachers thought that the instruction offered by others would not be as effective as the instruction they could offer students, but that the reading exposure and practice were beneficial for students. "Maybe it won't be exactly how you wanted it but it's good 'cause they're reading ... it's not gonna harm

them" (Bev, Grade 2 teacher).

In discussing the differences between Educational Assistants and teachers, most teachers spoke positively about receiving guided reading support from other teachers. Not all teachers viewed Educational Assistants as able to offer the level of instruction necessary for guided reading. Teresa said, "It would depend on the circumstances, depend on your group of kids, it would depend on that EA as well, and it would depend also on what I'm going to be doing while the EA is doing that" (Grade 1 teacher). Teresa continued:

> I've often been thinking lately, would it be better use for us to use those Educational Assistants a different way? Maybe to give them the group that is doing well and for us to take the kids that are maybe struggling ... I'm guilty of it just as much as anybody, sending the ones that are you know struggling with that person, who might not be as trained as you. (Grade 1 teacher)

Several teachers identified situations where they offer support to Educational Assistants in the form of lesson plans, lists of reading strategies, Reading A-Z resources, and reviews of the book beforehand. Another suggestion included the teacher modeling instruction during guided reading for the Educational Assistant.

The second and final category of response that emerged from the discussions on volunteers delivering guided reading lessons was teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. Several teachers described the small group experience presented by an Educational Assistant outside the classroom as a very positive experience for students that was not available in the classroom environment. One teacher described this situation as meeting the social needs of her students more than the reading needs.

> I have a couple of kids who are very good readers but socially really behind and it gives those kids an opportunity to have some success and to do something in a group that's small enough for them to have a comfort level with that I really can't give them. (Hailey, Grade 1 teacher)

Teachers talked about how daily guided reading time with an Educational Assistant can provide students who struggle with consistent daily guided reading instruction and benefit students' reading abilities.

Question #4: Length of guided reading lessons.

Analysis of the transcripts of the focus group discussions about the length of guided reading lessons revealed four categories: grade level expectations, the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, and balance and focus during guided reading. In terms of grade level expectations, Grade 1 teachers in all three focus group sessions said that longer guided reading lessons were simply not possible. Teachers of other grades were in agreement; many teachers seemed to indicate that 30 minutes was an acceptable length of time for a guided reading lesson. The second category of response, the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, included comments related to guided reading as only one of the blocks of literacy instruction. Each block within the Four Blocks framework is given equal instructional time. "I find 30 minutes is not usually enough time, but I try to limit it because with the four blocks, if you don't, you chop away minutes from another block" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher).

The third category of response about the duration of guided reading lessons included comments about teachers' perceptions of differences among students and

classes. One teacher indicated that the students she was teaching at the time of the research experienced difficulties staying focused for longer periods of time, which affected the length of her guided reading lessons. Another teacher talked about using students to "almost lead" the guided reading groups in the years when parent support is limited. She mentioned using heterogeneous groupings to ensure that each group had a capable leader.

The fourth category of response addressing lesson length, balance and focus during guided reading, included comments that were related to time. Most teachers seemed to think that longer lessons could include repeated readings of longer books and follow-up activities. One teacher described her lessons as follows:

> I've done it where we don't read the full story in one day, where you kind of break it up, and you stop at the halfway point and then you do a review next day and you do some predicting and see what they think is gonna happen, ask them what happened yesterday, see if they remember and if it actually stuck in their heads. I've found that 25 to 30 minutes is a good length of time to keep their attention and then the next day they're wanting to know what happens at the end of the story so they're anxious to get back to it. (Connie, Grade 1 teacher)

One teacher said, "It depends on if you had a before reading activity, reading, and then an after reading activity. See, I can't imagine what I'd do with a 10-minute one" (Megan, Grade 2 teacher). Teachers described how they often devoted more than one lesson or day on a single text, in which case instruction would take place over the course of several days. Some teachers talked about the duration of the guided reading lesson being dependent on whether the story was new to students or the type of activities that were

planned in connection with the lesson. Thus, the teachers connected the length of their guided reading lessons to the teaching focus of the lesson and to the balancing of reading activities connected to the text.

Question #5: Planning guided reading lessons.

The analysis of the data generated by discussions of the focus group question on time spent on planning guided reading lessons resulted in one category of response, balance and focus. Within this broad category teachers talked about balancing instructional time between different types of text, balancing preparation time between book selection, competing priorities, and materials preparation. Teachers also talked about balancing time spent during planning on specific subject areas. Sam identified a situation where she would like to spend more time on planning than she was able to: "Cause there's lots of things I <u>love</u> to do, but yes I would spend 10 hours a week for a half-hour lesson ... that's just not possible" (Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

The remaining comments related to specific details involved in planning guided reading lessons that allowed teachers to maintain balance and focus during guided reading. Initial planning and preparing of materials, selecting books, purchasing resources, creating curriculum connections, and being flexible were identified as important components of planning that allowed teachers to maintain balance and focus during guided reading lessons. Teachers described the planning requirements when using a text for the first time (or starting out as a beginning teacher) as extensive. This initial planning often required extra time for preparing materials such as printing books, laminating materials, and creating folders and flashcards. Teachers acknowledged that the time requirements decreased because the materials could be reused, but that the initial

demands were “huge.” Experienced teachers indicated that they have open-ended follow-up activities that can be used with multiple texts.

As the focus group participants talked about book selection, many teachers described how they devote much time to finding the perfect guided reading selection. One teacher said, “That’s what hooks them, it’s the book” (Holly, Grade 3 teacher). Another teacher said that she needs to be interested in the book as well, “I have to admit if it’s not a story I like, I do not do a great job of teaching the story” (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Other teachers talked about using programs or resources that have a selected number of books to choose from, thus limiting book selection and decreasing the amount of time dedicated to this task. Michelle described her choice: “That’s why I bought a purchase program, because I knew that I was deficient in the actual ability to get it put together, ’cause our demands are huge” (Grade 3 teacher).

Focus group participants mentioned the importance of resources in their guided reading planning. Many teachers explained how they have spent their own money on resources to help improve their guided reading instruction. Sam stated, “If it’s laid out there for me, it’s worth it to spend the $20 or the $30 or whatever because I just don’t have time to go and make all this up myself” (Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher). Other teachers explained that they had purchased complete sets of books to suit the needs of their students.

The teachers also reported spending time on planning curriculum connections. Several teachers talked about including content area reading materials during guided reading instruction. One teacher said, “The most important aspect would be getting my curriculum in because, like I said, I use it so much to get other curriculum in and read at

the same time" (Bev, Grade 2 teacher).

The need for being flexible in maintaining balance and focus when planning guided reading lessons was also discussed. For example, Susan, stated:

> I think you could plan, and plan, and plan and plan, but as a teacher you need to be flexible. You get to school and Joey has got a robin egg, well there goes any lesson you were gonna do. (Grade 1 teacher)

The importance of flexibility was discussed by other teachers as they talked about becoming personally invested in their planning and having difficulty when a lesson does not go as smoothly as planned. Michelle stated, "I find if I over plan they don't have a very nice day" (Grade 3 teacher).

Question #6: Adult support and routines in guided reading.

Data analysis of the final focus group question that addressed management and organization resulted in one new category of response, the importance of routines. Comments related to types of adult support available during guided reading and balance and focus during guided reading, two categories that were found during the analysis of earlier focus group questions on management and organization, were also identified during the analysis of the data generated by the final focus group question about management and organization.

In their discussion of the importance of routines, many teachers used the word "essential." They talked about the importance of establishing routines early. "It'll be hard, really hard for like two months, and then hopefully you will be able to relax a little bit with the group and have the others trained well enough to do their activities" (Megan, Grade 2 teacher). Other teachers commented on using routines to make students aware of

upcoming activities in the classroom. Sadie described the familiarity of routines as beneficial to students: “part of them being a part of the loop, needing to know, putting them more at ease about what’s happening next” (Grade 1 teacher).

Again the teachers debated the effectiveness of support offered by Educational Assistants and parents. Several teachers said adult support was essential to their guided reading instruction. “I have to say adult support was essential because I haven’t done near as much this year as I’d like to and I haven’t had adult support” (Megan, Grade 2 teacher). Other teachers reported that Educational Assistants in their rooms are responsible for working with groups of students. Without this extra support their guided reading instruction would change dramatically. “I don’t have that problem in our class because we have lots of adults during language arts ... so yeah, it’s very important to me” (Susan, Grade 1 teacher). Another teacher noted that extra adult support in the case of another teacher “allows you to have quite a bit of personal contact” (Michelle, Grade 3 teacher). No consensus was reached by the teachers on having Educational Assistants conduct guided reading lessons.

In the final category, focus and balance during guided reading, the teachers talked about their need for control during guided reading. Focus group participants noted problematic areas in guided reading and believed that the focus of the lesson was often lost because of classroom management issues. Presley stated:

> I think guided reading is problematic on a number of different levels ... it’s classroom management issues, there’s preparation issues, there’s all kinds of things that go into having guided reading. It is not a controlled situation, which you know, given that teachers are in general very much into control. (Grade 2

teachers)

Management and Organization Summary

In conclusion, the categories that were revealed in the analysis of the data on management and organization reflected categories of response identified in both previous focus group sections on knowledge and beliefs and grouping, and new categories of response. In reflecting upon the initial research question "How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading?", teachers repeatedly acknowledged their perceptions of differences among students and classes, and the differences between grade levels. Adult support during guided reading was another major area of concern for the teachers.

The survey and focus group data also reflected a wide range of responses on many areas of organization and management such as lesson length, time devoted to planning, classroom organization during guided reading, and the amount of and the use of adult support during guided reading. The teachers' choices in managing and organizing their classrooms during guided reading reflected a continuous attempt to maintain balance and focus during guided reading lessons. The teachers talked about these efforts in response to four of the six focus group questions. These categories and the repeated patterns of response are explored in Chapter Six.

Dialogue

"How do teachers encourage and facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions?" Survey items were created to address this research question on the dialogue component of guided reading.

Survey Findings

The section of the survey on dialogue contained six items. Likert scales were used for two items, three questions were open-ended, and one question required a yes or no response followed by an explanation. The number of respondents who answered each question varied from 20 to 27. The findings from individual survey items have been grouped together to present the findings in a coherent manner. The following sections address the importance of dialogue and the instructional issues concerning dialogue.

The importance of dialogue.

Of the 23 responses to survey item #2, only 1 respondent reported that dialogue was not important when planning guided reading lessons. When explaining the importance of dialogue, the responses of 20 teachers addressed a range of beliefs, not limited to planning. Many respondents referred to more than one purpose of dialogue in their response. For example, one teacher wrote, "Getting students to talk about their learning is extremely important. The way you form questions around reading will extend thinking to a deeper level" (survey respondent #21). In this single response, the teacher referred to comprehension, questioning, and oral proficiency.

Twenty respondents' comments were grouped into the following categories: comprehension, strategy use, oral proficiency, and assessment. Comprehension was referred to 12 times in the responses, and strategy use was mentioned by 5 teachers. Responses fitting into the comprehension category included thinking, clarifying, understanding, extending, making sense, and activating background knowledge. Oral proficiency of some level was indicated by 8 respondents and 5 respondents referred to assessment when identifying how they considered dialogue during their planning.

Few teachers focused on a single area in their response, although the following statement, taken from respondent #4's comment, addressed assessment issues in detail:

> Provides me with valuable info on what my students are doing as well as what they understand about the reading process. I am also able to gain insight into areas that my students need to work on as well as what they need to be introduced to.

These statements indicated that the teacher values the assessment data obtained through dialogue during guided reading.

Of the 24 respondents who rated student participation in guided reading discussions, on survey item #4, 16 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their students participated in guided reading discussions. Five respondents believed that their students did not participate and the remaining 3 respondents selected the midpoint, suggesting that they were uncertain. The specific range of responses can be seen in Table I3 (see Appendix I).

The final quantitative survey item on dialogue, survey item #5, required participants to use a Likert scale. Many of the teachers, 12 of the 23, indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of their guided reading discussions. A smaller number of teachers were not satisfied. The distribution of responses to this survey item is depicted in Table I4 (see Appendix I).

Instructional issues concerning dialogue.

Of the 23 respondents who answered survey item #1, 20 made comments about comprehension. Comments related to comprehension were further organized into the following categories: connections, story elements, predictions, illustrations, word meanings, and discussions. Respondents often referred to several ways to access

comprehension. For example, one teacher responded to this survey item as follows:

> My groups usually begin with a discussion of the title, characters' names in the story, picture walk, discussion of students' personal experiences that seem similar to the story, review of strategies that they use to figure out unknown words as well as a brief mini-lesson to introduce students to a new strategy they could use based on info gathered from running records and previous guided reading sessions. I also encourage students to share the strategies that they are currently using as this gives the other students input into some strategies that their friends use that they might try. (survey respondent #4)

This teacher identified comprehension through connections, illustrations, and story elements. She also described different approaches to addressing strategy instruction within the guided reading lesson.

Under the category of comprehension, 13 teachers mentioned students' connections to the text and 9 teachers identified story elements. The category of story elements included retellings and the use of graphic organizers; talk about specific elements such as plot, setting, genre, author, title, and characters was indicated by 9 teachers. Eight teachers identified predictions as one type of talk that occurred in their lessons and 8 teachers indicated that they accessed comprehension through the use of picture walks and discussions of picture cues. Seven teachers referred to word meanings or vocabulary and specifically word wall words, interesting words, and difficult words. The last category of response that addressed comprehension was discussions, which was referred to by 4 teachers.

Comments unrelated to comprehension were organized into three categories:

teaching strategies, reading fluently, and supporting readers. Instruction on the use of strategies was mentioned by 8 of the 23 respondents. Supporting individual readers and assisting students in becoming fluent readers were each mentioned by 3 respondents.

Of the 24 respondents, who answered survey item #3 about how teachers use the dialogue during guided reading, 15 noted planning future instruction as one of the uses of dialogue during guided reading lessons. Comments fitting into the category of future planning included selecting future reading materials, planning instruction to address areas of identified weakness, and selecting strategies to reinforce during future lessons. Assessment and review were identified as uses of the dialogue that occurs during guided reading by 6 and 4 of the respondents, respectively. Other categories, questions and reading strategies, reflected comments made by individual respondents: 2 respondents indicated that the dialogue was of "no help" to them and did not offer any other explanation.

The responses of the 20 teachers who answered survey item #6 indicated that they use a wide variety of instructional strategies and skills to enhance and increase dialogue during guided reading. Based on the descriptions of the 20 respondents, most of the instructional strategies were assigned to one of the following five categories: social involvement, comprehension, teacher questioning, decoding strategies, and engagement.

The social involvement category referred to comments made by 7 of the 20 respondents about the importance of including all students in the discussion. Their comments included specific strategies, such as a name jar where all students' names are kept in a jar and names are drawn to determine the speaker. This process would continue until all students had an opportunity to speak. Other teachers commented on requiring all

students to speak but did not explicitly describe how the latter would be achieved. Self-esteem issues were included in this category; 2 teachers referred to students' self-esteem during discussions and the need to include students who may be reluctant to participate.

Various comprehension instructional strategies were described by 6 of the 20 different respondents to increase the dialogue quality during guided reading. Using a beach ball with comprehension questions on each coloured section, completing graphic organizers, asking story element questions, going back into the text, brainstorming connections, asking students to listen for something specific, and requiring students to add a thought were some of the dialogue-oriented activities teachers indicated using to access comprehension. Teacher questioning was identified by 6 respondents. Few teachers elaborated on this strategy: a single respondent mentioned asking "thought provoking" questions without further elaborating on what a thought provoking question might address or how it might be framed.

The category engagement represented the variety of ways and tools that 4 teachers used to pique students' interest and entice them into participating in guided reading discussions. Concrete items such as WIKKI sticks (bendable sticks made of wax and yarn), plastic page protectors, post-it notes, and beanie babies were mentioned. Decoding strategies were also identified by 4 of the 20 respondents. The specific instructional activities related to decoding were reviewing and modelling; they included mini-lessons targeting topics such as phonics instruction. Teachers who made comments related to decoding strategies did not identify a connection between decoding strategies and how they may increase the quality of the dialogue during guided reading lessons.

Development of Dialogue Questions for Focus Group Discussions

As a result of the survey data analysis on dialogue, four focus group questions were generated. The first focus group question asked the teachers to talk about the differences between discussions for instruction, such as modeling strategies, and discussions for encouraging students to connect with the text. In the first survey item on dialogue, teachers noted the importance of personal experience and students connecting to the text. While acknowledging strategies as important, the teachers did not often distinguish between different types of strategies for decoding, comprehension, and fluency, or strategies used during discussions or while reading. For the second survey item on dialogue, teachers identified comprehending, strategy use, and fluent reading as reasons why dialogue was an important component of guided reading. Therefore, the purpose of the first focus group question was to have teachers address the differences between discussions for instruction and discussions to encourage students connecting with the text.

The second focus group question was generated to prompt teachers to identify the type of questions they used during guided reading. For each open-ended survey item on dialogue, at least 1 respondent mentioned using questions as a component of their guided reading lessons. In the final survey item on dialogue, teacher questioning was identified by 6 respondents as an instructional strategy during guided reading. Thus, since it seemed that questioning was an integral part of guided reading instruction for the teachers, it was important to have participants discuss the type of questions they ask and explain how questioning is used as an instructional strategy during guided reading.

The third focus group question asked teachers to think about their own responses

to students when questions were posed. As previously discussed, teacher questioning was identified as an important instructional strategy by teachers. Therefore, it was important to ask participants how they responded when students answered their questions.

Although no survey items were developed or included to address discourse, I was of the opinion that the focus group provided a more suitable method for collecting data to address this topic. It was anticipated that discourse would be a new idea or concept for many of the participants, and that teachers would need a definition of discourse and some processing time before they could begin to talk about discourse. Therefore, a definition of discourse was offered in the focus group agenda which participants received several days prior to the focus group session.

Focus Group Findings

Question #1: Different types of guided reading discussions.

Initial analysis of the transcripts resulted in the generation of six categories: discussions for instruction, discussions for connections, relevance of personal stories, ESL concerns, before and after reading, and small group versus large group. When these categories were further analyzed, most of the teachers' comments were about maintaining focus and balance during guided reading, with ESL concerns being the only exception.

Teachers were concerned about the teaching focus during guided reading and how to balance before, during, and after components of guided reading. They expressed concern about the instructional focus during these components of guided reading. Teachers talked about having to "sacrifice" time after the reading or "falling down" in a particular area of instruction. Comments about striking a balance between discussions for instruction (decoding strategy instruction) and discussions to encourage connections with

the text (comprehension instruction) were common. Further, when teachers discussed after guided reading discussion it was often in reference to comprehension instruction or activities.

Comments allocated to the category of relevance of personal stories were also related to the category of maintaining focus and balance during guided reading because teachers often perceived a lack of focus in students' sharing of stories and required students to make their connections clear. Teachers mentioned being "bowled over" by students' interest in sharing and having to schedule additional sharing times during the day to maintain the focus of the lesson.

The category of ESL learner concerns reflected comments made by teachers from the third focus group. These teachers talked about the challenges that accompany teaching English as a second language learners, explaining how they had to create text connections for students and sometimes had to go far back to "find a place to begin" after discussions indicated students' lack of understanding. The teachers discussed the common problem of students being able to decode text but not being able to comprehend text.

Question #2: Teacher questioning in guided reading.

When asked about the kind of questions they posed during guided reading and the role of the teacher, the teachers' comments were analyzed into the following categories: need for teacher control during guided reading, teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, and maintaining balance and focus during guided reading. With respect to teacher control, the majority of the comments related to how the teacher usually controls the discussion and does most of the talking. Sadie, a Grade 1 teacher,

commented, “That’s why we’re teachers, right? We like to hear our own voice.” Few strategies were mentioned to encourage student participation. One teacher likened discussions with students to an interview situation.

Teachers also described how the level of discussion and student involvement varied with the class composition and reflected individual student differences. One of the Grade 3 teachers, who was teaching a class with 17 boys at the time of the research, indicated that she was unable to talk as she would like for fear of losing the interest of her students. This teacher seemed to indicate that in a classroom comprised of fewer male students, she would be able to talk for longer periods without having to worry about students losing interest. She also discussed having to talk succinctly about what she wanted students to do and what they needed to do to complete the task. Some teachers indicated that grade-level differences may contribute to the quality of the discussion within the classroom. A Kindergarten teacher described her role during discussions as being similar to that of a mediator. Teachers also addressed the reluctance of particular students to participate in discussions during guided reading, an issue that had also emerged during the analysis of the survey data.

The third and final category that emerged when the data on the teacher’s role in discussions were analyzed, maintaining balance and focus during guided reading, was a common thread during earlier discussion related to differentiating discussions for instruction and discussions for connections. Several teachers also made comments related to the previous discussion on comprehension. Teachers believed that the focus of the lesson often was lost because the connections that students made were not related to the text. In contrast, some teachers reported being impressed with the connections made by

students and having discussions that went off in an unplanned, yet appropriate direction.

Question #3: Teacher questioning and evaluation of student responses.

The third focus group question introduced participants to the classic teacher questioning technique discussed by Cazden (1988), teacher initiated question followed by student response and then teacher evaluation. Analysis of the transcripts revealed two categories: teachers' questions and responses, and teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. As discussed previously, differences between classes and students was identified as a category in the previous focus group discussions on dialogue.

Teachers debated whether it was possible to refrain from evaluating student responses. For example, Chelsey stated, "But if it's an open-ended question then every answer should be good. If it's a how you feel or what do you think ... it shouldn't have a judgement" (Grade 1 teacher). Jade said, "I don't know if that's possible ... whenever anybody says anything to you, you take it and evaluate it" (Kindergarten teacher). The ensuing conversation concerned whether or not the judgement would be offered to students. The teachers noted how several open-ended phrases can be utilized to respond to students and that these responses may lead to more discussion and participation. Presley stated: "I try to relate it back ... or ask for further clarification" (Grade 2 teacher).

When talking about their perceptions of differences among students and classes, the teachers identified some of the specific needs they have experienced in their classrooms and the strategies they have used to address them. Participants noted the need to have students complete a written or pictorial response to ensure individuality of thought, the need for support and encouragement of students' ideas in the primary grades, and the need to accommodate or support learners who are unable to verbalize their

responses. Many comments in this category addressed the issue of self-confidence. The teachers spoke about the emotional needs of their students; many reported their awareness of their ability to "shut down" students and the search for alternate ways to provide positive feedback to students. For example, Presley spoke about a student who told "the most far fetched stories" (Grade 2 teacher) and how it was difficult to respond to him without being judgmental. "They gotta hear compliments ... I think that they do need to be encouraged, otherwise they will shut down," was a similar comment offered by Sam (Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

Question #4: Discourse in guided reading.

This question was the last focus group question that occurred at the end of the two-hour discussions, which may explain the lack of response from the teachers. The presentation of the question may have also affected the responses of the teachers. Teachers from all three focus group sessions encountered difficulty discussing the topic of discourse, despite my attempts to define discourse without leading the conversation in a specific direction. Most of the comments reflected the previously identified category of maintaining focus and balance during guided reading and teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes. The talk of participants of the third focus group, whose classes had high numbers of ESL students, resulted in the generation of the category of changes in student discourse. These teachers identified situations in which they had encountered a "switching of languages." One teacher said, "For an ESL group that is traditionally not allowed to speak as children, providing space for them to speak is probably replaced by trying to get somebody to say something" (Michelle, Grade 2

teacher). Another teacher described a situation where she was teaching in a school that has been established as part of a community, to which the teacher does not belong:

> Yes, there's a switch of language. They're going from and between their home and the church, you know, down the sidewalks there's another switch of language, but the switching of language doesn't mean a different discourse. I would say that my kids are ... use the same mannerisms, the same actual words, the same attitudes in the schoolhouse as they do in the feed lot, in the shop, in the church. Well actually though, the church may be different, but in their homes, on the playground, it's all the same and I think the reason is because I go to their territory. They're not coming out of their territory. (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher)

Teachers made comments about teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes when they discussed the topic of discourse communities. The teachers acknowledged the need to be inclusive while paying attention to the emotional needs of the students. Teachers from the first and second focus groups made connections between discourse communities and the need to ensure that students from all backgrounds were made to feel accepted in the classroom community, welcomed by the teacher and students. A Kindergarten teacher connected discourse communities to students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. She indicated that she thought it was important to validate their experiences in the classroom.

The final category related to participants' discussions of discourse communities, maintaining balance and focus during guided reading, included comments made by teachers regarding the relevance of connections and issues of appropriateness and

teachers' abilities to maintain the teaching focus during guided reading. Several teachers reiterated their concerns in accepting and validating the comments offered by students in the classroom, comments that some may view as inappropriate. As Hailey stated, "Sometimes you have to teach children what is an appropriate discourse for your space" (Grade 1 teacher).

Dialogue Summary

In summary, as teachers responded to survey items and focus group questions designed to address the research question "How do teachers encourage and facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions?" several categories of response were identified repeatedly during data analysis. Teachers described their concerns for maintaining balance and focus during guided reading lessons. They identified a variety of situations in which students' attention and focus were challenged. Teachers also perceived that each class brought with it particular challenges and that instruction should reflect the needs of individual students. Often the teachers were concerned with the affective aspects associated with dialogue within these focus group categories and similarly in their survey responses. The category of ESL learner concerns was relevant to only one focus group, the teachers acknowledged their challenges in teaching reading to students who speak a different language at home.

Assessment Issues

The following research questions formed the basis for the investigation of the connections between literacy assessment and guided reading: "How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction? What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed?"

Survey Findings

The findings from the seven survey items related to assessment are presented in the following two sections: running records and other literacy assessments. Likert scales were used for three items, four questions were open-ended, and one question required a yes or no answer followed by an explanation. The number of respondents for the survey items related to assessment varied from 16 to 25 respondents.

Running records.

Of the 23 respondents who answered survey item #1 on their use of running records, 6 indicated that they did not use running records, 16 teachers indicated that they used running records and 1 teacher did not answer yes or no, but listed three negative aspects she associated with running records. Five of the 6 respondents who indicated that they did not use running records wrote comments. Three of these 5 teachers indicated that the time required to administer running records was problematic. A Kindergarten teacher expressed concern about the appropriateness of using running records in Kindergarten. She wrote, "No, I don't want to pressure Kindergarten students. I'm just happy when they enjoy the experience and take part. I prefer anecdotal records or checklists of skills to keep track of accomplishments at this level" (survey respondent #3). Another respondent commented on using a similar format: "No, not really. I have never learned how to use them properly. I use my own version of running records" (survey respondent #13). Another teacher wrote that she used running records informally. The respondent who did not answer yes or no indicated that she used a "scoring grid" while students read.

The comments made by 14 of the 16 respondents who indicated that they used running records were analyzed into categories of similar responses. Five teachers

explained that they used running records to measure students' reading abilities, specifically strengths and weaknesses. Another 5 teachers indicated that they used running records as evidence of learning. Running records were used by 4 teachers to plan instruction and by 3 teachers to identify reading levels. A final category of comprehension was created based on the comments made by 2 teachers. Comments made by individual respondents addressed the appropriateness of running records as an assessment tool and the use of running records to supplement students' Individual Program Plan (IPP).

Based on the answers by 20 respondents to survey item #2, teachers reported using running record assessment information for the following purposes: reporting, planning, grouping students, identifying strategies used by students, remediating students, and reading fluency. Nine teachers wrote that running records were used to report to parents and students. Survey respondent #11 indicated that running records were used "for reporting on our report card, parent teacher interviews, and for intervention." Another teacher noted several uses of running records: "To plan guided reading groups, to plan lessons to address specific struggles that students may need practice with, to assist in determining report card marks, reporting to parents, and students" (survey respondent #19). As well as this teacher, seven others indicated that they used information from running records to plan future guided reading instruction.

Eight teachers explained that they used information from running records to determine student placement in guided reading groups. Survey respondent #8 wrote: "I use running records to help me group the students for guided reading and to help me determine what I may have to reteach." Another 6 teachers explained that running records

assisted them in identifying the strategies that students use while reading. Six teachers noted that they used information from running records for the purpose of remediation. One teacher wrote that running records "guide my remediation goals" (survey respondent #5), while another teacher wrote that a running record "helps with the goals on their IPP (Individualized Program Plan)" (survey respondent #16). Finally, three respondents explained that they used running records to assess students' fluency while reading. Other comments by individual teachers were related to vocabulary development and comprehension.

The third survey item asked teachers to indicate their level of satisfaction with the information gained from running records. Of the 16 respondents who answered this question, 15 indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied. A single respondent selected neither. No respondents indicated that they were unsatisfied. Table I5 (see Appendix I) shows the limited range of responses to this item.

Out of the 22 teachers who answered survey item #4, about the amount of time required to administer running records, 17 agreed that the use of running records could be time consuming. Eight teachers explicitly stated that running records were worth the time and effort to administer. This finding is consistent with the high levels of satisfaction found on the previous survey item. Survey respondent #19 wrote: "Running records do take up a large chunk of time, but the information gained cannot be obtained in any other way. It's worth it." Another teacher wrote: "It took a long time for me to be convinced that running records are useful. It is now one of my most valuable assessments" (survey respondent #21). Five teachers indicated that the first or initial running records assessment was time consuming, but subsequent assessments were more manageable

because they could be staggered. Five teachers expressed concerns about other students working independently while they completed running records and indicated that they needed to be creative in finding time to complete their assessments.

Another 4 teachers indicated that running record assessments could be problematic if they took time away from instruction. Survey respondent #14 wrote: "The more time given to assessing is time taken away from instruction." Yet, 4 teachers indicated that the information gained from running records was authentic and difficult to obtain through other assessments. Survey respondent #27 stated, "Running records can be useful in acquiring information not easily seen in guided reading groups."

Other literacy assessment tools.

The number of literacy assessments identified by 23 respondents, who answered survey item #5, was large. The teachers identified 22 types of literacy assessments, with 10 of these assessments mentioned by individual teachers. Seven teachers identified word lists or spelling words in some form. Comprehension tests and conferencing records were identified by 6 teachers. Anecdotal records and checklists were mentioned by 5 teachers. Fluency assessments, rubrics, and Reading A-Z resources (Reading A-Z, 2008) were each mentioned by 4 teachers. Another 3 teachers indicated that they used the Alphakids Reading Assessment (Barrett et al., 2002), and 4 other teachers indicated that they used some form of phonics assessment tools. Assessments created in collaboration with other teachers and observations were mentioned by 2 teachers. The remaining 10 literacy assessments mentioned by individual teachers ranged from specific reading assessments (such as the Gates MaGinite and Schonell Spelling tests) to assignments and observations.

Survey item #6 asked teachers to rate, using a Likert scale, their level of satisfaction with other literacy assessments, such as those identified in the previous survey item. Of the 25 respondents who answered this item, 19 were either satisfied or very satisfied. Dissatisfaction was indicated by 3 teachers, while another 3 teachers indicated neither. Table I6 (see Appendix I) shows the distribution of the 25 responses.

The final survey item on assessment, #7, asked teachers to indicate, again using a Likert scale, how closely their assessment practices were linked to their guided reading instruction. Of the 24 respondents who answered this item, 15 teachers indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that their assessment and guided reading practices were closely linked. One teacher disagreed, while 8 teachers indicated neither. Table I7 (see Appendix I) displays the range of teachers' responses to this survey item.

Development of Assessment Focus Group Questions

From the analysis of the survey questions, three focus group questions were generated on assessment. The first question on assessment asked teachers to reflect on their reading instruction before guided reading. This question was not connected to the analysis of the survey items because no survey items addressed the type of reading instruction teachers used before guided reading. I was of the opinion that the focus group provided a more suitable method for collecting data to address this topic.

Analysis of survey item #2 indicated that 6 of 20 respondents used information from running records to determine group placement, while the analysis of the survey data on grouping revealed that 8 of 23 respondents used individual student characteristics, such as individual behaviours and group skills, to determine group placement. Therefore,

it was important to ask teachers how they balanced these two data sources when deciding group placement.

The final focus group question that addressed assessment reflected the 22 different types of literacy assessment identified during data analysis of survey item #5 on assessment. Many teachers reported using more than one assessment tool: therefore, it was important to ask teachers how these assessments or record keeping practices were used during guided reading. The findings generated from these three focus group questions are discussed below.

Focus Group Findings

Question #1: Reading instruction before guided reading.

Analysis of the transcripts pertaining to the initial focus group question on assessment resulted in the creation of three categories of comments. Teachers talked about their previous reading instruction practices, their current guided reading instruction, and their assessment for learning practices. A group of 6 teachers described the reading instruction methods they had used before guided reading including whole language, explicit phonics instruction, and basal readers and related workbooks. Many teachers in these focus groups were in their first year of teaching and had limited experience to draw upon in responding to this particular question. However, this lack of experience did not prevent the beginning teachers from contributing. A first year teacher made the following comment in reference to whole language: “It was kind of the movement after phonics ... the sounding out and the decoding” (Emily, Kindergarten teacher). Hailey compared her instruction using whole language with her current guided reading instruction, as follows: “My kids, now, rather than when they did whole language, they read probably a higher

quality of material more often. 'Cause I'm not using a basal all the time, better variety, better quality in general" (Grade 1 teacher). The use of a basal reader in a whole language program appears contradictory (Stahl, 1999); one of the important components of a whole language program was the quality literature, usually trade books, that were used with students.

The second category, current guided reading instruction, was also evident within Hailey's statement. Teachers' comments in this category, like Hailey's, included the use of a greater variety of higher quality reading materials and the need to balance the type of literacy instruction offered to students. Only 2 teachers stated explicitly that they believed their reading instruction with guided reading was more effective than their previous methods. Each of these teachers said they used a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. One of these teachers, Bev, stated, "I do believe that they're progressing better because ... I've seen it. That would be my biggest evidence" (Grade 2 teacher). In their discussions involving balanced literacy, teachers talked about the differences between whole language and phonics. They also discussed the need for teachers to individualize their reading instruction to address students' needs. Presley explained that she had previously used methods associated with whole language and agreed that her reading instruction had changed over the years, although she did not say whether her students were progressing better.

> Even at that time ... there were a number of different things I did, so my teaching has definitely changed over the years, but I'm not sure if I can attribute it to just guided reading. I think there's so many other things. (Grade 2 teacher)

The third category of response, identified during the first focus group question on justifying their current guided reading instruction, was assessment for learning practices. This category included comments made by teachers as they related their guided reading instruction to their assessment practices. Hailey said:

> I think my assessment is very different now than it was when I did whole language. When I did whole language at reporting periods ... I'm listening to them read, I do the Alberta diagnostic at the beginning of the year, I do it at the end of the year ... I didn't have as much information on assessment on an ongoing basis. So, now I have more evidence of where they are, so I feel like they're doing, getting more practice ... whether they are or not I'm not sure. (Grade 1 teacher)

Presley, a Grade 2 teacher, described her view of education as heading in a new direction based on changing assessment practices. She said, "Whether we are doing even basal reading or small group or whatever else ... I think we would be looking at different types of assessment anyhow, by virtue of that's the direction we're heading in education."

Question #2: Behaviour and student placement in guided reading groups.

Analysis of the data from the conversations about this focus group question produced only one category of response, student behaviour considerations during guided reading. For example, Emily, a Kindergarten teacher discussed having to move students to create manageable guided reading situations: "I have some boys that cannot work together, they can be at the same level, but I am sorry you're not working together. So you're going to be higher and you're going to be in the lower group today." Another teacher described the situation created by guided reading groups working independently and how some students did not meet the behaviour expectations to work in those groups.

Presley identified situations that involved students being “silly together” (Grade 2 teacher) and off task.

Independent activities that followed guided reading were identified as creating situations that encouraged problematic behaviours. Hailey said, “When I’m doing my after reading activities and my practice activities, I split them up and so they start at different places in my circle of activities, so they’re not following each other” (Grade 1 teacher). A final situation was described where students were moved into higher groups prematurely to prevent certain groupings of students. Thus, the teachers described a variety of situations where behaviour considerations played a strong role in the creation of guided reading groups.

Question #3: Assessment practices used during guided reading.

Two categories were identified during the analysis of the transcripts of the focus group question on the types of assessment practices used during guided reading: teacher record keeping during guided reading and assessment for learning practices. Participants who made comments about record keeping during guided reading said they used checklists and kept anecdotal records. Teachers recorded the book level, date, title, strategy use, and fluency, as well as the need to move students to the next level. According to the teachers, the nature of a checklist ensured that no students were overlooked. Another teacher described using a scribbler during guided reading to make comments on each student during the guided reading session.

The second category of response identified during data analysis was assessment for learning practices. The teachers had also shared comments related to assessment for learning practices in their previous discussion on changes in guided reading instruction.

Assessment for learning was a specific area of focus of this question and had been a focus in the teachers' school division. Some teachers noted how their assessment practices have changed with the inclusion of rubrics, criteria setting practices, and self-assessments. One teacher made a connection between involving students in assessment practices and reducing some of the stress that students associate with assessment. Some teachers said, "I don't think it's changed what I've done for the last 5 to 6 years" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Another teacher of multigrades who identified her time as limited said, "It is the time factor and either I do paperwork or I teach and I'm teaching" (Sam, Kindergarten – Grade 8 teacher).

Also connected to teachers' assessment for learning practices were comments made by several participants who indicated that they did not keep records during guided reading. One teacher explained how she keeps anecdotal records but records her notes after the guided reading session. She said, "I don't sit there with my anecdotal booklet ... busy writing, because number one I'd lose my train of thought" (Erika, Grade 1 teacher). Another teacher explained that she was more focused on teaching at that time and said, "I find my running records time is more my record keeping time ... because I'm doing it elsewhere I've never really thought or felt the need to do as much complex paperwork" (Presley, Grade 2 teacher). Several other teachers linked using running records and other one-on-one assessments to their guided reading instruction, but noted that these activities took place at other times. For example, "I do running records but that's just kind of to see what ... how they're progressing through the levels, so it's not really guided reading" (Bev, Grade 2 teacher).

Assessment Summary

"How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction?" and "What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed?" were the research questions that focused the survey items on assessment. Teachers' survey responses and focus group discussions on assessment revealed that many teachers use running records. Some teachers indicated that they used a format similar to running records that they had modified to meet their individual needs. Teachers reported using a wide variety of other assessments, most of which, were specific to individual teachers. However, the survey and focus group data analysis indicated that these assessments, taking place during guided reading and other class times, are consistent with an assessment for learning focus. The results of data analysis also suggested that many teacher participants view their current guided reading instruction more favourably than their previous reading instruction.

Chapter Summary

Data analysis of survey items and focus group transcripts revealed many repeated patterns of response. The Four Blocks approach to guided reading was found to be common among teachers who participated in this research project. This popularity may be due to specific professional development opportunities offered in the school district. Many teachers identified themselves as using this particular approach and explained how it changed the way they approached guided reading in their classrooms. This finding will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Based on the survey data analysis, teacher definitions of guided reading were varied and teachers reported multiple purposes in using guided reading. The knowledge

and beliefs that focus group participants held about guided reading were closely aligned with their statements about their practice.

Data analysis of the survey items and focus group transcripts on grouping revealed that teachers shared common grouping practices during guided reading. Teachers changed their groups frequently, some based on specific time periods and others based on assessment data. The teachers discussed using assessments and other anecdotal data to determine group placement. Assessment for learning practices were identified in all but one of the instructional areas, management and organization. As mentioned earlier, this finding may suggest that teachers' assessment practices have become an essential component of their teaching and learning strategies. The teachers described utilizing running records and a multitude of other literacy assessments.

Teachers' choices in managing and organizing their guided reading instruction reflected their concerns about maintaining balance and focus and how their perceptions about the differences among students and classes impacted how they organized their guided reading instruction. Adult support, within several instruction areas of guided reading, was identified as an important consideration both by survey respondents and focus group participants. Teachers indicated that they seemed to believe that more adult support during guided reading could improve the quality of their guided reading lessons.

In the instructional area of dialogue, teachers were concerned with maintaining balance and focus during guided reading instruction. Also problematic was balancing the type of text selected and the type of activities used. Teachers believed that there were differences among students and classes and because of these differences, guided reading instruction could vary from class to class, year to year, and student to student.

Several common themes were identified during the data analysis of the focus group transcripts and many were also substantiated by the survey findings. These themes were present across more than one instructional area of guided reading and are discussed as major findings in the following chapter. The major topics include: the Four Blocks approach to guided reading, teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes, grade level expectations, the maintenance of balance and focus during guided reading, assessment for learning practices, and concerns about meeting the needs of ESL learners .

In Chapter Six these repeated patterns of response and the specific findings for each instructional area are explored and connected to the research questions that formed the basis of this study. They are also compared to the findings from the literature review that were described in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six

Discussion and Conclusions

The final chapter of the thesis presents the discussion of the findings of the research. Following a brief review of the study, including a description of the data gathering and analyzing procedures, I discuss the findings identified in Chapters Four and Five with respect to the literature and theories described in Chapter Two. The discussion is organized using the five aspects of guided reading that were explored in this research: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. These five areas were selected as the focus of this research to better understand the complexities of guided reading instruction from the perspective of practitioners who were using guided reading in their classrooms at the time of the study. Following the discussion of these five instructional areas, I describe the major findings of the study that were present across multiple instructional areas of guided reading. The limitations and strengths of the study are identified, as are recommendations and implications for future research. I end the chapter with my conclusions and final reflections on the study and the research process.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore guided reading as practiced by primary grade classroom teachers. Research questions were generated to reflect instructional aspects of guided reading that I deemed essential to understanding guided reading. These instructional areas were: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, organization and management, dialogue, and assessment.

A mixed methods approach was utilized to examine multiple areas of guided reading instruction as used by primary grade teachers in a small, rural school division located in Alberta, Canada. The data collection methods included a survey and three focus group sessions. I developed a survey that included qualitative (open-ended and yes-no) and quantitative (Likert scale) questions that addressed the instructional topics of guided reading listed above. A combination of qualitative and quantitative survey items were used because a survey with only qualitative items would have required respondents to spend more time completing the survey. A survey comprised of quantitative items would have required less time to complete, but would not have provided respondents an opportunity to respond using their own voice. Therefore, I developed a survey comprised of both qualitative and quantitative survey items. The survey was administered to all 50 primary grade language arts teachers in the school division. For the data analysis, the responses to each individual survey item were organized using a table format. Common responses were then colour-coded and tallied to identify categories of common response (e.g., Table 5, p. 71).

The findings from the survey data were used to create a focus group agenda that was used to guide the discussion during focus group sessions. The focus group questions were generated to substantiate and extend the findings of the survey data analysis as well as to address any gaps that were found during data analysis. In Chapters Four and Five, I reported the findings from the survey and identified the survey data findings that were considered when creating each focus group question.

Approximately 6 teacher participants from the target school division participated in each of the three focus group sessions. The two-hour sessions were video- and audio-

recorded, and the transcripts of each focus group session were analyzed using an interpretational focus (Gall et al., 2005). A series of systematic procedures was used to code and categorize the data to ensure the identification of important themes and patterns of response. Key words from sentences and phrases in the transcripts were used as labels to assist in organizing categories of common response. The following sections connect the categories or patterns of response from the survey and focus group data analyses to the initial research questions and to the theory and findings described in the review of the literature.

Discussion of Research Findings

The following sections are organized using the instructional aspects of guided reading that I deemed essential to my research: knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. Each section identifies the research question that guided the data gathering and analysis procedures. The findings related to each instructional aspect are identified and discussed in relation to the research question(s) and compared to the findings of other researchers and to the theoretical framework that were presented in the literature review in Chapter Two.

Knowledge and Beliefs

In examining teachers' knowledge and beliefs about guided reading, I began with the research question: "What knowledge and beliefs do teachers hold about guided reading?" My intention was to address teachers' beliefs about the importance of guided reading and how their beliefs might influence their practice. As the research by Pajares (1992) demonstrated, teachers' beliefs do influence the manner in which they act and teach. The teachers' survey responses to three of the questions that addressed knowledge

and beliefs (#1, #8, and #9), indicated that they address many topics during guided reading. Assessment, leveled group instruction, small group instruction, student support and encouragement, comprehension, fluency, positive student characteristics, and reading skills were categories that I generated when analyzing the teachers' responses to each of the three survey items. The teachers' responses reflected a belief that guided reading can be an important component of reading instruction and can be used as a vehicle for accomplishing many instructional purposes. Their beliefs about the purpose or goal of guided reading can be linked to the interactive model of reading. The teachers talked about how they needed to assist students in solving unknown words and in comprehending text. These pedagogical beliefs are reflective of the interactive model of reading which purports that readers use multiple knowledge sources when reading (Rumelhart, 1994).

A focus group question was created to uncover teachers' beliefs about the main purpose of guided reading. Although a single main focus was not identified during the teachers' discussions, many of the topics that were identified by survey respondents were also found to be topics of importance for the focus group participants. The teachers held similar beliefs about the importance of guided reading, but their knowledge of guided reading seemed to be less solid than their beliefs. In several instances, some teachers articulated knowledge about guided reading that was incorrect or inconsistent with current guided reading models. Pajares (1992) identified beliefs as being based on evaluation and judgement, and knowledge on objective fact. These teachers had refined their evaluations and judgements about guided reading, but their knowledge appeared to

be linked to their beliefs more than based on informed familiarity with an instructional model.

Despite the wide range of years of experience using guided reading (1 to 15 years), teachers held varying beliefs about guided reading and their purpose for using it. This survey finding was substantiated by focus group discussions on the definition of guided reading and the differences between small group and whole class instruction. More experienced teachers indicated that they believed they had a strong knowledge base of guided reading. According to Pajares (1992), people grow comfortable with their beliefs over time. Therefore, the more experienced teachers in this study may have become more comfortable with their beliefs about guided reading over time and have felt more confident in identifying themselves as having a strong knowledge base of guided reading. Many different activities were identified by the teachers as assisting them in developing their knowledge base (e.g., engaging in professional readings, collaborating with peers, attending workshops, and reflecting on classroom experiences). Pajares also stated that researchers cannot observe or measure beliefs, they must be inferred by actions. Similarly, survey questions about teachers' knowledge base asked teachers to self-assess their knowledge base. These values may or may not actually reflect a teacher's knowledge base about guided reading. Without direct classroom observations or one-on-one interviews, I have no way of confirming or rejecting teachers' self-reported measures.

Most teachers stated that guided reading was an important part of their literacy instruction, while only 2 survey participants indicated that it was not and 5 were undecided. Many teachers reported including echo reading, partner reading, shared

reading, independent reading, choral reading, and teacher read-alouds as a part of their literacy instruction. These teachers who viewed guided reading as one component of their reading instruction may be described as having a balanced approach to literacy instruction, although further research into the exact nature of these other components is warranted to definitively claim that these teachers employ a balanced approach to literacy. The focus of this research was guided reading, which is only one component of language arts instruction. A balanced approach is one that includes multiple approaches to literacy instruction to insure than all students are acquiring literacy skills (Cunninghman & Allington, 2003; Schulman & Payne, 2000).

Similar to Fitzgerald's (1999) perspective on balanced literacy, the guided reading instruction described by the teachers in this study varied from year to year, depending on the class and students. Fitzgerald defined balance as a "philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained" (p. 100). Fitzgerald described local, global, and affective knowledge about reading as equally important in a balanced approach to literacy instruction. In this study teachers talked about strategies that addressed local knowledge of reading, such as the importance of instruction in decoding skills. The teachers also talked about comprehension and the importance of understanding the text, or global knowledge about reading. Affective knowledge about reading, a love of reading, was identified as another important component of reading through teachers' discussions of involvement and motivation. Fitzgerald claimed that all three types of knowledge are interwoven in a balanced view of literacy instruction. Similarly, the teachers in this study discussed all three types of reading knowledge within the context of guided reading

instruction. The teachers stated that they used guided reading to model and explicitly teach reading strategies, a characteristic also found by Morrow et al. (1999) in first-grade classrooms taught by teachers nominated as effective by their supervisors or administrators. During the focus group discussions, the teachers also talked about guided reading comprising up to one-half of their language arts instructional time. This finding may suggest that some of these teachers share some similar instructional practices with those teachers who were considered to be effective literacy teachers.

During their discussions about how children learn to read, connections were found between the teachers' beliefs and the topics that had been listed as instructional foci. The teachers who said they used a whole class approach to guided reading, Four Blocks, believed that larger groups offered more support for beginning readers. Their beliefs about beginning reading instruction and student support are consistent with Vygotsky's ideas (1934/1978) about the scaffolding that can be offered by others or the social environment. These teachers believed that the whole class setting provided students with opportunities to receive support from their peers, the teacher, and the group as a whole. These teacher participants also believed that they were encouraging participation and active involvement during whole class guided reading, and therefore acting in a manner consistent with the social constructivist paradigm. Thus, the teachers' varying beliefs in this study, about how students learn to read, could be linked with their guided reading practices (Pajares, 1992). Similarly, there was congruency between the beliefs and instructional practices of those teachers of those teachers in the focus groups who said they believe that students learn to read by being offered a variety of approaches. The teachers' beliefs about how students learn to read were revealed by their discussions of

how they support their students (e.g., reading aloud to children, engaging in shared or choral reading, and partner reading). The idea of offering students multiple ways to achieve literacy is aligned with Cunningham and Allington's (2003) description of balanced literacy as a diet.

During the focus group conversations, it became evident that many teachers no longer identified their guided reading practices with any single approach, such as Four Blocks (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000) or the work by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). The participants referred to their instruction as guided reading. Elements of both the small group and the Four Blocks approach to guided reading seemed to be evident in their practice, but the teachers no longer identified the elements as such. Again, some of the teachers could be described as having well-developed beliefs about guided reading, while not identifying with the knowledge, or specific practice (Pajares, 1992), associated with a single approach.

As Pajares (1992) stated, it is difficult to address teachers' beliefs without data collection methods such as observations or recordings. The focus group sessions provided opportunities for teachers to articulate their beliefs about guided reading. As evident by the above discussion, the teachers shared their beliefs about (a) how children learn to read, (b) how guided reading fits into language arts instruction, and (c) how teachers can support students in learning how to read.

Grouping

Grouping is an important consideration when planning guided reading instruction. The two research questions that addressed grouping were "What grouping strategies do teachers use when planning guided reading lessons?" and "Are these groupings dynamic

and flexible or does group composition rarely change during the course of the school year?"

Descriptive results from the survey findings revealed that when asked about the number and size of their guided reading groups, teachers reported a range of group sizes. The number of groups ranged from 1 to 8, while the size of the groups ranged from 1 to 16. Wilkinson and Townsend (2000), who investigated the grouping practices of several effective literacy teacher in New Zealand, reported that effective teachers of guided reading managed between 4 and 10 groups and as needed taught smaller groups, comprised of only one or two students. These findings are similar to the findings in this study; some of the teachers were willing to have groups comprised of a single student when needed and the number of guided reading groups reflected the needs of the students. Groups were not based on a pre-determined number, as evident by classes with 8 or 10 guided reading groups. The teachers' survey responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with their guided reading group size. The survey data analysis also indicated that teachers reported using assessments and observations to guide changes in their guided reading groups, while a smaller number of teachers used a combination of assessment data and time periods. The teachers did not explain how often they actually changed the composition of their groups, which was the information sought by this survey item. Similar to Wilkinson and Townsend's findings, the teachers in my study expressed concerns related to the organizational factors involved with managing guided reading groups.

Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) noted that reading ability was the main factor used by teachers to determine group placement. Similarly, my survey respondents

reported using running records, reading levels, and other assessment tools to determine group placement. Several teachers noted that individual student behaviours were also considered when grouping students. When asked during the focus group sessions how student behaviours were related to assessments when deciding group placements, the teachers talked about the types of student behaviours that were considered when reorganizing groups for guided reading instruction. The teachers' comments indicated that individual student behaviours played a strong role in determining student group placement.

Research on traditional ability grouping practices has documented many negative aspects associated with ability groups such as lack of academic gains and students experiencing low self-esteem (Paratore & Indrisano, 2003). My survey results indicated that almost one-half (14 out of 27) of the survey respondents believed that there were negative aspects associated with ability grouping. The teachers' expressed concerns about students being labelled by their peers and the stigma attached to belonging to a lower achieving group.

During the focus group discussions, the teachers talked about the lack of compassion demonstrated by some students for struggling readers. This concern also emerged in Elbaum et al.'s (1997) research. When they surveyed third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students, they found that only those students who were considered poor readers were viewed by other students as needing instruction based on ability groups. Participants in my research were also concerned with a lack of role models in lower achieving groups. This finding also concurred with Elbaum et al.'s research as the students in their study on ability grouping indicated that they believed the mixed-ability groups offered students

opportunities to learn from one another and work cooperatively. In a later study, including more students with special needs, Elbaum et al. (1999) found that many struggling readers identified ability groups as problematic because of their inability to cope with the demands of the instructional tasks independently. Interestingly, Paratore and Indrisano (2003) identified higher level groups as not making the expected academic gains as a consequence of being placed in ability groups. They claimed it was a myth that higher achieving students performed better because of placement in ability groups. The teachers in my study made no comments about students in the higher achieving groups. After reviewing the literature on grouping, Barr (1995) suggested that the most important finding was the inconclusiveness of the findings. In my research, the findings suggest that the participants were most concerned with the affective issues surrounding ability grouping. This finding adds further support to Barr's comments about the lack of definitive findings with respect to the effectiveness of ability groupings.

During the focus group discussions, the teachers talked about whether they could justify the use of ability groups during guided reading considering the negative aspects associated with this type of grouping. The teachers did not reach consensus. Those teachers who used a Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 2000) approach to guided reading, which does not involve grouping students by ability, did not believe that ability groups offered the same peer support as whole class guided reading. Other teachers were concerned about teacher time spent with small groups in general and the type of tasks completed by the other students. Those teachers who used ability grouping said they used non-ability groupings for other activities in the classroom, to offset any perceived or actual negative effects of guided reading groupings. These teachers who used ability

groups believed that the benefits of having students read at their instructional level outweighed any potential negative effects. Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) also found that the effective teachers in their study, who used ability groups during guided reading, grouped students using a variety of formats during other instructional activities, similar to some of the teachers in this study.

Based on teachers' survey responses and the focus group discussions, it appeared that some teachers used ability grouping to avoid students being labelled as struggling by their peers. Several teachers indicated that they thought that students were not easily fooled; despite teachers' attempts to vary their groupings in other areas, students were aware of those students who struggled and often needed adult support to be successful. Many teachers believed that it was best to be honest with students about their abilities and the need to work on specific areas during guided reading. My review of the literature on ability grouping did not reveal any findings on this particular aspect of ability grouping. However, a connection can be made to assessment for learning practices. Currently, an important component of assessment for learning practices is to be honest with students about their progress; having students set goals for themselves and assess their progress in reaching those goals are vital to assessment for learning practices (Gregory, Cameron, & Davies, 2000).

The findings of the research revealed that some of the teachers were concerned with students working within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1978). The survey responses indicated that many teachers used running records, reading levels or reading skills to determine students' initial placements and their movements between guided reading groups. Some teachers used small ability-based

groups with the teacher providing the bulk of the support necessary for students to be successful. As stated previously, other teachers preferred whole class activities where other students and the teacher were able to offer the support necessary for students to experience success. Suprisingly, the effects of ability grouping on gifted or exceptional students was not discussed. Overall, both groups of teachers expressed concerns about grouping students. The teachers who used small ability-based groups believed that flexible groupings in other instructional areas would offset possible negative effects, while some teachers believed that small group guided reading could not be justified.

Management and Organization

Data from four survey items and six focus group questions were analyzed to address the following research question: "How do teachers organize and manage their classrooms during guided reading sessions?" The survey responses indicated that the teachers used a variety of organizational approaches during guided reading instruction. The teachers identified using independent activities, centres, and other adults to help them organize their instruction during guided reading. The teachers explained the complex and potentially problematic management issues that were created when the teacher worked with one small group. The complexities of managing and organizing a classroom when using guided reading groups has been acknowledged in the literature (Reutzel, 2003). Some of the management issues the teachers in this study identified were time constraints, behavioural issues, planning demands, and lack of other adults to monitor students working independently. Many of these management issues were concerns that were identified by the beginning teachers who completed the survey and participated in the focus group sessions.

Guastello and Lenz (2007) developed a guided reading kidstation model in response to similar frustrations expressed by teachers who had also used a centres approach to guided reading. Kidstations are, in essence, portable centres that allow students to move around in the classroom and that enable teachers to have centre type activities within a limited space (Guastello & Lenz). During the focus group discussions the teachers shared their belief about the lack of existence of a single solution to this problem. Their organizational approaches changed from year to year, varying with the students being taught and the level of adult support available during guided reading.

The teachers discussed the planning demands associated with guided reading. The survey respondents reported spending less than one hour each week and up to 10 hours each week planning and preparing their guided reading lessons. Several focus group participants, who were in their first year of teaching a particular grade, discussed the extensive planning demands. Connected to the demands of planning was the type of tasks completed by students who were not working with the teacher. Generating meaningful, productive, and appropriate literacy activities that students could complete independently was identified as a concern when using guided reading. This concern connects with Allington's (2002) identification of the type of tasks used by effective teachers. He found that higher level thinking tasks were associated with the practices of teachers who were identified as effective. Morrow et al. (1999) also found, in their study of effective first-grade literacy instruction, that teachers were concerned with assisting the students to become "self-directed learners who could think for themselves" (p. 469).

Despite 14 of 27 survey respondents reporting that they seldom or never had volunteers during guided reading, a common thread throughout the focus group

discussions was adult support during guided reading. The teachers talked about not giving up their guided reading instruction to an adult helper, parent volunteer or educational assistant, and several participants held strong beliefs about the teacher's role in guided reading. Other teachers believed that it was acceptable to have educational assistants conduct guided reading lessons with students. Several teachers indicated that all extra help in the area of reading was beneficial for students. Some teachers stated that extra adult support, from volunteers or educational assistants, was essential to their guided reading programs and without the presence of additional adults, they would plan fewer guided reading lessons in their classrooms. In my review of the literature on guided reading, I found no research that addressed the use of adult support, volunteers or educational assistants, during guided reading.

During the focus group sessions, most teachers concurred that establishing routines during guided reading was fundamental to the success of future guided reading instruction. This issue also has been addressed in the literature (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004; Guastello & Lenz, 2007; Morrow et al., 1999). Morrow et al. (1999) found that the teachers in their study devoted time and attention during the first few weeks of school to teach students the rules and routines that were expected of them throughout the year. As the teachers talked about the management and organization of their guided reading instruction, they were unanimous in their opinions that the complex demands of organizing their guided reading instruction consumed much of their planning time. These concerns were elevated for beginning teachers and teachers new to a particular grade level; they indicated that they expended much time and energy preparing materials and lessons that would be reused in future years.

Dialogue

"How do teachers encourage and facilitate dialogue during guided reading sessions?" This research question was originally developed to address the dialogue component of guided reading. I initially believed that the dialogue that occurred during guided reading was an area overlooked by teachers and consequently not given the necessary planning attention. This expectation may have reflected my own lack of attention to dialogue during my guided reading instruction. However, teachers' survey responses indicated that my initial hypothesis was incorrect.

Almost all of the survey respondents (22 of 23 responses) who answered this question on the importance of dialogue to planning reported that they considered dialogue to be an important instructional component when planning guided reading lessons. Survey respondents indicated that they used dialogue during guided reading in various ways: to gather assessment data, to plan future instruction, and to access comprehension through review. The teachers reported high levels of student involvement in guided reading discussions, yet less than one-half of the teachers reported being satisfied with the quality of their discussions during guided reading. These findings appear to contradict each other. If students were involved in discussions and teachers considered dialogue to be important and used the dialogue for the purposes identified above, it is unclear why teachers are not satisfied with the dialogue that is occurring during guided reading. Without classroom observations to substantiate the teachers' responses, or the opportunity to ask them about it directly, it is difficult to discern what aspect of dialogue during guided reading is problematic for teachers.

The teachers described many instructional strategies that they believed increased the quality of the guided reading discussions by including and engaging all students in the discussions. Several of these strategies reflected helping students develop social interaction skills, one of several benefits of engaging students in discussions as identified by Almasi (1996). The survey responses offered by teachers demonstrated an awareness of the importance of the social aspect involved in discussions during guided reading. The teachers said they used dialogue for checking students' comprehension, fluency, teaching decoding strategies, and supporting readers. When asked to distinguish between discussions for instruction, such as modeling strategies, and discussions to encourage students to connect with the text, during the focus group sessions, the teachers' comments related primarily to maintaining balance and focus during guided reading. Teachers talked about trying to maintain a specific focus during guided reading despite the number and range of personal stories offered by students. Balancing the time engaged in before and after reading discussions was another concern described by teachers.

Although I specifically asked the teachers to talk about the types of questions they asked during guided reading lessons, the focus group participants did not directly address my query in their responses. Instead, the teachers explained that they usually control the discussion, a finding similar to that of Skidmore et al. (2003) who explored the dialogue between teachers and students in their study of guided reading. In their examination of transcripts of guided reading lessons, Skidmore et al. found that the teachers did most of the talking, controlled the discussion, and rarely asked questions that required more than a literal response. Several teachers in the focus group sessions indicated that they talked the most during guided reading lessons, while a smaller number of teachers indicated

indicated that the students did most of the talking during guided reading lessons. The teachers in my study also discussed their perceptions of differences among students and classes and the effects of these differences on guided reading discussions. Comments regarding affective issues, such as students who were reluctant to speak, were common within this category.

When asked specifically about the initiate, response, evaluate (IRE) format (Cazden, 1988), the teachers talked about whether or not it was possible to refrain from evaluating student responses; however, several open-ended ways to respond to students without judgement were discussed. The teachers' suggestions included thanking students for their responses, asking the rest of the class to add their thoughts, and asking for further clarification or expansion on topics. In contrast to the findings of Skidmore et al. (2003), in their study of teachers' dialogue during guided reading, my participants did not acknowledge that the IRE format was common during guided reading. Although, the teachers in my study stated that they often controlled the discussions during guided reading. This control was usually connected to concerns about maintaining balance and focus during the lesson.

In their discussions of dialogue during guided reading, the teachers offered limited responses and often did not actually answer the questions that were asked of them. As noted earlier, the questions on dialogue were discussed near the end of each focus group session. The teachers' brief responses may have reflected a desire to finish the session due to fatigue over the length and level of involvement required by 5 or 6 participants during two hours of discussion.

Assessment Issues

The following research questions formed the basis for the investigation of literacy assessment and its connection to guided reading: "How do teachers use assessment to inform their guided reading instruction? What types of assessment tools or techniques are employed?" The data from seven survey items and three focus group questions revealed strong connections between assessment and reading instruction. In an informational article on informal reading inventories, Paris and Carpenter (2003) describe reading assessment in the primary grades. They state that assessment is vital to reading instruction because of the variability among students' reading skills and the need for teachers to tailor reading instruction to meet the individual needs of the students. Over one-half of the teachers in my research indicated that they use running records and others stated that they use assessment tools similar to running records. Of the teachers who did not use running records, several expressed a common concern - the time required to administer running records. This pragmatic concern was also highlighted in the literature on running records reviewed in Chapter Two (Hebert, 2004). All teachers, even those who said they used running records, agreed that this assessment tool was time consuming to administer. However, many teachers believed it was time well spent because of the authentic information that was gained. Other teachers noted the time taken away from instruction.

According to the teachers, they used the information gained from running records in ways that were similar to those identified by Afflerbach (1995), Fountas and Pinnell (1996), and Paratore and McCormack (2005). My study participants stated that they used running records to report to parents and students, plan future instruction, determine group

placement, identify strategies used by students, plan remediation, and identify fluent reading practices. Those teachers who reported using running records indicated high levels of satisfaction with the information gained through running the records.

Analysis of the focus group sessions revealed two distinct practices with respect to record keeping during guided reading. One group of teachers did not keep detailed records during guided reading because they were focused on instruction during that time: a second group kept complex and detailed records during guided reading. Many of the teachers who did not focus on record keeping during guided reading said they administered running records at other times. These teachers did not believe that they needed to gather as much data or information during guided reading lessons and instead they were more focused on the instruction during the guided reading lesson.

The second group of teachers did keep detailed records during guided reading lessons. This group of teachers believed that guided reading presented an opportunity to record and document students' reading abilities. In their research of effective first-grade literacy instruction, Morrow et al. (1999) noted how the teachers focused on one child during each guided reading lesson and during that session gathered more assessment data on that child than the others in the group. Over the course of a week each child in the group received extra attention for assessment purposes during a guided reading lesson. The teachers in this study did not indicate whether or not they focused on particular students.

The survey respondents expressed mixed beliefs about whether their assessments were connected to their guided reading instruction; 15 of the teachers agreed, 1 disagreed, and another 8 teachers were undecided. When discussing previous reading instruction

practices and whether teachers considered students to be performing better using guided reading, a small number of the focus group participants indicated that they believed their students were currently performing better. Only those teachers with more than one year of teaching experience were able to talk about their previous reading instruction practices and therefore a smaller number of teachers contributed to this part of the discussion. Little information was offered by the teachers to support the claim that students were progressing better because of experiences with guided reading.

In addition to running records, the teachers mentioned other assessment tools and methods and reported high levels of satisfaction with these tools. Many assessment tools or methods were specific to individual teachers; approximately one-half of the 22 assessment tools or methods identified were mentioned by a single teacher. Spelling lists, comprehension tests, conferencing records, anecdotal records, and checklists were mentioned by five or more teachers. In their response to the survey items on assessment and the discussions on assessment, teachers confirmed that they use running records and other literacy assessment tools to guide their reading instruction and were satisfied with the results obtained through these assessments. The assessment practices of many of the teacher participants in my study were consistent with those practices identified by Afflerbach (1995) and Morrow et al. (1999).

Major Findings

Analysis of the survey and focus group data revealed the challenges of separating the instructional topics that I had set out to examine. The teachers' knowledge and beliefs about guided reading and their role were intertwined when they answered questions about grouping, organization and management, assessment, and dialogue. This linking of

instructional topics was present in the responses to many survey items and throughout the focus group discussions. In the previous sections I described each instructional topic individually. In the following sections, I discuss common themes or patterns that were identified across several instructional topics during the process of data analysis.

The Four Blocks Approach to Guided Reading

The Four Blocks approach to guided reading (Cunningham et al., 2000) was mentioned during discussions of knowledge and beliefs, and management and organization. Six teachers who returned the survey, and all but three of the focus group participants, indicated that they used some form of Four Blocks instruction during guided reading. The large numbers of teachers using Four Blocks may be attributed to professional development opportunities available in this school division. In recent years, several workshops had been available for teachers who were interested in using this approach to language arts instruction. Several teachers who use Four Blocks reflected on their previous small group guided reading instruction and identified the concerns that had prompted them to change to a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Many of the concerns these teachers identified during the focus group sessions were similar to the concerns identified on the survey responses. As noted above, these concerns included the lack of meaningful work involved with the use of centres during guided reading (i.e. the teacher conducts guided reading with small groups of students, while the other students are expected to work independently or in a group completing other activities set out by the teacher) and the abilities of students to work effectively while the teacher worked with small groups of students. As they talked about their Four Blocks guided reading instruction (Cunningham et al., 2000), the teachers' articulated beliefs matched the

opinions they had expressed earlier during the focus group session concerning how children learn to read. Several teachers indicated that they had used components of Four Blocks instruction during guided reading and now teach guided reading using an eclectic approach that includes components from both a Four Blocks approach to guided reading and the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). This eclectic approach may include whole class guided reading (the Four Blocks approach to guided reading) in some situations and also include instances of small group guided reading (the approach advocated by Fountas and Pinnell) as another component of reading instruction.

Several teachers communicated some confusion regarding the format of Four Blocks instruction; they believed that small, academic homogeneous groups were part of Four Blocks. According to Cunningham et al. (2000), the creators of the Four Blocks approach, small ability groups are not intended to be a part of Four Blocks guided reading instruction. Indeed, the movement away from homogeneous grouping is a cornerstone of the Four Blocks approach to guided reading (Cunningham et al., 1991). This finding is important because it indicates that some of the teachers who are using guided reading are not clear about the guided reading approach they are using and further that they are unaware of the teaching philosophies that form the basis of the guided reading approach they are using. Although adherence to the Four Blocks approach to guided reading was prevalent among these teachers, several teachers were unclear about the organizational characteristics and underlying beliefs of guided reading instruction using a Four Blocks approach. Cunningham et al. (1998) explicitly state the purposes of guided reading within the Four Blocks approach as: “expose children to a wide range of literature, teach comprehension strategies, and teach children how to read in materials that become

increasingly more difficult" (p. 653). Two of the above purposes were evident in the data analysis of the survey and the focus group sessions, while the third purpose, concerning the increase of level of text difficulty, was not identified by the teachers in this study. The third purpose, advancing students through reading levels or increasing their reading abilities, is an essential component of guided reading instruction and it was suprising that the teachers did not talk about this fundamental aspect. However, none of the survey items or focus group questions directly addressed leveled text.

Teachers' Perceptions of Differences Among Students and Classes

When analyzing the data, the focus group discussions on knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, and dialogue revealed that teachers' perceptions of differences among students and classes was an important consideration in all aspects of guided reading instruction. The teachers' discussions about the particular nature of students and classes were related to several instructional topics of guided reading, suggesting that teachers view each class independently and the students in them as individuals. This concept of particularity relates back to teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching. Many teachers stated that they believe that children learn to read in a variety of ways using different methods. The identification of this category of response in four of the five instructional areas substantiates the belief that these teachers are concerned about tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs of the students. In their discussion about the characteristics necessary for an effective teacher, the teachers talked about the need for flexibility and the ability to adapt instruction to meet students' needs. They indicated that each new class presents its own special student needs and challenges. Similarly, in their discussions about split grades, students and classes were viewed as

unique and the instruction offered to students in split grades was considered to match the needs of the students, just as it was in single grade classrooms. The teachers shared comments about perceptions of differences among students and classes during the discussion of each focus group question that addressed grouping.

The participants suggested that the use of ability groups may depend on the composition of the class and that certain students benefit from the use of ability groups while others do not. They identified some classes as better equipped to handle the independence associated with using small group guided reading instruction. Research conducted by Elbaum et al. (1997), and Elbaum et al. (1999), with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students, suggested that some groups of students viewed ability groups as unfavourable. While other classes of students, particularly those that included more students with learning disabilities, viewed mixed-ability groups as frustrating and problematic. Similarly, in their discussions about management and organization concerning educational assistants working with small groups of children, the study participants indicated that many students enjoy this experience, while others do not. The teachers also talked about their students' attention spans affecting the length of guided reading lessons. Finally, several teachers identified situations where some students were given opportunities to lead their peers during guided reading sessions.

During the discussions on dialogue, the teachers identified differences among individual students and their willingness to participate in guided reading discussions, and specific strategies to include all students in discussions. Focus group participants believed that guided reading discussions were more difficult for students who are shy, but that it was important to ensure that all students had opportunities to participate in guided

reading discussions. The teachers also talked about students who shared personal experiences that were unrelated to topics under discussion and noted how these students seemed to be unable to distinguish when and what was appropriate to share during guided reading. The comments made by the teachers during these discussions supported their beliefs about considering, treating, and teaching each student as an individual in a particular class.

The teachers' goal of encouraging student discussions was consistent with the benefits of students engaging in discussions identified by Almasi (1996). These benefits include developing social interaction skills, internalizing higher-level thinking processes, working within students' zone of proximal development, and developing students enjoyment of literature. The teachers also identified some of the affective benefits of engaging in discussions, similar to those described by Almasi.

Grade Level Expectations

The teachers also identified the challenges presented by teaching different grades. These challenges were intensified for teachers of split and multigrade classes. The category of grade level expectations was mentioned during discussions of knowledge and beliefs, and of management and organization. These discussions focused on the differences between grade level expectations during guided reading. For example, Kindergarten teachers indicated that their purpose during guided reading was different from the purpose mentioned by teachers in older grades and that the length of their guided reading lessons were affected by the attention level of the students. The teachers of older students talked about how shorter guided reading lessons did not meet students' instructional needs. This difference between grade levels may be explained by the level

of text difficulty or the complexity of the follow-up activities being used during guided reading. The teachers in the focus group sessions recognized that each grade level presents particular challenges and benefits related to implementing guided reading instruction.

Maintaining Balance and Focus During Guided Reading

The category of maintaining balance and focus during guided reading was mentioned during the discussions of the data findings on management and organization, and dialogue. Comments related to maintaining balance and focus often concerned time-related issues. The teachers noted that timing demands related to timetables and that specific times of the year were often obstacles to using guided reading as much as they would have liked. Issues related to the length of guided reading lessons were mentioned, and teachers were concerned with balancing the time spent on before, during, and after reading activities. Creating a balance between the types of text used for guided reading instruction was also identified as a planning concern. Classroom management issues were discussed as a part of maintaining balance and focus during guided reading. Problematic areas of guided reading were described when teachers talked about losing the specific focus of the guided reading lesson because of classroom management issues. Additional adult support was suggested as a solution to this problem area. In reporting this finding, it must be considered that 6 of the 16 focus group participants were in their first or second year of teaching. The perspective of these early career teachers may have potentially highlighted this particular aspect of maintaining control of the classroom environment.

As a part of maintaining balance and focus during guided reading, the teachers also talked about the specific focus during lessons being altered by the sharing of

students' personal experience and stories. As described previously, the teachers explained how the students told stories or anecdotes that were either unrelated to the topic being discussed or were inappropriate. The teachers shared how they found it difficult to maintain the focus of the lesson while accepting all the responses offered by students. The category of maintaining balance and focus during guided reading reflects the complex demands associated with small group guided reading (Reutzel, 2003). The challenges that the teachers in my study associated with maintaining balance and focus during guided reading lessons were compounded by teachers' awareness the benefits of discussion (Almasi, 1996) and thus their reluctance to quell student discussions. These teachers offered no solutions to address this challenge.

Assessment for Learning Practices

The category of assessment for learning practices was mentioned during the discussions about knowledge and beliefs, grouping, and assessment. Assessment for learning practices were identified when the teachers talked about their purposes for using guided reading. They indicated that student assessments were used to guide their instruction, an important component in assessment for learning definitions (Black et al., 2004). This finding concurs with the survey finding that many teachers believed their guided reading instruction was closely linked to their assessment practices. The focus group participants also talked about their assessment practices during the discussions on grouping. Many teachers indicated that their assessment practices were shifting toward formative assessment practices, practices that serve to promote students' learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). They described involving students in the assessment process and having students set goals for themselves; comments made by the focus group participants

suggested that these practices eased some of the students' anxieties concerning assessment and testing. When the teachers reflected on their previous assessment practices, they stated that their current practices result in collecting more evidence that reflects students' progress. However, several teachers held less than positive views on assessment for learning; they believed that their assessment practices have not changed and that some of the time devoted to assessment for learning practices would be better spent on instruction.

Concerns about Meeting the Needs of ESL Learners

Concerns about meeting the needs of English as a second language (ESL) learners, were mentioned during one focus group's discussions on knowledge and beliefs, management and organization, and dialogue. Although a single French Immersion teacher participated in the first focus group session, comments related to ESL concerns occurred during only the third focus group session. The first concern of this group of teachers associated with ESL students was comprehension. The five teachers talked about many ESL students' ability to decode without understanding what they have read, a concern identified by Cummins (as stated in Purdy, 2008) when he examined cognitive academic language proficiency of ESL learners.

During the discussions about dialogue, the teachers indicated that they often had to create personal connections for their ESL students. When discussing texts, teachers sometimes had to backtrack to assist students in establishing a connection between what was being read and students' experiences. Lack of background knowledge was identified by Lenters (2004) as a limitation for ESL students that has to be dealt with during reading instruction. The study participants in the third focus group talked at length about

accessing background knowledge and about having to be explicit about connections made to the text. This extra level of scaffolding, attention to developing background knowledge, and connecting to the text, may assist ESL students to successfully work within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1978).

Daily guided reading was viewed as important by the teachers in the third focus group because of the complex language needs of their students. Purdy (2008) conducted research on guided reading in a Grade 3 classroom that included ESL students. She discussed the importance of the social nature of learning for ESL students; several of her suggestions for improving language and literacy development for ESL students were identified by the participants of this study, as part of their guided reading instruction. These suggestions included the use of questioning, teaching vocabulary, inviting collaborative talk, and adopting a culturally sensitive point of view (Purdy). In my research discussions of the teachers of ESL students revealed that they were cognizant of the challenges associated with teaching students who do not speak the language of instruction and that they adapted their instruction to try to meet the needs of their students. The teachers in my study indicated that they used questioning, taught vocabulary, and were sensitive to the home cultures of their students. The topic of collaborative talk was not addressed in this study by the teachers in the third focus group.

Limitations and Strengths of Study

This research could have involved all the primary grade level teachers from a single rural school division. However, many teachers did not return the survey, resulting in a response rate of 54%, which according to Babbie (as cited in Edwards et al., 1997) is adequate for survey purposes. Many possible reasons exist for the survey response rate.

The teachers who did not return the survey may not have been familiar with guided reading or they may have been too busy to respond. As well as teachers not returning the survey, several who did return the survey did not answer all of the questions. The results of this study cannot be generalized to other teachers or teaching situations due to the small sample size.

A second limitation of this study concerns the researcher. During the focus group sessions, I was acutely aware of my dual role of moderator and colleague. My awareness of my ability as moderator to influence responses led me to remain quiet during much of the focus group sessions. As a result, I did not guide the discussion as effectively as I had planned; I posed questions and then let the participants speak. During the process of transcribing the focus group discussions, I became aware that by not taking a more active role in discussions I moved onto new agenda items despite the fact that participants did not directly respond to the question that had been posed.

A third limitation of this study concerns the analysis of the quantitative data. Extensive statistical analysis was not employed with the data set because the scope of this thesis and the small sample size ($n = 27$) did not allow for an extensive statistical analysis. Therefore, the demographic data were analyzed using only descriptive statistical measures.

In retrospect, the survey data collection tool could have been enhanced by further revisions. During the process of data analysis, it became clear that several survey items were misinterpreted by the respondents and therefore could have been presented more concisely to improve the quality of the results.

A fifth limitation of this study concerns the teachers who participated in the focus group sessions. As previously indicated, all but three of the focus group participants use some components of the Four Blocks approach (Cunningham et al., 2000) to guided reading. Therefore, the findings based on the focus group sessions were heavily influenced by teachers who use a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. This high number of teachers who use a Four Blocks approach to guided reading may be explained by the professional development opportunities available in the school division where the survey was distributed. Approximately seven years ago a group of teachers came together on a monthly basis to learn about and explore the Four Blocks approach to literacy instruction. Many of these teachers, who continue to offer Four Blocks professional development opportunities and mentor beginning teachers, volunteered to be participants in the focus group sessions. Similarly, many of the teachers who participated in this research, as described in the demographic sections in Chapter Four, were beginning teachers with less than five years of teaching experience.

A final limitation of this study is that data were collected based on teachers' responses rather than on actual classroom observations or visits. Participants may have provided answers that they perceived I expected, answers which in fact differed from their classroom practices. Also, due to the timing of the focus group sessions I did not use member checks as I had initially planned. The focus groups took place near the end of the school year and I thought that it was not possible to transcribe the focus group sessions and deliver them to the focus group participants before the end of the school year. I also believed that it would not be considerate of me to expect teachers to review the transcripts at such a busy point in the school year.

In terms of strengths, the mixed method approach helped to strengthen the confirmability of the findings of this study. Survey data were substantiated by the focus group data and provided findings that were consistent within both data collection tools.

By examining multiple areas of guided reading in a single research project, I was able to identify common patterns of response that were consistent across multiple areas of guided reading. This strength would not have been possible if a single area of guided reading had been examined. The complex nature of guided reading requires the examination of guided reading in its entirety.

The data collection tools, both the survey and focus group sessions, provided opportunities to gather data from the perspective of teachers who were using guided reading at the time of the research. For this reason, the snapshot of guided reading provided by this research is authentic. The direct words and phrases of practitioners were used to help create the rich data set of guided reading presented in this study.

Recommendations for Teachers

The findings of this study should be relevant to those practitioners who are interested in using guided reading in their classroom and researchers who are interested in investigating guided reading. According to Gall et al. (2005):

> Reading about cases that are either similar to or different from your own experience in education can deepen your understanding of the educational phenomena that you experience in your work … [these] insights and speculations can help you develop the capacity to explore and refine your educational practice. (p. 307)

It is my hope that this document will have the effect described above for teachers who use guided reading. As previously stated, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other teachers or teaching situations. However, the recommendations contained in this thesis may serve to assist teachers within this school district in enhancing their guided reading practice. This thesis may also serve to as a starting point for teachers who may be unfamiliar with guided reading and are interested in implementing guided reading as a part of their reading instruction.

Teachers need to create a clear goal for their guided reading instruction. The study participants identified many goals and purposes of guided reading: so many, in fact, that it would be impossible to achieve them all during one guided reading lesson. In this research, the teachers did not specify how many goals they attempted to address during a single guided reading lesson. Trying to cover too many topics or goals during a guided reading lesson could adversely affect both the quality of the lesson and the students' learning. Teachers need to understand clearly why they are using guided reading, what the particular focus of each lesson will be, and what the students will potentially learn from each lesson. In their selection of effective teachers, Morrow et al. (1999) were interested in identifying those teachers who could articulate a sound teaching philosophy that matched their classroom practices. Teachers need to continually revisit their philosophies about guided reading in order to ensure a sound understanding of their guided reading philosophy.

This revisiting or reflecting on teaching philosophies or practices is particularly important after teachers have implemented changes in their instruction. Many of the teachers in this study explained that they have made changes to their guided reading

practices over the years. Time to reflect on these changes could potentially result in more improvements to their guided reading instruction. It is recommended that teachers who use guided reading take time to reflect upon their practices. They should be given opportunities to engage in collaborative discussions and endeavours with their colleagues. As revealed by survey data, many teachers developed their knowledge base of guided reading from peer collaboration and professional readings. Teachers need opportunities to regularly update their knowledge base. For example, professional development could take the form of book clubs based on books or articles on current research. Regardless the forum, teachers need to continue to develop their guided reading philosophy instead of relying on past professional development experiences to justify their programs. The teachers in Morrow et al.'s (1999) study of effective literacy instruction taught in school districts that provided opportunities for staff development and in schools that promoted positive and collaborative relationships among teachers and administrators. These characteristics may have contributed to the positive teaching outcomes at these schools.

In terms of grouping, teachers would benefit from experimenting with a variety of grouping formats, such as mixed ability groups, whole class, and ability groups, to determine which type of group is most suitable in their teaching situation. The teachers in this study seemed to be most concerned with the affective component of ability grouping. This is a legitimate concern for all teachers. However, another question remains unanswered; what methods or strategies were these teachers using to address the needs of their struggling readers? Teachers may wish to try ability grouping to determine for themselves if student progress justifies the use of ability groups. If possible, teachers may

wish to collaborate with their colleagues and experiment with ability groups across several classrooms or grades.

Teachers also may wish to revisit their assessment and teaching cycle. Many teachers in this study indicated that their assessment for learning practices were growing and developing. Based on this finding, teachers may consider rethinking how they go about reorganizing their guided reading groups. As teachers' assessment practices change it may be purposeful to change the way that students are organized or grouped for instruction. Guided reading, as indicated by many teachers in this study, is closely linked to assessment, particularly running records. If teachers' assessment practices are changing then instruction, specifically guided reading instruction, could also be examined to ensure that the linkage between assessment and guided reading remains sound.

Implications for Future Research

More research is needed to explore the use of guided reading as a component of literacy instruction. Guided reading instruction may be specific to individual teachers, yet further examination is needed to determine commonalties across several teaching situations. A comprehensive picture of guided reading has not yet been established and supported by research. School divisions should collect information to determine how many teachers are using guided reading in their districts. If school divisions collected data on teachers using guided reading, then they would be better able to assist teachers in developing their guided reading skills. School divisions could target professional development and create partnerships to invite teachers to continue to develop and refine their guided reading instruction. I also believe that school divisions should be asking a bigger question: "If teachers are not using guided reading, what are they using to deliver

their reading instruction?" Is the use of guided reading as widespread as suggested in the literature (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000)? This question provides a point from which to begin research in the area of guided reading.

While the scope of this thesis project did not allow for the analysis of data based on specific grade levels, this topic deserves further attention. Study participants indicated that the purpose and length of guided reading lessons change depending on the students' grade level. Kindergarten teachers were more likely to mention the differences between grades, suggesting that more research on guided reading in Kindergarten is needed. The findings on the teachers' perceptions of special qualities of students and classes suggest that more research is needed to examine how teachers adapt their guided reading instruction to meet the particular needs of individual students and classes.

Research is also needed to examine the many different components of guided reading and their interrelationships in practice. The breadth of the questions posed by the survey resulted in many findings about guided reading. In contrast, the focus groups provided some depth on the instructional topics that were examined in this study. Research that examines the instructional practices of individual teachers through classroom observations would contribute to developing a comprehensive understanding of guided reading by examining all of the instructional areas of guided reading. Although the data collection methods used in this study provided data on teachers' beliefs about their guided reading instruction, no data were collected on teachers' actual practices during guided reading instruction. Future research should examine each instructional area of guided reading in classroom settings and could also address concerns that were identified by teachers in this study. Some of these concerns include the use of guided

reading with ESL learners, the demands of guided reading with respect to experienced and beginning teachers, and the use of adult support during guided reading instruction.

Conclusion

This thesis study helps to fill a gap in the literature on guided reading. This research found that guided reading is a vital part of literacy instruction in primary grades in the target school division. My research findings concur with those who have described guided reading as an important component of literacy instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Schulman & Payne, 2000). As noted above, more research on guided reading in classrooms is essential to better understand guided reading as a constantly evolving instructional practice. This study was conducted with Canadian teachers and, to date, few studies on guided reading have been conducted with Canadian teachers.

The data revealed that the teachers' identified goal of guided reading was to meet the needs of their students. After analyzing the responses to survey items and the focus group discussions, I believe that that the majority of participants were satisfied with their guided reading instruction. Many teachers described teaching practices consistent with practices identified as particularly effective in the teaching of reading. However, the wide range of responses shared by the teachers in this study suggests that some teachers may be using guided reading to address too many instructional goals in a single lesson. I worry that guided reading instruction that addresses too many instructional goals reflects a "jack of all trades and master of none" ideology that is not beneficial for students. As teachers, we need to be acutely aware of our teaching philosophies and instructional goals in using guided reading. We need to take the time necessary to reflect on our guided

reading instruction to ensure that the instruction that we are providing meets these goals and continues to be informed by our teaching philosophy.

Final Reflections

As a teacher who uses a combination of small group and whole class guided reading, I embarked on this journey to enhance my understanding of the complexities of guided reading instruction for myself and for other teachers. I began my research with biases firmly in place. I was very familiar with both approaches to guided reading and anticipated that my research would demonstrate how closely teachers were adhering to the popular approaches outlined in the literature. Instead, my research has provided a complex picture of the implementation of guided reading from the perspectives of a group of teachers. Some of these teachers used the Fountas and Pinnell approach and others used the Four Blocks approach to guided reading. Although I discussed many patterns of response within the rich data set, there was also diversity among the commonalities. My findings seem to echo the personal and individualistic nature of teaching. Many of the teacher participants indicated that they have taken aspects of and practices from different views about guided reading and merged them to create guided reading instruction that is unique and purposeful for them. Meeting the needs of their students was paramount for these teachers.

Upon reflecting on my research, I have been prompted to examine my own instruction more closely. I would like to read more about guided reading and reread some of the texts on which I have based my teaching. I would like to spend some time reviewing current research on best practices in literacy instruction. I would value more time to reflect on my own teaching of guided reading. I would like to audio- and video-

record some of my guided reading sessions in order to reflect on what I actually do during guided reading instead of what I think I do. A final reflection is that I plan to examine my purposes when I use guided reading in order to clarify my goals of instruction to insure that my students are experiencing the maximum benefit from this type of reading instruction.

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Appendix A: Letter to Superintendent: Permission to Conduct Research

XXXXXXX
XXXXXX, XXXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX
XXXXXXX XXXX
XXXXXXX, XXXXX
XXX XXX

Dear Mr. XXXXXXX,

I am currently completing a Master's of Arts degree from the University of Victoria in the area of Language and Literacy. I have completed all of the necessary course work for this degree and am now working under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo on my final Master's research project. For this research project, I will be exploring guided reading from the perspective of teacher practitioners. In addition to completing the University of Victoria's Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research, I am writing to provide you with the details of my study and to seek permission to conduct my research with the primary teachers of XXXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX.

What My Research Study Will Involve

My study will involve surveying the primary language arts teachers within XXXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX regarding their beliefs about and practices associated with guided reading. The research project involves a survey and subsequent focus group sessions; all of which will take place outside school hours. The number of focus group sessions will depend upon the willingness of individual teachers to participate. I hope to obtain an accurate picture of guided reading instruction by gathering data from practitioners who are currently using guided reading in their classrooms. Copies of the survey and focus group questions are attached.

Goals of the Study

The study I am proposing is entitled *Guided Reading: Teachers Speak Up.* The purpose of this research project is to provide a detailed description of the small group guided reading instruction that takes place in the primary grades. This research project is important because guided reading is a common component of reading instruction, yet little research is available documenting how teachers use guided reading. This study will focus on the key instructional issues of guided reading - management and organization, grouping, dialogue, and assessment. The results of this study will be published in the form of a master's thesis and serve as a resource for teachers, researchers, and other parties interested in guided reading. A copy of the thesis will be given to you. This research may also lead to an article published in an educational journal. A copy of the article would be available to you upon request. It is also anticipated that the findings of this research may be shared with others through conference presentations and professional development workshops, within XXXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX if possible.

Consent to Use Teachers' Responses as Research Data

All primary language arts teachers within XXXXXXX XXXXXX will receive a survey on their guided reading practices. It will be the individual teacher's choice to complete and return the survey. Although all participation is voluntary, once surveys have been returned it will not be possible to remove that data from the study as the identity of respondents will be unknown. The surveys will not be marked or numbered in any way to identify the respondents.

Teachers will also receive an invitation to participate in a focus group session, which will allow further in-depth discussion of their guided reading practices. Individual letters of consent will be presented in person to the teacher participants before the start of the focus group sessions. Participation is voluntary and teachers may withdraw from the focus group session at any time without explanation. Teachers will receive no compensation for their participation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

There are no known or anticipated risks to teachers associated with giving consent for information to be used in my study. The only inconvenience would be that of time; time spent completing the survey, time given up to travel to the site of the focus group session, and time spent in the focus group session. The focus group sessions will be audio and video recorded. Pseudonyms for the school division and teachers will be used during data analysis and also in any written or verbal communications about my study to protect the anonymity of all participants.

Any data gathered throughout the study will be taken to my residence where it will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All electronic data will be stored on my personal computer and individual files will be password protected. Once audio and video recordings have been transcribed they will be erased. All written data will be shredded upon the completion of my Master's of Arts degree. Computer files pertaining to the research data will be deleted and paper documents will be shredded.

Contact Information

If you have any questions for me about the research project, please feel fee to contact me at XXX@XXXX or at home at XXX-XXXX. Should you give your approval for me to conduct this research project I would like to further discuss support or funding opportunities available within the school division.

If you have any questions about my research project for my university supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, she can be contacted at XXX@XXXX or XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical approval of my project, the Human Research Ethics office at the University of Victoria can be reached at XXX@XXXX or XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

_____
Nicole Piercey

_____
XXXXXX

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.

Appendix B: Guided Reading Survey

Information About You

1. Classroom teaching experience (not substituting) – Grade levels and years of experience.

_____

2. Level of education. Circle all that apply.
   B.A.
   B.Ed.
   M.A.
   M.Ed.
   M.Sc.
   Ph.D.
   Other, please provide details _____

3. What grade or grades are you currently teaching?

_____

4. How long have you been teaching this grade(s)?

_____

IF YOU USE GUIDED READING OR HAVE USED GUIDED READING IN THE PAST, PLEASE SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION

5. Would you ever consider or have you ever considered making guided reading a part of your language arts program? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. If you do not use guided reading, please describe briefly the methods of teaching reading you use in your language arts program.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Guided Reading Knowledge and Beliefs

1. Please define guided reading based on your understanding and teaching experience.

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

2. How many years have you used guided reading?

_____

3. How frequently do you use guided reading during a week?

_____1x/week
_____2x/week
_____3x/week
_____4x/week
_____5x/week
_____other (please describe)_____

4. I believe that I have a well-developed knowledge base of guided reading.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Please list ALL the relevant activities that helped you develop your guided reading knowledge base (for example: professional development book clubs, workshops, peer collaboration).

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Guided reading is an important component of my literacy instruction.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I use guided reading to model, demonstrate, and explicitly teach reading strategies.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. List your goals or purposes for using guided reading.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please list any **advantages** you associate with guided reading.

_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

10. Please list any concerns you have about guided reading.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Grouping

1. How many groups do you usually teach per day during the guided reading portion of your language arts program?

_____

2. Approximately how long is each guided reading session/lesson?

_____

3. How many guided reading groups do you typically have?

_____

4. In your opinion, what is the ideal size of a guided reading group?

_____

5. What is the typical size of your guided reading groups?

_____

6. Are you satisfied with the size of your guided reading groups?
   _____ Yes _____ No
   Please explain why or why not.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. What information or criteria do you use to help you determine student placement in guided reading groups?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. How often do you change the composition of your guided reading groups?

_____
_____
_____

9. Do you think there are any negative aspects associated with grouping students?

_____ Yes _____ No

Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Assessment Tools

1. Do you use running records as an assessment tool? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. How do you use the information gained from running records?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. I am satisfied with the information gained from running records.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied

4. Some teachers express concern about the amount of time required to administer running records. What are your thoughts on this issue?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Please list any other literacy assessment tools that you use in guided reading or your language arts program.

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

6. I am satisfied with the information gained from my assessments (excluding running records).

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied

7. My assessment practices and guided reading instruction are closely linked.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

Organization and Management of Guided Reading

1. How do you organize and manage your guided reading time?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Are you satisfied with your current organization?
   _____ Yes _____ No
   Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. I have volunteers to assist me during guided reading.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Never	Seldom	About half the time	Often	Always

4. How much planning and preparation do you put into guided reading on a weekly basis?

_____
_____
_____

Dialogue During Guided Reading

1. What is the nature or kinds of talk that occur in your guided reading groupings?

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

2. Do you consider dialogue to be an important instructional component when planning your guided reading lessons?

_____ Yes _____ No

Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. How do you use the dialogue that occurs during guided reading lessons to inform subsequent guided reading lessons?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. All of my students participate in the discussions during guided reading.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I am satisfied with the quality of my guided reading discussions.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Please describe any instructional strategies that you use or have used that you believe increase the quality of dialogue during your guided reading lessons.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Further Comments

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix C: Survey Cover Letter

Dear Colleague;
I am currently completing a Master's of Arts degree from the University of Victoria in the area of Language and Literacy. I have completed all of the necessary course work for this degree and am now working under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo on my final Master's research project.

What My Research Study Will Involve

The study I am proposing is entitled *Guided Reading: Teachers Speak Up.* The purpose of this research project is to provide a description of the small group guided reading instruction that takes place in the primary grades.

My study will involve surveying the primary language arts teachers within XXXXXXX XXXXXX regarding their beliefs about and practices associated with guided reading. The survey will be followed up by focus groups sessions that will take place outside of school hours. The number of focus group sessions will depend on how many teacher volunteer to participate in this part of the research. I hope to obtain an accurate picture of guided reading instruction by gathering data from practitioners who are currently using guided reading in their classrooms.

Goals of the Study

This research project is important because guided reading is a common component of reading instruction, yet little research is available documenting how teachers use guided reading. This study will focus on the key instructional issues of guided reading - management and organization, grouping, dialogue, and assessment.

Consent to Use Teachers' Responses as Research Data

All primary language arts teachers within XXXXXXX XXXXXX will receive this survey on their guided reading practices. The surveys will not be marked or numbered in any way to identify the participants. Although participation is voluntary, once the surveys have been returned it will not be possible to remove that data from the study as the identity of respondents will be unknown. Although I may know you as a colleague, please do not feel obligated or pressured to complete this survey because of this relationship.

You have also received an invitation to participate in a focus group session, which will allow for further in-depth discussion of guided reading practices. Individual letters of consent will be presented in person before the start of the focus group sessions.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participating. The only inconvenience would be that of time; time spent completing the survey. Pseudonyms for the school division and individual teachers will be used in written or verbal communications about my study to protect the anonymity of all participants.

Any data gathered throughout the study will be taken to my residence where it will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All electronic data will be stored on my personal computer and individual files will be password protected. All written data will be shredded after 1 year following the completion of my Master's of Arts degree. Computer files pertaining to the research data will also be deleted and video and audio data will be erased.

The results of this study will be published in the form of a master's thesis and serve as a resource for teachers, researchers, and other parties interested in guided reading. A copy of the thesis will be given to XXXXXX. This research may also lead to an article published in an educational journal. A copy of the article would be available to you upon request. It is also anticipated that the findings of this research may be shared with others through conference presentations and professional development workshops, within XXXXXXX XXXXX if possible.

Contact Information

If you have any questions for me about completing the survey or the research project, please feel fee to contact me at XXX@XXXX or at home at XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions about my research project for my university supervisor, Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, she can be contacted at XXX@XXXX or XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical approval of my project, the Human Research Ethics office at the University of Victoria can be reached at XXX@XXXX or XXX-XXXX.

Please take the time to complete this survey. I have included a package of herbal tea to help make the experience as enjoyable as possible. Please return the survey in the envelope by _____.

By completing and submitting the survey, your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Sincerely,

_____

Nicole Piercey

Appendix D: Focus Group Invitation to Teachers

Dear Colleague;

I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group session where you can share your thoughts, beliefs, and opinions about guided reading with grade-level teaching colleagues from the school division. This focus group is part of the research that I am conducting for my Master of Arts degree at the University of Victoria.

A focus group is an informal discussion among 6 – 9 people that focuses on a specific topic; in this case guided reading practices. The focus group session will last approximately two hours and will take place in a central location that will be convenient to all participants.

The purpose of the focus group is to discuss in-depth some of the instructional issues of guided reading: management and organization, assessment, dialogue, and daily lesson delivery.

Although the topics of conversations during the focus group will match the areas on the survey, we will discuss these aspects of guided reading in more detail and revisit some of the common practices and beliefs that were identified through the survey responses.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in the focus group. The only inconvenience that you may experience by participating is that of loss of time. The focus group session will be audio and video recorded. Your identity will be protected with the use of a pseudonym in the labeling of data collected, in the analysis of data, and in any resulting documents.

The focus group will provide you with opportunities to discuss your guided reading practices with other practitioners at the same grade level and to critically reflect on your guided reading practices.

By participating in the focus group you will be contributing to the growing body of research on guided reading. The data gathered based on the survey and focus groups will be used to create a final report that will assist teachers, researchers, and other parties interested in guided reading.

Please fill out the bottom portion of this letter and return it to me via the XXXXXX if you are interested in participating in a focus group session. You may also contact me by e-mail (XXXX@XXXX) to indicate your interest in participating.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Nicole Piercey
XXXXXXX Elementary

Name: _____
School: _____
Current Teaching Assignment: _____

Appendix E: Focus Group Agenda

Introductory question: Introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your teaching background, what grade you teach, how many years you've been teaching,

General

- How does guided reading fit into your overall language arts instruction?
  - What beliefs do you hold about how children learn to read?
  - In your opinion how can we, as teachers, best support children in reading?

- Talk about the teacher characteristics that you believe are important to be an effective teacher of guided reading.

- Based on the survey results approximately one-quarter of the respondents reported using use a Four Blocks approach to guided reading. What does that look like?
  - How does it differ from small group guided reading?
  - If you use Four Blocks, did you use small group guided reading before Four Blocks? Why did you change your practice?

- In your opinion, what do you believe is the main purpose of guided reading?
  - Talk about the importance of reading strategies with respect to your guided reading instruction.

Organization

- Split grades are becoming more common in our schools as enrollment continues to decline throughout the division. Would guided reading instruction change in a split grade classroom?
  - What would some of the challenges be?
  - What would some of the advantages be?

- Twenty-four percent of respondents indicated that guided reading occurs in their classrooms daily, while another 24% indicated that guided reading is scheduled 3/week. If you do not schedule guided reading daily, what type of reading activities do you do on the days that you do not do guided reading?
  - Discuss why you do not engage in guided reading daily.

- What are your thoughts about having other adults, parents or educational assistants, delivering guided reading lessons with small groups of children.
  - How would you prepare them? Resources? Training?

- Teachers reported substantial differences in the length of their guided reading lessons with the shortest lesson lasting 10 minutes and the longest lasting 60 minutes.
  - Talk about the duration of your lessons and what you do during the lessons.
  - What would some of the advantages of longer guided reading lessons be?
  - How would longer lessons affect your guided reading program?

Groupings

- Sixty-four percent of respondents who answered this survey question thought there were negative aspects associated with grouping students. Survey respondents identified students' inability to work independently and the availability of meaningful appropriate work for students as the main concerns of using guided reading. Talk about how we can justify guided reading in the context of these concerns.

- Some respondents indicated that some students experience self-esteem issues because of ability groupings. Talk about your experiences involving ability groups.
  What kinds of comments, if any, do students make about their groups?
  How do you deal with having the same 'low' students stay in a group for an extended period of time?

- Seventy-one percent of the survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the size of their guided reading groups. Of the 29% who were not satisfied, 86% of those did not have a match between their perceived ideal number of students in a group and the actual number of students in their groups. Talk about possible obstacles that teachers face in trying to have an ideal number of students in their groups.
  What is the smallest size of guided reading group that you have worked with?
  How did it work for you? The students?

Assessments

- Reflect on your reading instruction before you used guided reading. Do you believe the students are progressing better when you use guided reading?
  What would you take as evidence of this?

- Teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with their assessments. Behaviour also came up as a determining factor for student placement in guided reading groups. Describe how you balance behaviour and student ability when deciding on student placements in guided reading groups.

- Many teachers reported keeping complex and detailed records during guided reading. Talk about your record keeping practices during guided reading.
  What steps are taken to insure that no students are overlooked?
  How has our divisional focus on formative assessment or assessment for learning influenced your guided reading practices?

Management

- Teachers reported spending anywhere between 1 hour to 10 hours per week planning for guided reading. How do you invest your time when planning your guided reading lessons.
  What are the most important aspects you attend to when planning?
  How much time is spent on book selection?
  What about follow up activities?
  What resources do you use when planning your guided reading lessons?

- Adult support was mentioned often in response to several different survey items. Yet over one-half of the respondents reported never or seldom having volunteers during guided reading.

  How much of a role does this type of support play in your use of guided reading?
  Talk about the importance of establishing routines during guided reading.

Dialogue

- Most teachers (95%) identified dialogue as being an important instructional component of guided reading. Also, most teachers believe that their students are participating in the discussions. Talk about the differences between discussions for instruction, such as modeling strategies, and discussions to encourage students connecting with the text.

  How do you balance before and after reading discussions?

- Think about your guided reading lessons. What kind of questions do you tend to ask? Talk about the role of teacher questioning to facilitate students thinking more deeply about what they read.

  Who controls the discussion?
  Who does most of the talking?

- Teacher initiated question – student response – teacher evaluation – this classic teacher questioning technique is considered to be an impediment to engaging in discussions. How can teachers avoid evaluating student responses in guided reading?

- Discourse is like an 'identity kit,' people have several different discourses that we use in particular situations such as a home discourse, a school discourse, and a playground discourse.
  "Davies (1991) defined members of discourse communities as those people who felt they had a right to speak, and who believed that what they had to say could affect the future of the conversation. Thus, teachers who create spaces for student-talk are creating greater learning opportunities for their students" (McVittie, 2004, p. 488).

  Talk about how you incorporate an awareness of discourse communities into your guided reading practices.

Appendix F: Focus Group Script

Welcome to this focus group on guided reading. The purpose of this focus group is to talk about guided reading practices and to discuss some of the general and specific findings from the survey data. I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time from your busy schedules to share your opinions, beliefs, and insights about guided reading.

Please remember that your participation in this focus group is voluntary and that you may withdraw from this research at any time. I have a letter of consent for each of you to sign. Your signature indicates that you are voluntarily participating in this focus group session. As you are aware, the discussion is designed to explore the way guided reading is implemented. In the unlikely event that you become uncomfortable with a particular topic, you may opt to not contribute to the discussion or simply excuse yourself.

The session will last approximately two hours: you are welcome to take a break and stretch as you need to. I will be recording the focus group discussion using audio and video equipment.

I also have some guidelines that I'd like to call your attention to.
First, we do not need to speak in any particular order.
Second, please do not speak while someone else is talking.
Third, I'd like for everyone to share throughout; all viewpoints are welcome!
Fourth, you do not need to agree with what anyone or everyone in the groups says, but please state your opinion in a positive way.
Lastly, we have a limited amount of time, therefore I may need at times to stop and redirect our discussion.

This focus group is meant to be informal, relaxed, and enjoyable! So make yourself comfortable, enjoy the snacks, and we'll begin!

Appendix G: Participant Letter of Consent for Focus Group Session

Dear Colleague:
You are being asked to participate in a study entitled, *Guided Reading: Teachers Speak Up,* which is being conducted by me, Nicole Piercey, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for my Master of Arts degree. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo. You may contact my supervisor at XXX-XXXX, or by e-mail XXX@XXXX, respecting this study.

The purpose of this research project is to explore teachers' beliefs about and practices regarding small group guided reading instruction. This research project is important because guided reading is a common component of reading instruction, yet little research is available on how and what teachers do during guided reading. The final report of this study will serve as a resource for teachers, researchers, and other individuals interested in guided reading.

You contacted me indicating your willingness to particpate in the focus group session about guided reading practices. Through participation, you will have the opportunity to participate in a discussion where you can share your beliefs, opinions, and practices with respect to guided reading.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, it will involve participating in a single focus group session, approximately two hours in duration, outside of school time at a location that is convenient to you. The focus group sessions will be audio and video recorded. I will be transcribing the focus group recordings and will make them available to you upon request.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this study. The only inconvenience that you may experience by participating is that of loss of time. By participating, you will have the opportunity to critically self-reflect on your guided reading instruction, which could subsequently enhance your pedagogy. You will also be contributing to the research on guided reading. You may withdraw at any time from this study without consequence or explanation by informing me in writing that you would like to have your data excluded from the data analysis process. In addition, you may choose to decline from answering individual questions during the focus group session should you feel uncomfortable. However, participation is voluntary and you will not receive any compensation.

In accordance with the University of Victoria's standards for ethical research, your anonymity, and that of the school, and school division, will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in both the labeling of data collected and in the analysis of data. However complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of the focus group discussions. You will be known to other focus group participants, as they will be known

to you. To protect confidentiality, all of the physical data gathered from the focus group sessions and recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic data will be stored on my personal computer and individual files will be password protected. Data will be kept for 1 year following the completion of my thesis. At that time the data will be destroyed; paper data will be shredded and audio and video recordings will be erased. The only individuals who will have access to the data collected will be my thesis supervisor, if she requests to see it, and myself.

The results of the study will be published in the form of a master's thesis. Copies of this thesis will be given to Dr. Pantaleo, the University of Victoria, to be housed in the Curriculum and Instruction Laboratory at the University of Victoria, and the district superintendent. This research may also lead to an article published in an educational journal. A copy of the article would be available to you upon request. It is also anticipated that the findings of this research may be shared with others through conference presentations and professional development workshops.

In addition to being able to contact myself and Dr. Pantaleo at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this research project or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at XXX-XXXX.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the conditions of your participation, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered, and that you give your consent to participate in this research project.

Sincerely,
Nicole Piercey

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.

Appendix H: Tables to Accompany Chapter Four

Table H1

Survey Demographic Data

Survey #	Experience	Education	Assignment	Grade Experience
1	0.75	B. Ed	Kindergarten	1
2	22	B. Ed, ECD	Kindergarten	12
3	10	B. Ed	Kindergarten	8
4	11	B. Ed, M. Ed	Grade 1	5
5	33	B. Ed	Grade 1	5
6	23	B. Ed	Grade 1	3
7	3	B. Ed, B. Music	Grade 1	1
8	36	B. Ed	Grade 1	28
9	25	M. Ed	Grade 1	17
10	29	B. Ed, B. Arts	Grade 1	1
11	15	B. Ed	Grade 2	11
12	15	B. Ed, ECD	Grade 2	1
13	21	B. Ed	Grade 2	9
14	9	B. Ed	Grade 2	2
15	30	B. Ed	Grade 3	8
16	10	B. Ed	Grade 3	1
17	10	B. Ed	Grade 3	3
18	10	B. Ed, B. Arts	K-12	10
19	10	B. Ed	Grades 1/2	1
20	0.5	B. Ed	Grades 1/2	1
21	20	B. Ed	Grade 1	6
22	11	B. Phys. Ed	Grades 1 – 3	1
23	0.5	B. Ed	Grade 1	1
24	0.5	B. Ed	Grade 1	1
25	2	B. Ed	Grade 2	2
26	19	BA, B. Ed., M. Ed	Grade 1 French Immersion	10
27	0.5	B. Ed	Kindergarten	1

Table H2

Grade Levels Taught by Survey Respondents

Grade Level	Survey #	Total
Kindergarten	1, 2, 3, 18, 27	5
Grade 1	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26	14
Grade 2	11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25	9
Grade 3	15, 16, 17, 22	4
Split Grades	18, 19, 20, 22	4

Note. Teachers of split grades were included in each grade they taught making the total number of teachers larger than 27.

Table H3

Focus Group Demographics

Grade	Focus Group Participant	Total
Kindergarten	Emily, Jade,	2
Grade 1	Sadie, Teresa, Erika, Chelsey, Hailey, Susan, Connie,	7
Grade 2	Presley, Megan, Bev,	3
Grade 3	Holly, Michelle,	2
Split grades	Judy	1
Multigrades	Sam	1

Note. All teacher names are pseudonyms.

Table H4

Years Using Guided Reading

How many years have you used guided reading?																
# responses	6	2	1	2	0	3	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	6
# years	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	No response

Table H5

Knowledge Base of Guided Reading

I believe that I have a well-developed knowledge base of guided reading.					
2	5	5	6	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response

Table H6

Comparison of Teachers' Knowledge Base and Experiences

Survey #	Years using guided reading	Well-developed knowledge base	Years teaching experience
1	1	Strongly Disagree	0.5
7	1	Strongly Disagree	4
	2 years	Total 2	4.5 years
	Average 1 year/person		Average 2.3 years/person
10	1	Disagree	29
11	3	Disagree	15
20	1	Disagree	0.5
27	1	Disagree	1
	6 years	Total 4	45.5 years
	Average 1.5 years/person		Average 11.4 years/person
2	15	Neither	22.5
13	4	Neither	21.5
14	2	Neither	9.5
16	1	Neither	10.8
23	0	Neither	0.2
	22 years	Total 5	64.5 years
	Average 4.4 years/person		Average 12.9 years/person
6	2	Agree	22.5
8	10	Agree	32.5
9	4	Agree	25.5
17	3	Agree	10.5
18	10	Agree	10.5
22	6	Agree	11.5
	35 years	Total 6	113 years
	Average 5.8 years/person		Average 18.8 years/person
4	7	Strongly Agree	11.5
5	10	Strongly Agree	33.5
12	6	Strongly Agree	6.5
19	8	Strongly Agree	7.5
	31 years	Total 4	59 years
	Average 7.75 years/person		Average 14.8 years/person

Note. No Response to Item #2 or #4 *Surveys 3, 15, 21, 24, 25, 26,*

Table H7

Importance of Guided Reading

Guided reading is an important component of my literacy instruction.					
0	2	4	9	8	4
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response

Table H8

Guided Reading Occurrence in a Week

How frequently do you use guided reading during a week?					
4	5	5	2	5	6
1/week	2/week	3/week	4/week	5/week (daily)	No response

Table H9

Use of Reading Strategies

I use guided reading to model, demonstrate, and explicitly teach reading strategies.					
1	3	0	12	7	4
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response

Table H10

Number of Groups Taught Daily

How many groups do you usually teach per day?					
7	7	5	4	1	3
1 group	2 groups	3 groups	4 groups	5 groups	No response

Table H11

Length of Lessons

How long is each guided reading session?				
8	12	2	1	4
5-15 minutes	20-30 minutes	40-45 minutes	60 minutes	No response

Table H12

Number of Guided Reading Groups

How many groups do you typically have?							
4	2	3	4	3	1	7	3
1 group	2 groups	3 groups	4 groups	5 groups	8 groups	Varies	No response

Table H13

Ideal Size of Group

What is the ideal size of a guided reading group?				
18	2	1	2	4
3-5 students	7-8 students	10-12 students	unsure	no response

Table H14

Typical Size of Group

What is the typical size of your guided reading groups?					
15	4	1	4	1	2
2-5 students	6-9 students	10-12 students	Whole class	Various (1-16)	No response

Appendix I: Tables to Accompany Chapter Five

Table I1

Volunteers During Guided Reading

I have volunteers to assist me during guided reading.					
5	9	5	2	4	2
Never	Seldom	About half the time	Often	Always	No response

Table I2

Teacher Preparation Time

How much planning and preparation do you put into guided reading on a weekly basis?						
4	7	3	2	1	7	3
1 hour or less	2 hours	3 hours	5 hours	10 hours	Not specific	No response

Table I3

Student Participation in Dialogue

All of my students participate in the discussions during guided reading.					
1	4	3	13	3	3
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response

Table I4

Levels of Satisfaction with Discussions

I am satisfied with the quality of my guided reading discussions.					
1	5	5	10	2	4
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response

Table I5

Satisfaction with Information from Running Records

I am satisfied with the information gained from running records.					
0	0	1	12	3	11
Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	No Response

Table I6

Satisfaction with Other Literacy Assessments

I am satisfied with the information gained from my assessments (excluding running records).					
0	3	3	18	1	2
Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied	No response

Table I7

Linkage Between Guided Reading and Assessment

My assessment practices and guided reading instruction are closely linked.					
0	1	8	12	3	3
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	No response